Teaching and Transformation in Popular Confucian Literature of the Late Qing

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Published in the United States of America by the
University of Michigan Press
First published August 2025

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-472-07758-8 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-472-05758-0 (paper : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-472-90514-0 (open access ebook)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14428723

The University of Michigan Press's open access publishing program is made possible thanks to additional funding from the University of Michigan Office of the Provost and the generous support of contributing libraries.

Cover image: Detail from "With fear and self-examination, we pass through the sea of calamity together 恐懼修省劫海同超" Jiangnan tielei tu, (Dejian zhai, [1864?]), 41a. Courtesy of the Asian Library, Claremont Colleges Library.

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For my *zhiyin*

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Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL: https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14428723

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Acknowledgments

Little did I know, when I first read *Pan Gong baojuan* on a research whim in 2011,that it would lead to all this. What started as a simple question about what that text had to do with the Taiping War led me to propose writing a dissertation chapter on it, which led to discovering Yu Zhi seemingly everywhere I looked, even while researching things I assumed had nothing to do with him. So, to Tobie Meyer-Fong, who warned me when we first met in 2013 that Yu Zhi would try to take over my dissertation because he had tried to take over her book, *What Remains*, all I can say is this: I managed to keep him contained back then, but he really wanted a book. Let's hope this one meets his exacting standards. Your encouragement, sound advice, and commiseration along the way have meant so much.

As I struggled with writing this book through a haze of self-doubt, listening to the worst critics my imagination could produce, many friends reminded me that I should write for them instead: brilliant, funny, incisive, and careful scholars whose work always inspires me to do better. I am indebted to Jason Protass for pressuring me in late 2022 to start showing other people my writing, instead of trying to perfect it alone, and for his willingness to read and talk through parts of the manuscript. To Gregory Scott, who read the entire draft, sometimes in very rough stages, and listened to my many complaints with infinite patience, your encouragement means more than words can say. Many other friends have supported me through this process with kindness, humor, and sustained interest in my work, including Eric Schluessel, SJ Zanolini, Alia Goehr, Daniela Campo, Scott Gregory, Ariel Fox, Kay Duffy, Maggie Greene, Anna Rebull, Isabel Köster, Alison Gray, and Katharine Mershon.

My dissertation committee at the University of Chicago—Judith Zeitlin, Paul Copp, Yuming He, and Jacob Eyferth—read the earliest versions of some parts of this book and guided me to think more critically about

my sources. I am grateful for the many different lessons I learned from going through the first stages of this long process with you. My Chinese studies colleagues at the University of Colorado–Boulder—Antje Richter, Matthias Richter, and Evelyn Shih—have been a constant source of encouragement and good humor in the years we have worked together. The kind of interdisciplinary research I do could not happen without so many people in intersecting fields welcoming me to join them at conferences and workshops, and to collaborate on exciting projects, challenging me to grow into the kind of scholar who may one day be able to do the same for junior colleagues. There are too many to be able list all who have helped me here, but I especially want to thank Tobie Meyer-Fong, Vincent Goossaert, Rania Huntington, Margaret Wan, Paul Katz, Chuck Wooldridge, Patricia Sieber, Maram Epstein, Thomas Wilson, Gil Raz, Terry Kleeman, Philip Clart, and Marcus Bingenheimer. There have been times in the last few years when I would have been lost without the warm sororal support of the loosely organized but tightly knit community of women in the study of Chinese religions. Our group keeps growing, but I would like to particularly thank Elena Valussi, Natasha Heller, Jessey Choo, Megan Bryson, Rongdao Lai, Xiaofei Kang, Pauline Lee, and Anna Sun for inviting me to join them in the dark years of meeting only over Zoom, when we could only dream of getting back together for the Women's Breakfast at the AAR Annual Meeting.

I have received support for the research reflected in this book from many fellowships and awards over the years. From within the University of Colorado–Boulder: a Kayden Research Award from the College of Arts and Sciences; a faculty fellowship from the Center for Humanities and the Arts; and a team grant from the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. During graduate studies at the University of Chicago: a Whiting Dissertation-Year Fellowship, a Martin Marty Junior Fellowship from the Martin Marty Center, and from the Center for East Asian Studies, a Chinese Studies Dissertation Fellowship and a Predissertation Research Grant. My first year of dissertation research, spent at Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan, was supported by a Fulbright Student Fellowship.

I am forever grateful for the libraries whose collections have made my work possible. These include Shanghai Library, Fudan University Library, Capital Library of China, National Library of China, Peking University Library, Theater Institute Library at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts, Waseda University Library, University of Tokyo Library, Tainan Public Library, the Bodleian, Harvard-Yenching Library, the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, Widener Library at Harvard Univer-

sity, Columbia University Library, the East Asian Library at Princeton University, and the Claremont Colleges Library. I could not have accessed some of these collections without the generous and careful assistance of those who kindly visited them on my behalf: Remy Lepore, Ruby Wai Yee Chan, Xin Yu, and Xiaojing Miao.

The editors I have worked with at University of Michigan Press—Katie LaPlant, Marcella Landri, and Marcia LaBrenz—have been flexible and extraordinarily helpful throughout the process of bringing this book to publication. The two anonymous readers who read my initial manuscript have my eternal gratitude for their kindness, perspicacity, and care. This book is better for their feedback. Anna Rebull scrupulously copy-edited the manuscript before final submission. All errors and infelicities that remain are my own.

Conventions

I use *pinyin* romanization for Chinese terms, names, and places, except in cases where authors whom I cite are known to use alternate romanization for their names.

In my footnotes, I maintain the surname–given name order for scholars whose research was published in Chinese and Japanese. Names and titles are given in the form in which they appear in publications, such that simplified Chinese characters will appear in notes and the bibliography when I reference research by scholars published in the People's Republic of China.

I use traditional Chinese characters for all transcriptions except when the original text used an alternate or simplified character form, which I have then transcribed as best as possible given the limitations of Unicode.

Dates from before 1912, which are given in terms of the lunar calendar and reign period in my sources, have been converted into their equivalents in the Gregorian calendar.

Introduction

Words for When the World Falls Apart

On March 19, 1853, when Nanjing (南京) fell to the forces of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (太平天國 Taiping tianguo), the death toll numbered in the tens of thousands. A little under 200 kilometers away in Wuxi (無錫), evangelical Confucian schoolteacher Yu Zhi 余治 (1809–1874) responded in the first of three essays, each titled "Jiehai huilan shuo" (劫海迴瀾說 Turbulent Waves in a Sea of Calamity), that he would write over the war years:

> Alas! What times are these? What circumstances are these? The times and the circumstances are as if [all are] disoriented and unawakened. The whole earth shakes. The people are suffering. Bones pile up like mountains. Blood flows like a river. Hearing this, one's heart aches. Speaking about it, one's nose prickles [with unshed tears]. What times are these? What circumstances are these?[1]

1.「吁嗟乎。此何時此何勢耶。此時此勢而猶昏昏未醒耶。大地震動。生民塗炭。積骸如山。流血成川。聞之痛心。言之酸鼻。此何時此何勢耶。」 Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo shang 劫海迴瀾說上," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* 尊小學齋集 (Dejian zhai, 1883), 1:7a (punctuation added). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* was compiled after Yu's death and includes many essays, prefaces to extant and lost works, poems, and family precepts, all written by Yu, as well as his *nianpu* (年普 chronological biography). Though the work physically consists of four volumes, it is divided and separately paginated in such a way as to make precise citation difficult. As such, I divide it into ten volumes, based on the labels on each folio center (版心 *banxin*). Volumes 1–6 refer to the six *wenji* (文集 collected prose) volumes. Volume 7 refers to *shiji* (詩集 collected poems), Volume 8 to *shiyu* (詩餘 additional poems), Volume 9 to *jiaxun* (家訓 family precepts), and Volume 10 to the *nianpu*. For consistency, I follow Meyer-Fong in translating the essay title. Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 35.

Yet, instead of serving as rhetorical strategies to highlight the senseless violence of war, such questions were answered immediately and firmly. *These* are times of widespread immorality. *These* are circumstances of deserved heavenly retribution. *These* are merely a preview of the apocalyptic times yet to come if the living do not immediately repent. With his use of *jie* (劫) in the essay title, a word originally referring to the "kalpa," a Buddhist unit of cosmic time that later also referred more specifically to the disasters that would indicate the kalpa's end, Yu framed the war in eschatological terms, as did many of his contemporaries.[2] In the decades before the war, Yu had already led local efforts to combat social ills through philanthropic organizing and promoting education. The Taiping War (1851–1864) was taken as evidence that these mobilizations had not transformed customs as much as hoped, and in terms of what Vincent Goossaert describes as the "eschatology of threat," this meant that while the apocalypse had not yet arrived, it was imminent if those with the power to change society continued to do nothing about it.[3] The arrival of war was undeniable proof of society's failure thus far to transform for the better and keep Heaven's punishment at bay. Why wouldn't they allow themselves to be taught? What could be done to reach them and save the world?

This is a book about narratives—historical, religious, fictional—and how reformers like Yu Zhi sought amid the chaos of the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911)to weave coherent explanations for why things had become so bad, and to spin utopian images about a world they hoped to rebuild for good. In this sense, Yu Zhi is typical of reformers in the late Qing in his zeal, which alongside his many social ties to those with social and political influence, makes him a compelling figure through whom to view this turbulent moment in Chinese history. The Taiping War, and the many crises leading up to it, meant that scholar-officials, gentry, and educators were no longer mostly focused on extending civilization to restive border peo-

2. For more on how *jie* was used in this context, see Vincent Goossaert, "Competing Eschatological Scenarios During the Taiping War, 1851–1864," in *The End(s) of Time(s): Apocalypticism, Messianism, and Utopianism through the Ages*, ed. Hans-Christian Lehner (Brill, 2021), 271–72.

3. This conflict is most commonly known in English as the Taiping Rebellion; I follow arguments made by Stephen Platt and Tobie Meyer-Fong, among others, and term it simply the Taiping War. Meyer-Fong notes that this term remains ideologically neutral, while "rebellion" places both writer and reader on the side of the Qing against the Taipings. See Meyer-Fong, 12–14, and Stephen Platt, "War and Reconstruction in 1860s Jiangnan," *Late Imperial China* 30, no. 2 (December 2009): 7–8. Goossaert, "Competing Eschatological Scenarios," 271.

ples along the Qing frontier.[4] Now it was time to reeducate the average Chinese within the heartland who had forgotten how to keep Heaven from sending down retribution.

From the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) onward, the Confucian civilizing mission of *jiaohua* (教化 teaching and transformation), wherever it was enacted, was seen as the responsibility of government bureaucrats, sometimes acting in partnership with local gentry families, to morally transform the common people. This involved efforts such as staging lectures on "The Sacred Edict" (聖諭 *shengyu*) through *xiangyue* (鄉約 community compact) organizations or building prominent shrines to honor filial and chaste exemplars.[5] As a term, *jiaohua* dates back to at least the third century BCE and had for centuries exemplified various ideas about how Chinese civilization could be spread and maintained through ideal education and governance.[6] In earlier dynasties, *jiaohua* featured less of a sense of public duty, but during the Ming and especially the Qing, the state sought to emphasize the obligation of those in charge, whether through state power or social influence, in transforming those under their jurisdiction into civilized, obedient subjects of the empire.[7] *Jiaohua* takes on a clear directionality: those above teach, and those below are transformed. The process also was designed to maintain clear social divisions and ideal hierarchical roles: a small class of scholar-officials and their gentry partners

4. At the same time, *jiaohua* efforts continued (and accelerated) in contentious border regions, as Eric Schluessel explores in *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

5. For a comprehensive history of one such Qing exemplar from the bureaucracy, see William Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2001). "The Sacred Edict," promulgated by the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor (r. 1661–1722) in 1670, comprised sixteen maxims of seven characters each, encapsulating a simple form of Confucian orthodoxy intended to enlighten the less educated. The Qing mandated that the community compacts deliver lectures on the edict at regular intervals throughout the year, leading to the development of colloquial commentaries and paraphrases for lecturers to use. For more on the vernacularization of the Sacred Edict, see Victor Mair, "Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, and Andrew J. Nathan (University of California Press, 1985), 325–59.

6. For the ancient date of *jiaohua*, and a longer discussion of *hua*, see Gungwu Wang, "The Chinese Urge to Civilize: Reflections on Change," *Journal of Asian History* 18, no. 1 (1984): 1–34. This reference via Rowe, 539n1.

7. For a brief overview of *jiaohua* in the late imperial period and community compact lectures, see Huan Jin, *The Collapse of Heaven: The Taiping Civil War and Chinese Literature and Culture, 1850–1880* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2024), 70–74.

actively promoted socially stabilizing values, while the common people were passive recipients who became peaceable subjects.[8] In the final years of the war and the first decade afterward, the Tongzhi Restoration (同治中興 *Tongzhi zhongxing*) built its foundation on this sort of top-down reform.[9] During this period, powerful political actors focused on reinstating Confucian governance and values, beginning at court and targeting the general populace; these conservative leaders were certain that by intensifying existing *jiaohua* tactics they could restore proper hierarchies and reinforce orthodox order, thus averting disasters like another Taiping War.[10]

Yu Zhi, while deeply concerned about *jiaohua*, diverged from the mainstream top-down reformist views of major wartime officials and leaders of the Tongzhi Restoration. While he certainly approved of their efforts and was a strong advocate of community compact lectures (if revised with his suggestions), his defense of state-sponsored and time-honored *jiaohua* methods also revealed the cracks in a crumbling edifice. As such, Yu was a curious outlier among the scholar-official class that he aspired—but never entirely managed—to join. As the focus of *jiaohua* turned back toward the Chinese heartland instead of largely being concerned about the frontier, it could not do so without triggering an identity crisis among some of its most ardent advocates. Describing the sense of responsibility eighteenth-century literati felt regarding *jiaohua*, Rowe writes that "the routine process of civilizing others gave meaning to one's own existence; it is only a slight stretch to say that one's evangelical zeal was the key to one's own personal salvation."[11] Given the existential importance of *jiaohua*, what were the self-appointed nineteenth-century guardians of Confucian moral transformation to do as their apocalyptic fears seemed to be coming true? How could they explain their utter failure to

8. Rowe, 406.

9. Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862–1874* (Stanford University Press, 1957). Though Wright's assessment of the Restoration has been rightly criticized for her characterization of Confucianism as anti-modern and of the reformist movement as doomed from the start, her descriptions of the movement and its main actors remain an essential summary of the political era. See Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (Columbia University Press, 1984), 79, for a specific assessment of her book, and more broadly Cohen, 57–96, for a wide-ranging critique of the scholarly tendency in the early to mid-twentieth century to pit "tradition and modernity" against each other in China.

10. Wright, 60–63.

11. Rowe, 406.

create a just and moral world? What did it say about all their efforts before the crises, and about their identities, if moral rot could take root at the very core of civilization?

In Yu's view, the disasters of the late Qing were the natural consequence of *jiaohua*'s failure to compete against more attractive, socially disruptive alternatives, most often identified as vernacular fiction and immoral theatrical productions. In this, he remained in good company with many Confucian fundamentalists of his time, railing against popular culture's corrupting influence. But this is also where he radically diverged from them. Burning and banning immoral books, ramping up efforts to teach Confucian classics in charity schools, emphasizing community compact lectures, or restoring shrines to exemplars could only fail just as they had in the past, unless and until social reformers tried something *new*, based on Yu's suggestions. As the Taiping War ground on for over a decade, and in the Restoration years that followed, Yu became a vocal advocate of teaching with moral vernacular literature that met commoners at what he imagined to be their own level. He emphasized the hope that by writing, printing, and performing such texts, he could transform every member of his audiences into teachers themselves, carrying on the work of moral restoration to save all from the sea of calamity. *Jiaohua* could be a collective effort, encompassing everyone from illiterate village grannies to men who repeatedly failed the civil service exam and never obtained an official position, like Yu himself. Through his writings (and those he inspired), we encounter extraordinary efforts motivated by the fragile hope that stories can save us as the world falls apart.

A prolific writer in both the vernacular and classical Chinese registers, including essays clearly outlining his justifications for more skeptical peers, Yu Zhi gave voice to a zealous and evangelical side of conservative Confucian reform efforts. His life's work centered on exhorting goodness (勸善 *quanshan*) and empowering individuals to contribute to the social stability of their communities and the moral reformation of self and others. His corpus includes many texts that explain a moral framework of cosmic retribution that accounted for national strife, and the means to resolve such crises. Many of these texts also served as instruction manuals for individuals hoping to assume a similarly evangelical role, whether one had the money to donate to every open hand, the strength for volunteer efforts, or nothing more than the words of one's mouth. Yu's innovations won support from prominent late-Qing politicians and gentry and countless more obscure individuals who funded the printing and distribution of his texts, an enterprise that continued well into the twentieth century. Yu's

emphasis on the pedagogical value of mass media presaged movements among producers of religious and morality literature in the Republican era (1911–1949), especially in relation to periodicals and novels.[12]

Yu Zhi's Life and Works

Throughout this book we will encounter Yu Zhi wrestling with crises, processing events through deeply emotional (sometimes mawkish) prose and poetry, and always coming up with new ideas for how teaching and practicing goodness might alleviate personal and collective suffering. His enthusiasm leaps off the page as we read his voice projected through many avatars, yet we also clearly see his very human contradictions and the oversights in his visions for a societal transformation to a postwar utopia. A cynical observer may argue that history proves how, with the collapse of the Qing in 191 1initiating several incredibly destructive decades for China, none of Yu's efforts to avert calamity actually worked. Nonetheless, I invite readers living through the concatenated disasters of the early twenty-first century to try taking his convictions regarding the saving power of literature as seriously as he did when he believed it could reach into every corner of society and reshape the world. What does literature become when vested with such purpose? What potential energy lies in genres at the margins and in the marginalized audiences who enjoy them? When the world looks like it is on the verge of collapse, what kinds of stories might save us? Though we lack many of the sources necessary to understand what life was like for the average person in the final decades of the Qing, Yu's attempts to reach out to such people—through charity, social reform, and stories to entertain and edify—allow us glimpses into the lives of those we otherwise cannot reach.

Information on Yu Zhi's family background and early years is scant, with only a single source, his *nianpu*, providing information on what shaped his development.[13] It was compiled by Wu Shicheng 吳師澄 (fl.

12. On religious periodicals, see Gregory Adam Scott, "Revolution of Ink: Chinese Buddhist Periodicals in the Early Republic," in *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, ed. Jan Kiely and J. Brooks Jessup (Columbia University Press, 2016), 111–40.

13. For a succinct, modern summary of Yu's life and major accomplishments, see You Zi'an 游子安, *Shan yu ren tong: Ming Qing yilai de cishan yu jiaohua* 善於人同: 明清以來的慈善與教化 (Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 93–95. For a detailed analysis, see Lai Jinxing 賴進興, "Wan Qing Jiangnan shenshi de cishan shiye ji qi jiaohua linian—yi Yu Zhi (1809–1874) wei zhongxin 晚清江南士紳的慈善事業及其教化理念—以余治 (1809–

late Qing), another Wuxi native, but little is known about this writer or his relationship with Yu. The *nianpu* leans heavily on stereotypical phrases and character traits to describe a man who, though from unremarkable roots, had by the time of his death in 1874 won widespread admiration for his impeccable character and virtue. Even so, between hagiographic descriptions, such as his mother dreaming of five-colored clouds and smelling an exotic fragrance at his birth (in religious texts, typical characteristics of the birth of an exceptional person), and dry chronicles of Yu's education listing the texts he studied each year, certain details and anecdotes stand out. While we cannot eliminate the possibility that, as in the case of his portentous birth, his biographer embellished other elements of the narrative to create a specific arc, three elements of his early life—family, books, and teaching—seem to have had a powerful combined influence on his future career.

Because Yu's father, Huitian 惠田, already had a son, Yu Zhi was adopted by his childless uncle Shutian 書田 to serve as his descendant. After his mother died when he was three *sui* (born late in the lunar year, he was at most fifteen months old), his aunt, née Hu 胡, took over his care.[14] At the tender age of seven *sui*, Yu apparently saw how hard his aunt worked and regretted that he was unable to help her with her household duties.[15] After he began school at nine *sui*, he came home one day complaining to his uncle that a substitute teacher used popular drinking songs for teaching material, and he knew that alcohol should not be used in teaching. After praising young Yu for his perspicacity, Shutian presented him with a copy of the *Ershisi xiao gushi* (二十四孝故事 Tales of the twenty-four filial exemplars), which Yu fell in love with.[16]

While Yu's education proceeded as planned for a few years (despite his guilt over the hard work of his adoptive parents while he studied), his schooling was imperiled when Shutian died in 1821. Unable to pay tuition, Yu farmed and continued studying independently in his spare time. Aunt Hu also supported them through spinning and weaving, and Yu prepared

1874) 為中心" (MA thesis, National Cheng Kung University, 2005), 13–27. For a recent Chinese monograph on Yu's charitable activities, written in an accessible, nonacademic style but based on close engagement with Yu's collected works, see Lian Pu 廉朴, *Liyuan jiaoren xing cishan—cishan zuojia shuo Yu Zhi* 梨园教人兴慈善—慈善作家说余治 (Daxiang chubanshe, 2018).

14. Wu Shicheng 吳師澄, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu" 余孝惠先生年譜, in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 10:1b–2a.

15. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:2a.

16. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:2b.

to quit his studies entirely. If Aunt Hu had agreed, he would have apprenticed himself to a book publisher as a block engraver, but she forbade it. By 1823, when he was fifteen *sui*, he was instead teaching in an elementary school, the start of a teaching career that would last into his sixties.[17] Denied his teenage impulse to get his hands dirty in the book trade, Yu spent his life nonetheless defined by a fascination with print and a faith that, in a time of crisis, print would provide a means of salvation.

His family's relative poverty and the lengths they went to to secure an education for Yu seem to have helped power him through decades of exam failures while supporting himself as a schoolteacher and growing his reputation for philanthropic organizing. In the 1830s and 1840s, he began developing his own teaching materials for classroom use and dreamed of publishing a handbook for local philanthropic societies that supported causes ranging from charity schools and soup kitchens to foundling homes, to name just a few. He also built charitable societies (善堂 *shantang*, 善會 *shanhui*) with friends and family, beginning in 1835 with a society for cherishing characters (惜字 *xizi*), which also promoted cherishing grains (惜五穀 *xi wugu*).[18] Cherishing characters, or more specifically, surfaces on which characters had been written, became increasingly common among literati from the Ming onward as part of the popularization of devotion to Wenchang 文昌 and the inclusion of the practice in the growing genre of morality texts called "ledgers of merit and demerit" (功過格 *gongguo ge*).[19] By establishing his own cherishing-character society, Yu participated in the Confucian popularization of the practice in the mid to

17. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:3a–3b. This seems very young for a teaching position, but students in the lowest level of elementary school would have been as young as six to eight years old. See Angela Ki Che Leung, "Elementary Education in the Lower Yangtze Region in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (University of California Press, 1994), 381–416, for more on the organization of these schools, especially 391–93 for the age range of students and an introduction to the low status (and pay) of the teachers working at this level. Leung does not include information on the average age of elementary teachers. Yu's *nianpu* mentions his teaching only in passing: "Every time the master went out into the streets in the neighborhood where he taught at the elementary level, he carried with him a bag and gathered abandoned written paper; later, this would become habitual. 先生訓蒙里中每出佩一囊拾道路間遺棄字紙後率以為常" (3b).

18. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:5a.

19. On the popularity of these in the Ming, see Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton University Press, 1991).

late Qing. This reverence for writing became one of the many causes more general charitable societies might embrace, even though it diverged from the externally oriented relief efforts that earlier societies emphasized.[20] Scholarship on cherishing grains is less well established, though the practice has been documented since at least the Ming.[21] Guidelines for founding both such organizations are included in Yu's encyclopedic work *Deyi lu* (得一錄 Record of achieving [goodness]), which places the section on organizing groups to collect and dispose of written paper immediately before similar instructions for groups to honor grain. Yu suggested that associations should cherish both as an expedient means of accruing merit, since the same activity applies to each—roaming the streets with baskets to collect wasted paper and scattered grains.[22] He connected the life-giving properties of grain to how life is given by one's parents, meaning that the careless treatment of grains was no different from the crime of abandoning one's parents.[23] In countless morality tales circulating in the Qing, merit earned from cherishing characters was associated with exam success. Yet for Yu, success never came, even after repeated attempts at the provincial exams, and gradually his involvement with charitable societies in general drew him to a higher calling: philanthropic organizing for those worse off than him. In 1852, after his fifth failure, he lamented the years lost on studying for exams when he could have been doing good, and he resolved to dedicate himself fully to his teaching and organizing.[24]

20. For more on the role of Confucian scholars in cherishing-character societies and their spread in the mid to late Qing, see Leung Ki Che 梁其姿, *Shishan yu jiaohua: Ming Qing shiqi de cishan zuzhi* 施善與教化:明清時期的慈善組織 (Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 125–48. Leung cites *Deyi lu* extensively in her descriptions.

21. Liu Zhiwan 劉枝萬, *Zhongguo minjian xinyang lunji* 中國民間信仰論集 (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan minzuxue yanjiusuo, 1974), 184.

22. *Deyi lu* (Dejian zhai, 1869), 12:1.21a–b. You Zi'an also briefly discusses organizations dedicated to both in *Shan yu ren tong*, 237–38.

23. *Deyi lu*, 12:2.1a.

24. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:9a–9b. While his *nianpu* does not clearly identify that the moment followed the results of the provincial exam, it confirms 1852 as the year he failed for the fifth time. The provincial exam was offered every three years, and counting backward from the fifth attempt, we can assume that his first attempt was the year after he began attending the Jiangyin (江陰) provincial academy, Jiyang Shuyuan (暨陽書院), where he would have specifically prepared for the provincial exam, in 1839 (5b). His path from *tongsheng* (童生 apprentice candidate) to *fusheng* (附生 secondary government student) is also not well documented, though the *nianpu* does note that his first attempt at the county/prefectural exam in 1829, which, if successful, would have given him *tongsheng* status, was a failure (4a). *Fusheng* were the lowest class of *shengyuan* (生員 degree holders).

Yu's failure to achieve any success within the exam system placed him in a large yet still liminal category of Qing intellectuals, men with more aspirations than measurable achievements in government service. Such men understood themselves as scholars, steeped in the Confucian literary and philosophical traditions, but for them, the career path of officialdom remained closed, perhaps forever. This class comprised not only the majority of men who failed the exams at every level, but also those who managed to pass but for whom no official positions were available. Even degree holders in the Qing often waited their entire lives for a post to open.[25] With direct participation in the desirable bureaucratic service denied to them by hypercompetitive exams and limited government positions, such men remained on the margins of the world they spent their lives working to join.

At this point, I have repeatedly referred to Yu as a "Confucian," primarily because, as we will see in later chapters, Yu defends the importance of *Ru* (儒) as the source of all political and social stability; fluency in Confucianism was indeed how he crafted an identity as an expert on practical *jiaohua* approaches and statecraft. His friends emphasized his Confucian expertise in their organization of his collected essays in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* (尊小學齋集 Collected works from the studio of venerating *Lesser learning*) and in the careful record of every step of Yu's childhood progress in learning the Confucian classics in his *nianpu*.[26] While we have no expression from Yu himself explicitly self-identifying as a Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist, such a confession seems unnecessary given his clear dedication to the unity of Confucian governance and education. But his devotion to collecting written paper and grains and engaging with other moral issues are recognizably not derived from any canonical Confucian texts. Even so, as mentioned above, participating in these organizations was increasingly associated with Confucian scholars from the mid-Qing onward. Leung Ki Che's cogent analysis of cherishing-character societies

25. Alexander Woodside, "The Divorce between the Political Center and Educational Creativity in Late Imperial China," in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (University of California Press, 1994), 471–72.

26. The *Xiaoxue* (小學 Lesser learning) in Yu's studio name refers to the textbook written by Song dynasty Neo-Confucian thinker Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in conjunction with his proposal that the early years of education should focus on performing rituals to firmly imprint children with ethical norms before introducing the moral principles behind such ethics in later years. For more on Zhu Xi's theory of education, see Jaeyoon Song, "Source of Learning: Zhu Xi's Theory of Moral Development," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 48, no. 3 (2021): 315–25.

in the context of late-imperial charitable societies directs our attention to the diversity and complexity of practices associated with Confucians.[27] Charity organizations took on causes that seemed increasingly beyond the bounds of classical Confucian social responsibilities, reflecting the religious practices of those she terms middle- and lower-tier Confucians (中下層儒生 *zhongxia ceng Rusheng*). Leung highlights these to create a subtle but powerful difference between "Confucianization" (儒教化 *Rujiao hua*), which would remain associated with the study of Confucian philosophy, and "Confucian scholar-ization" (儒生化 *Rusheng hua*). The latter describes the process by which charitable societies were increasingly taken over by Confucian scholars dedicated to moral causes that were meant to produce personal merit, probably in the hopes of earning career success as a divine reward.[28] When we conceive of late imperial Confucians only in terms of influential philosophers or statesmen, we leave out the majority of men who expressed their Confucian identities in many noncanonical ways. The "Confucian" label contains a diversity of viewpoints and moral stances that developed outward from the same source—concern for the moral state of the civilized world.

Applying this insight back to Yu's life, we can better understand how his actions reflect popular Confucianism in the late Qing. Most Confucian scholars, men who dedicated their lives to education and study, were not part of the privileged class of successful literati who also obtained government jobs and influence. Instead, these men sought other ways of measuring success and handling their disappointment in the educational and political system that they nonetheless continued to believe in. In Yu's case, his frustrations seemed to have made him all the more dedicated to moral restoration through education—but not simply in terms of the Confucian classics. In Yu, we see a clear example of those who Alexander Woodside described as a kind of disillusioned idealist: "Among the literati, there lurked a diffuse utopian mentality that longed for some sort of education-based reenchantment of the world as a whole" that led to "expectations about possibilities of government schools that were almost millenarian in their intensity."[29] Yu fuses this desire for reenchanting the world through education with the popular Confucian devotion to merit-making activities like cherishing written paper and grains. When the Taiping War threw Jiangnan (江南) into turmoil, Yu's years of charity work and teaching had

27. Leung, *Shishan yu jiaohua*, 140–45.
28. Leung, *Shishan yu jiaohua*, 166–68.
29. Woodside, "Political Center and Educational Creativity," 465, 486.

prepared him not only to leap into action to support refugees and local militias, but also to restore the health of his community through moral education. Because of his energetic advocacy on both practical and spiritual matters, he went from small-time teacher to well-connected member of Shanghai society, famed for his philanthropy in late wartime and the early postwar era.

As a result, Yu came to command the attention of a vast network of socially and politically influential men of the late Qing. With broader recognition finally came rank, with honorary promotions for his service in 1858, 1863, and 1867.[30] These promotions did not provide official bureaucratic appointments but accompanied his increasing influence among those within the system. For example, Yu's views on licentious popular literature influenced Jiangsu (江蘇) governor Ding Richang's 丁日昌 (1823–1882) famed book-banning campaign in 1868.[31] Yu was known to General Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) in his lifetime, and to reformer Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) by posthumous reputation.[32] His published works, both in life and in death, drew the sponsorship of many who shared his social and religious priorities. Wu Yun 吳雲 (1811–1883), a famed antiquarian whose successful political career included time as the prefect of Suzhou, endorsed Yu's elementary primer *Xuetang riji gushi tushuo* (學堂日記故事圖說 Illustrated daily stories for the schoolroom) in a preface dated 1868. Earlier, in 1864, Wu was instrumental in introducing him to Ying Baoshi 應寶時 (1821–1890), who served as Shanghai circuit intendant from 1865 to 1869, and later as provincial judge of Jiangsu province.[33] Ying cofounded charity organizations with Yu in Shanghai; appointed him a principal of the Guang Fangyan Guan (廣方言館 School for the Diffusion of Languages), a government-run foreign-language school founded in 1863 by Li Hongzhang; and wrote the first preface to his biography.[34] Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 (1809–1874), Confucian political scholar,

30. Lai Jinxing, 17. The promotion in 1858 gave him the most junior honorary status in the Guanglu Si (光祿寺 Banqueting Court), at the rank 6b. In 1863, he was promoted two levels and given the right to wear a blue feather in his hat, along with new honors for both his adoptive and birth parents. In 1867, he reached rank 5a and his grandparents received posthumous promotions and honors.

31. Ding Shumei 丁淑梅, "Ding Richang sheju jinshu jinxi lun 丁日昌设局禁书禁戏论," *Shanxi shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 40, no. 1 (2011): 143–49.

32. Lai Jinxing, 19, 22.

33. Lai Jinxing, 86–89.

34. Yuen-Sang Leung, *The Shanghai Taotai: Linkage Man in a Changing Society, 1843–90* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 136. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:13b–14b. For more on the Guang Fangyan Guan, see Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixue*

wrote the first preface for Yu's encyclopedic work on charitable foundations and morality, *Deyi lu*.[35] Sociopolitical reformer Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842–1922), whose first essay collection featured a preface by Yu dated 1872,in turn wrote a preface for Yu's collected morality plays *Shuji tang jinyue* (庶幾堂今樂 New music from the Shuji Hall), and then contributed to the compilation of Yu's posthumously published works in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*.[36] Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907), prominent scholar and teacher, wrote a laudatory preface (dated 1872) for Yu's collected plays, and soon after Yu's death, composed his tomb epitaph (墓誌銘 *muzhiming*). Yu Yue further expressed his admiration for Yu Zhi in a preface (dated 1884) to *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*.[37] Though Yu Zhi was neither a scholarly success nor wealthy, he influenced both men of wealth and stature and those of lesser status still seeking to establish their philanthropic reputations. Together, these men of different classes supported efforts across Jiangnan to establish institutions to restore the world.

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dongjian yu wan Qing she hui 西学东渐与晚清社会 (Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011), 266–77. Translation of the school name via Paul Katz, *Religion in China and Its Modern Fate* (Brandeis University Press, 2014), 119.

35. "Feng xu," *Deyi lu*, 1:1a–4a.

36. For more on Zheng Guanying, in an account that curiously mentions nothing of his close connection to Yu Zhi, see Guo Wu, *Zheng Guanying, Merchant Reformer of Late Qing China and His Influence on Economics, Politics, and Society* (Cambria Press, 2010). Two more recent articles on Zheng's religious life and involvement with spirit writing are Lai Chi-tim 黎志添, "Zheng Guanying 'xiandao' yu 'jiushi' de sixiang he shijian: jianping qi dui Qingmo Minchu Daojiao fazhan de yingxiang ji yiyi 鄭觀應「仙道」與「救世」的思想和實踐: 兼評其對清末民初道教發展的影響及意義," *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo shibao* 67 (July 2018): 151–202, and Jiang Yanping 蔣艷萍, "Zheng Guanying fuji xinyang chutan 鄭觀應扶乩信仰初探," *Daojiao yanjiu* 35, no. 1 (2020): 186–97. Since I have yet to find either an original copy or a facsimile reprint of Zheng's collection *Jiushi jieyao*, I use the preface as reprinted in Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應, *Zheng Guanying ji. Jiushi jieyao (wai ba zhong)* 郑观应集. 救时揭要 (外八种), ed. Xia Dongyuan (Zhonghua shuju, 2013). Zheng's 1880 preface can be found on the final two pages of the first volume of *Shuji tang jinyue* (Dejian zhai, 1880). See also the second-to-last folio page of the final volume of *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, where Zheng is included among a list of compilers and contributors. A more precise translation of the title for the play collection, which addresses the classical allusion made by "Shuji Hall," would be "Music of the day of the near to a [moral state] hall," as Michelle Tien King translates it. She also provides a detailed explanation of the allusions behind Yu's title in *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 58–59.

37. For more on Yu Yue, especially the tragedies his family faced during and after the Taiping War, see Rania Huntington, *Ink and Tears: Memory, Mourning, and Writing in the Yu Family* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018).

Brief Introductions to Yu's Publications

During his lifetime, Yu wrote, collated, and edited a massive number of texts. In the extant portion of this corpus, we find primary school textbooks, poetry, morality plays, filial piety tales for girls, an extensively illustrated and poetic fundraising plea for Taiping War relief, various essays on socio-moral reform, a set of family instructions, and, perhaps most importantly to Yu, his encyclopedic compendium on charities and morality organizations: *Deyi lu*. According to his *nianpu*, some lost works include poetry mourning his departed family members, an illustrated plea for flood relief, a collection of new community compact lectures, a revised family genealogy, and a newly edited and annotated edition of the early Qing literary anthology *Guwen guanzhi* (古文觀止 Best examples of classical prose). As few of his extant works are well known, in this section, I briefly describe his main works and their major characteristics. We will return to these with sustained attention in the chapters to follow.

Yu's earliest publications consist of pedagogical materials, consistent with his years-long career as a primary school teacher. These schoolroom works can be divided into those with a focus on poetry and those written in simple Classical Chinese prose, both of which focus on teaching morality while also developing literacy. Most seem to have been written in the 1840s, though the extant editions I have been able to access date from the 1870s to the 1910s. Also in the 1840s, Yu completed the first version of an eclectic morality handbook, *Deyi lu*, though the blocks, half completed for printing, were lost in a fire in 1849, bringing the project to a halt until an expanded version was published in 1869. Partly a guidebook of detailed organizational rules, forms, and meeting schedules for establishing charitable organizations to address various social causes, it is also filled with morality texts, from lectures written in the vernacular (presumably by Yu) to family precepts to one of Yu's long poems for children. This work also anthologizes pieces by many other authors, ranging in date from prominent Song dynasty (960–1279) Neo-Confucians to contemporary Qing officials. Organized into sixteen volumes by socio-moral cause, this version, clearly expanded from the unpublished original twenty years earlier, demonstrates the sheer attention to detail with which Yu approached every one of his moral crusades.

After his death, Yu's supporters banded together to publish two important collections as memorials to their lost teacher and friend. The first, *Shuji tang jinyue*, printed in 1880, consists of twenty-eight morality plays (of a supposed forty in total) that Yu had been working on for decades and

planned to release in a three-volume set. These dramas cover a range of topics, from Qing martyrs killed in the Taiping War to cherishing grains and opposing infanticide. According to his *nianpu*, he began experimentally staging them in 1859, so work on these plays presumably began in the late 1850s, in the shadow of the ongoing Taiping War.[38] The second posthumous collection, *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, printed in 1883, consists of six volumes of Yu's essays, two of poetry, and one of family precepts, with the final volume taken up by his *nianpu* and essays in his memory. Derived from a wide range of sources, including personal letters, prefaces to his many works, and reactions to current affairs, these essays are all unfortunately undated. Nonetheless, they form a valuable collection of how Yu addressed his peers and those he considered potential sponsors for his morality campaigns.

Around the end of the Taiping War, Yu was behind the publication of an extraordinary work on wartime devastation and loss. In *Jiangnan tielei tu* (江南鐵淚圖 A man of iron's tears for Jiangnan), Yu paired forty-two original poems about the war and his vision for postwar restoration with vividly drawn illustrations of loss, death, and reconstruction.[39] This work went through many reprints, both with the original blocks and with newly carved blocks for an 1872 edition produced in Beijing.[40] Each version I have seen maintains the core image-text pairings but otherwise they all vary, sometimes quite dramatically, in terms of the paratext that comes afterward. Of the four printed from original blocks that I have examined, one edition ends with a collection of essays in Classical Chinese on phi-

38. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:12a.

39. The extraordinary work of the illustrator or illustrators gives this text incredible affective power, but they are not credited in any edition I have seen. For more on this text, see Meyer-Fong, 51–62. Meyer-Fong highlights how in his preface to the work, Yu explains this oddly constructed title by describing how the devastation would make even a man of iron cry. Notably, this was not Yu's first use of this title. According to his *nianpu*, in response to disastrous flooding of the Yangzi River in 1849, Yu produced a now-lost work titled *Shuiyan tielei tu* 水淹鐵淚圖 (A man of iron's tears for the flood), with twenty-four illustrations, and sent it to prospective donors near and far. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:8a–b. For more on the flood, which is well documented and widely studied, see Zhixin Hao, Danyang Xiong, and Jingyun Zheng, "Flood Disasters and Social Resilience During the Decline of the Qing Dynasty: Case Studies of 1823 and 1849," *Hydrological Processes* 35, no. 7 (July 2021): n.p. https://doi.org/10.1002/hyp.14295

40. Jiyun shanren 寄雲山人 [Yu Zhi], *Jiangnan tielei tu* (Baowen zhai kezi pu, 1872), held by the National Library of China. Some of this later edition's paratextual supplements were copied directly from *Deyi lu*.

lanthropy and guidelines for founding charity organizations, much like those in *Deyi lu*; most of the others end with direct appeals for charity in both Classical Chinese and the vernacular. Two close with all three of Yu's "Jiehai huilan shuo" essays.[41] These essays, already intensely emotional in their appeals for moral revival in response to the Taiping War, are enhanced by Yu's extensive commentary, which is absent from the versions of these essays that appear in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*. His commentary appears between the columns of characters and in half-width lines after key phrases, adding to the affective tone that Yu had already taken in these essays about the war and the need for change. That *Jiangnan tielei tu* was distributed with such different paratextual appendices suggests that Yu carefully targeted diverse audiences in his appeals for charity.

In addition to *Jiangnan tielei tu*, some of Yu's books for children are also heavily illustrated. *Deyi lu* likewise includes some illustrations, most captivatingly in the context of replacing brand names with brand logos in the section on cherishing written paper.[42] Illustrations are powerful because they can communicate without text. Though the artist was never credited, the publisher that produced them, Dejian zhai (得見齋), situated within the famed Daoist temple Xuanmiao Guan (玄妙觀 Abbey of Mysterious Wonder) in Suzhou, clearly worked with talented illustrators, and their work often amplifies aspects of the stories for maximum emotional impact. This was not meant for just illiterate or minimally literate children: the illustrations for these often-grisly morality tales in the textbooks add shock value (and sometimes humor). Images are also used as a rhetorical strategy in *Jiangnan tielei tu* to make even rich men with hearts of iron weep after coming face to face with pitiful depictions of suffering and to open their purses to donate to relief efforts.

41. Jiyun shanren 寄雲山人 [Yu Zhi], *Jiangnan tielei tu* (Dejian zhai, [1864?]); this edition held by the library of the Claremont Colleges is heavily damaged toward the end and appears to be missing a significant number of its final pages, but its table of contents (the only edition that offers one) catalogs a series of essays on specific relief organizations and methods for their operation. Compared to the subsequent editions, it appears that the blocks for the body pages were in the best condition, marking this as the earliest print I have examined. Princeton University's copy ends with two appeals for charity. Both editions credit Suzhou Dejian zhai as the printer. The copy held at the National Central Library in Taiwan has been damaged on the title page, leaving the printer unclear, but the three heavily annotated "Jiehai huilan shuo" essays were added. This version is available as a facsimile: Jiyun shanren [Yu Zhi], *Jiangnan tielei tu* (Guangwen shuju, 1974). The copy held by Columbia University credits a different publisher on its title page, indicating that the same blocks, by then in quite poor condition, had been adopted by a different Suzhou group.

42. *Deyi lu*, 12.1:13a–18b.

Chapters 3 and 4 are based on close readings of two of Yu's works from among a small set of texts that are not officially credited to him. Even though he is not explicitly named as their author, internal and external evidence from three *baojuan* (寶卷 precious scrolls) indicates that he was closely involved in editing and writing them. In chapter 5, I compare a *baojuan* that clearly names Yu as its editor with an earlier version of the work to further discern his agenda in engaging with this popular religious performance genre. The *baojuan* that do not name Yu as author/editor were all published by Dejian zhai, the same morality print house that published first editions of *Jiangnan tielei tu*, *Deyi lu*, *Shuji tang jinyue*, and *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, and many more of Yu's works.[43] Though the history of this print house has yet to be reconstructed, the close connection with Yu further strengthens the link between these uncredited *baojuan* and his signed works.

In recent years, more attention has been paid to *baojuan* in English-language scholarship, but a brief introduction to the genre remains necessary to illustrate their appeal to Yu as another medium for his moral messages. The generic term *baojuan* describes a broad range of literature that spans from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries. Rooted in earlier practices of popular Buddhist preaching and depending heavily on vernacular linguistic registers, *baojuan* also came to be used by sectarian religious groups in the sixteenth century for proselytizing followers to adopt new deities and faiths.[44] Eventually, such groups faced government persecution and repression, and their texts could not circulate openly.[45] Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *baojuan* continued to have a mixed reputation—if not for advocating officially condemned heterodoxies, then for representing the religious misconceptions of lay audiences using colloquial language and lurid plots. This is perhaps why Yu did not sign the *baojuan* works that are so clearly products of his brush. Official suppression and elite condemnation notwithstanding, *baojuan* continued to develop and flourish, albeit toward a less explicit style of proselytizing,

43. For a brief history of Xuanmiao Guan, see Paul Katz, "Xuanmiao guan," in *The Encyclopedia of Daoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (Routledge, 2008), 1135–36.

44. For English-language scholarship on the early *baojuan* traditions, see Daniel Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), and Barend ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014).

45. For more on these groups and their relationship with imperial suppression, see Hubert Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Brill, 2003).

tending toward less obviously sectarian narratives in later centuries. As texts meant to be performed before audiences who might not have enough education to understand dense Classical Chinese or to even read at all, *baojuan* would have appealed to Yu as another tool for mass education, like staged drama. Should his new creations find appeal, they had the potential to spread broadly and quickly, as chapter 3 will show occurred with one of the three *baojuan* that Yu was most directly involved in producing.

Both Buddhist clergy and lay professionals performed *baojuan* in connection with specific rituals or celebrations and tended to work from personal, handwritten copies of the texts. However, *baojuan* also spread widely via print, and while the appearance of the earliest printed *baojuan* is a subject of ongoing disagreement, enough late-sixteenth-century *baojuan* survive to show that this genre also benefited from the broader explosion in print in the mid to late Ming.[46] Even though the depredations of time and Qing censorship campaigns have left us with few Ming and early Qing imprints compared with the vast number from the late Qing and early Republican eras, some early prints were especially fine, perhaps thanks to sponsorship by members of the Ming court.[47] Most printed *baojuan* in the later period reflected simplistic print styles, however, with few to no illustrations and cheap production techniques using either woodblock or lithographic technology. In the case of noncommercial editions, which constitute the majority of *baojuan* produced before the twentieth century, inexpensive production methods presumably helped sponsors' contributions go toward the highest number of copies for the widest possible distribution. Some late-Qing editions were even printed with interlinear phonetic guides to assist amateur performers with pronunciation. Whether or not more amateur performances resulted, such inclusions indicate that producers had at least the perception that *baojuan* might be used in this way, perhaps within the space of the home as an edifying form of entertainment literature. Printed *baojuan* also earned merit for the donors who funded their imprints through religious print houses.

46. See Che Xilun 車錫倫, "Zhongguo zuizao de baojuan 中國最早的寶卷," *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo tongji* 6, no. 3 (September 1996): 45–52. For a discussion of one text sometimes considered to be the earliest extant printed *baojuan*, dated to the thirteenth century, see Wilt Idema, "A Second Look at the *Precious Scroll of the Red Gauze*," *Nanyang Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1 (November 2021): 79–99.

47. For a clear summary of *baojuan* print and circulation history, see Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu* 中国宝卷研究 (Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 33–38.

In his 2005 MA thesis on Yu Zhi, Lai Jinxing was the first to credit Yu with authoring *baojuan*. Lai primarily explores the texts that I also focus on in chapters 3 and 4: *Pan Gong mianzai jiunan baojuan* (潘公免災救難寶卷 The precious scroll of Lord Pan which will avert calamities and save from disasters; hereafter *Pan Gong*) and *Xigu mianzai baojuan* (惜穀免災寶卷 The precious scroll of cherishing grains to avert calamities; hereafter *Xigu*), respectively.[48] Lai builds on *baojuan* scholar Sawada Mizuho's 澤田瑞穗 earlier suggestion that *Pan Gong*, *Xigu*, and *San Mao zhenjun baojuan* (三茅真君寶卷 The precious scroll of the three perfected Mao lords) were most likely written by the same author, and Lai takes this a step further to identify that author as Yu.[49] By making detailed comparisons among *Pan Gong*, *Xigu*, and Yu's credited works, Lai makes a convincing case for his authorship, one that scholars like Meyer-Fong and myself have previously accepted and built on in our work on Yu Zhi.[50] However, as I will explain in chapter 3, my new research has led me to conclude that Yu's involvement with *Pan Gong* was a combination of editorial work on a preexisting volume and the production of two new volumes of his own work to complete the text. Yu's new three-volume edition substantially overshadowed the limited impact of the earlier anonymous single volume. Yu invested significant time and energy in this pursuit and then built on them by writing *Xigu*, which I focus on in chapter 4, as a companion text to *Pan Gong* for female audiences, perhaps the wives and daughters of the men he hoped to reach with the first work. Though there is no space in this book to elaborate on it, I would like to suggest that *Bixie guizheng xiaozai yan-*

48. For more, see Lai Jinxing, 124–37.

49. Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū* 增補宝巻の研究 (Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975), 143. For more on the religious context of *San Mao*, see Rostislav Berezkin and Vincent Goossaert, "The Three Mao Lords in Modern Jiangnan: Cult and Pilgrimage between Taoism and *Baojuan* Recitation," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 99 (2014): 295–326. While the first volume of the Dejian zhai version of *San Mao* has no relation to the *baojuan* in this set, the second volume is structurally similar to *Pan Gong* and *Liyuan*, combining most of the twelve precepts explained in both texts along with further materials that seem inspired by moral prohibitions from *Pan Gong*, 1:15b–18b, for a total of thirty-six admonitions elaborated at length. Even so, it is tonally and stylistically very different from the second and third volumes of *Pan Gong* and *Xigu*, the *baojuan* about which I am most certain of Yu's authorship; in my opinion, this work was most likely inspired by Yu Zhi but not actually written by him.

50. Meyer-Fong, 38–46, and Katherine Alexander, "Conservative Confucian Values and the Promotion of Oral Performance Literature in Late Qing Jiangnan: Yu Zhi's Influence on Two Appropriations of *Liu Xiang baojuan*," *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 36, no. 2 (2017): 93n16 and 97–98n27.

shou liyuan baojuan (辟邪歸正消災延壽立願寶卷 The precious scroll of vowing to exorcise evil, return to the correct, eliminate calamities, and extend life) ought to be considered one of Yu's *baojuan* efforts, because it significantly overlaps with the first volume of *Pan Gong* and many of Yu's morality tales; however, I leave this for now as a possible avenue for future research.

The performance context of *baojuan* is very different from those of dramas or community compact lectures, the two other genres Yu hoped to use to teach audiences about morality through colloquial, emotional speech targeting lower comprehension levels. Though Yu's collection of community compact lectures has unfortunately been lost, essays in a colloquial vernacular register can be found scattered throughout the volumes of *Deyi lu*. Thanks to the inclusion of sentence-final particles, reduplicative words, and rhetorical questions designed to capture the attention of an imagined audience, when read out loud, the text occasionally sounds little different from modern Chinese. Yet the textual context of these simple essays—included in a work that would have been read by highly literate members of society—suggests that they were meant to be used as examples, or even scripts, for speaking to the lower classes (socially or intellectually). Yu's approach in his *baojuan* is different from the use of actors or other members of the social elite as his mouthpieces in plays or *xiangyue* lectures. By the nature of printed *baojuan*, every literate listener could potentially become an amateur performer on behalf of their immediate social groups. Few audience members at a staged drama performance or community compact lecture could do the same. Even for illiterate listeners, Yu's *baojuan* include carefully phrased slogans that listeners are encouraged to memorize and use to admonish their families and friends. By explicitly inviting audiences to participate in their replication (whether in print or performance), *baojuan* could become valuable tools to teach everyone who heard his good news and to transform society.

Prior Attention to Yu's Works

Some of Yu's works have already attracted researchers in many fields of sinology, including historians of the postwar period, charitable organizations, pedagogy, and traditional theater, to name a few.[51] Yu's oeuvre is so

51. Both Fuma Susumu 夫馬進, *Chūgoku zenkai zendōshi kenkyū* 中国善会善堂史研究 (Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1997) and Leung Ki Che, in *Shishan yu jiaohua*, use *Deyi lu* as

extensive that I do not venture to claim that everything worth studying is covered in this book. This is particularly true when it comes to his collection of morality dramas, *Shuji tang jinyue*; in chapter 4, I briefly touch on only two of the twenty-eight extant plays. Chinese scholarship on Yu's plays from the early 2000s brought attention to their value to theater history, including articles on their reception history, impact on the theatrical world, and literary quality and staging.[52] Meanwhile, more recently in English-language scholarship, articles by Rania Huntington and Kwok-Yiu Wong drew attention to the value of these plays in understanding literary representations of the Taiping War and the historic roots of the early-twentieth-century theater reform movement.[53] Most recently, David Rolston's encyclopedic book *Inscribing Jingju/Peking Opera: Textualization and Performance, Authorship and Censorship of the "National Drama" of China from the Late Qing to the Present* treated the collection with meticulous attention as an exemplar of literati-produced playscripts during the early developmental phase of *jingju* (京劇 Peking opera).[54]

Beyond these literature-focused studies, Qing historians have also found Yu's corpus to be a rich source of material. In *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China*, Tobie Meyer-Fong dedicates one chapter to some of Yu's works, especially *Pan Gong* and *Jiangnan tielei tu*, that directly address the Taiping War and postwar reconstruction, using them as examples of the fiercely religious nature of

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a significant source of information on charitable organizations and make detailed case studies of Yu's efforts with infant-protection societies. At the opening of his chapter on the early history of charitable societies, Fuma identifies *Deyi lu* as the best source for documenting their historical importance among charitable organizations (Fuma, 91). A full Chinese translation of Fuma's work is also available as *Zhongguo shanhui shantangshi yanjiu* (Shangwu shuju, 2005). Evelyn Sakakida Rawski's *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (University of Michigan Press, 1979) also draws heavily on examples of Yu's work, especially his primers and the instructions in *Deyi lu* for establishing and running charitable schools.

52. Hu Yu 胡瑜, "Yu Zhi jiqi xiqu huodong zhi lishi yiyi de zai tantao 余治及其戏曲活动之历史意义的再探讨," *Zhongguo xiqu xueyuan xuebao* 34, no. 4 (2013): 82–86, provides a clear summary of studies contributing to this minor surge in interest in his dramas.

53. Rania Huntington, "Singing Punishment and Redemption in the Taiping Civil War: Yu Zhi's Plays," *Frontiers of History in China* 13, no. 2 (2018): 211–26. Kwok-Yiu Wong, "Reform Spirit and Regional Theaters: Yu Zhi's (1809–1874) *Shuji tang jinyue* and the *Xiqu* Reform Movement," *Monumenta Serica* 65, no. 2 (2017): 363–400.

54. David Rolston, *Inscribing Jingju/Peking Opera: Textualization and Performance, Authorship and Censorship of the "National Drama" of China from the Late Qing to the Present* (Brill, 2021), 226–50.

local elite responses to the apocalyptic conflict.[55] Michelle Tien King's book, *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China*, likewise devotes a chapter to works by Yu, drawing almost entirely on different works than Meyer-Fong. King focuses on Yu as an exemplar of male scholars who took up anti-infanticide as a crusade; addressing how he sought to save baby girls by writing short morality tales, one play-script focused on infanticide, and detailed guides for philanthropists looking to establish foundling homes or infant-protection societies.[56] Finally, a very recent book, Huan Jin's *The Collapse of Heaven: The Taiping Civil War and Chinese Literature and Culture, 1850–1880*, though not directly addressing Yu's work, deserves mention here. Jin's analysis shows that a variety of literary genres written during the war and postwar years show startling rhetorical similarities, even among parties on opposite sides of the conflict, and she explores the meaning of these discursive strategies and the shifts in literary and cultural paradigms brought about by the crisis. Writers did not even need personal experience of the war to be caught up in the apocalyptic thinking and desire for utopian solutions that came to echo through literature for decades afterward. Yu's body of literary work from the 1840s to the 1870s, which I explore in this book, does not precisely overlap with Jin's broader survey, but evinces many of the same themes she identifies.[57]

Inspired by and owing an intellectual debt to all earlier scholarship on Yu Zhi and literature from this period, I am particularly interested in how he conceived of literature's function, purpose, and potential, and how these beliefs fueled his prodigious output of words. In this book, I aim to situate these varied works of morality literature, sprouted from an earnestness that in many cases exceeds Yu's literary skill, within the community of those who strongly supported his efforts with their time, influence, and money. As I hope to prove, even didactic and frequently awkward literature can be exceptionally rich food for thought. One typical argument to justify engaging with literature that fails to meet most or all of the conventional markers of literary quality is to point out how formulaic or derivative works frequently found significant popularity in the broader market of nonelite audiences. It is relatively easy to argue that such works deserve study due to their definitive impact on society or their role as antecedents to more refined literary gems.

55. Meyer-Fong, "Words," in *What Remains*, 21–63.

56. King, 46–76.

57. See Jin, 12–16, for a summary of the book's main argument. Yu Zhi is mentioned briefly on 208–9 in a chapter on other contemporary dramatists who wrote more directly about the war in their plays.

But what of works like Yu Zhi's morality plays, illustrated children's literature, or *baojuan*, only a few of which garnered serious popular attention? Created by someone who publicly eschewed engagement with popular literature but wanted to appropriate its power to influence audiences, these works give us a glimpse of what one social reformer thought popular literature looked like and how he thought it worked on its followers. Yu's efforts to engage with a world of spectators beyond the reach of conventional Confucian education reveal many assumptions about the people of the late Qing whom we otherwise cannot reach. We may never hear directly from a late-Qing primary schoolboy who had to drop out after the first few years to work, but we can see the kinds of entertaining, gruesome morality tales that Yu hoped he would enjoy and tell his family all about. An illiterate grandmother could not leave us her thoughts, but we know what Yu thought would inspire her to greater heights of moral care for her home and neighbors. By relentlessly lobbying the more elite members of Jiangnan society, many of whom probably shared his concerns about approach of the apocalypse, Yu took *jiaohua* out of the hands of high-ranking officials and put it in the mouths of every villager. All it took was the catalyst of an empire-shaking war.

Morality Literature in War and Reconstruction

Exhortative morality literature was, in a way, a precipitating cause of the Taiping War, which nearly toppled the faltering Qing imperium and pushed Yu to contend with an impending apocalyptic collapse through his own creative forays into morality literature. Granted, the social and political factors that led to over a decade of civil war were complex, as were the countermeasures employed against a rebel force that sought to establish a Christian kingdom in place of the existing Manchu dynasty. Even so, were it not for vernacular Christian evangelistic tracts that inspired religious fervor in a young man, Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864), when he interpreted contemporary events and strange dreams through a foreign religious lens, this particular war would never have happened.

In 1836, Hong Xiuquan, the man who would become the spiritual leader of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and seek to overthrow the Qing, was still a young scholar hoping to pass the prefectural *shengyuan* (生員) examinations in Guangdong. As he took this first step toward the unlikely possibility of securing a post in the imperial bureaucracy, rebelling against the system was probably the furthest thing from his mind. The anxious young men who emerged from these exam halls, in which they had been

sealed for three days and two nights, were considered easy targets for evangelism by Christian missionaries in southern China. In one such moment of proselytizing, Hong received a set of morality tracts entitled *Quanshi liangyan* (勸世良言 Good words to exhort the age), which, from the title, probably looked like any number of other popular morality texts of his day. By his own account, Hong merely glanced at the volumes but did not read them carefully until seven years later. In the meantime, he would attempt and fail the exam in Guangdong another two times.[58]

The *Quanshi liangyan* tracts contained a blend of Classical Chinese translations of the Christian Bible followed by vernacular-language exegesis by a Chinese convert, Liang Fa 梁發 (1789–1855). The tracts' Christian message, as far as Liang was able to convey via decontextualized Biblical passages, seemed to explain the crises facing China from within and without.[59] In 1843, after noticing the books on Hong's shelf, a relative finally read them and returned with the enthusiastic recommendation that Hong do the same. Without guidance to interpret unfamiliar transliterated names, stories of a distant land to the west, and a savior purportedly born there, the tracts would have been an esoteric, confusing read. Even so, they felt familiar to Hong: they explained a series of mysterious dreams that had come to him while he was seriously ill after his second exam failure. *Quanshi liangyan* enabled Hong to connect his delirium with the Christians' god. Hong came to believe the dreams had been sent to inform him of his identity as Jesus Christ's younger brother and his destiny to drive evil out of China and convert its people to Christianity.

Liang's core argument, that disaster was imminent due to empire-wide moral decline, was already familiar to Hong as part of a long-held set of eschatological beliefs about the always-impending apocalypse.[60] It is one we also see in Yu Zhi's writings about the Taipings after the fall of Nanjing in 1853. Yet Yu, ever a Qing loyalist, was careful to pin the moral decline on individual behavior, not on cosmic forces that might imply a fundamental weakness of the reigning dynasty. But such ambiguity in *Quanshi liangyan*, describing a coming apocalypse in which some would be saved but most would be damned, and the "heavenly kingdom" to appear afterward, played into the idea slowly growing in the minds of Taiping leaders and

58. Philip A. Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," in *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 10, *Late Ch'ing (1800–1911)*, Part 1, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 266–68.

59. Kuhn, 267.

60. Vincent Goossaert, "Competing Eschatological Scenarios," 269–306.

followers that the time for revolution was now at hand.[61] The values endorsed in Hong's earliest writings on the subject of his newfound religion, apart from the iconoclastic insistence on abandoning family altars and local temple cults, reflect concepts one might find in a typical conservative morality text: condemnation of licentiousness, gambling, and murder while endorsing such wholesome values as filial piety and simple living.[62] However, as Hong continued to study Christianity in the late 1840s, he became increasingly convinced that the Qing state, and the entire imperial system, were blasphemous and should be purged from China.[63]

As these apocalyptic visions gathered momentum with the promise of a new ideal kingdom, the movement drew in disenfranchised commoners, former pirates chased up the rivers by the increased British presence in the seas around Hong Kong, and secret societies (including the Triads).[64] With a successful skirmish over a frontier town in mid-1850, the new religious movement became an insurgency against the Qing, and on January 11, 1851, Hong Xiuquan proclaimed the foundation of the Great Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, clearly establishing his intent to overthrow the dynasty.[65] Pushing northward from the periphery of the empire, victorious Taiping forces fought their way from the frontier to the heartland for two years. City after city fell, which was interpreted as a sign of heavenly favor, culminating in a successful assault on Nanjing in March 1853. The shockwave caused by the fall of this city, the former capital of the Ming—now capital of the Heavenly Kingdom—reverberated throughout the Jiangnan region for decades.[66] Most pressingly, it established the Taiping as a serious contender for the Mandate of Heaven.

The Qing only emerged as the victor after fourteen years of war, and during those years, it was often unclear which side would ultimately prevail. Was this an immoral rebellion against the benevolent state or a brave revolution against a corrupt dynasty? Were Jiangnan residents caught between the forces of a crumbling old dynasty and the incipient new dynasty, as they had been during the Ming–Qing transition? When Nanjing fell in 1853, Yu Zhi fretted about the moral health of Jiangnan in "Jie-

61. Kuhn, 267.

62. Kuhn, 269.

63. Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (University of Washington Press, 2004), 91–100.

64. Kuhn, 273.

65. Kuhn, 273–74.

66. Chuck Wooldridge, *City of Virtues: Nanjing in an Age of Utopian Visions* (University of Washington Press, 2015), 12–15.

hai huilan shuo" and began to write words he hoped would save the world. Afterward, in 1853–1854, he was involved in the editing and composition of what would become a very popular *baojuan* about the war, *Pan Gong*. In *Pan Gong*, handily avoiding political labels, he characterized the long-haired bandits (as they were often called because they refused the Qing mandate to shave their foreheads and wear the queue) as agents of heavenly punishment. This explanation for their rapid spread across China did not require acknowledging either their imported deity or their dynastic claims:

> Up from Guangxi they came, through Hunan and Hubei,
> Millions killed, men and women are now vengeful spirits,
> It's all because we, the common people, did evil in the past.
> It's to the point that heaven and earth are furious, and our inexorable doom has arrived.
> No wonder in recent years the ghostly armies bring great chaos,
> and hundreds of thousands of headless ghosts cry out in the depths of night.[67]

More texts soon followed during the war years, including other *baojuan* and a set of morality plays. Though Yu fervently hoped for the restoration of Qing order, in light of the overwhelming Taiping victories, how certain could he have been of that eventuality?

Five years later, in 1858, with war still raging, Yu composed his second essay with the title "Jiehai huilan shuo," beginning: "Alas! See the calamities of war in the world and know how extremely enraged Heaven's heart is!"[68] He continued, "Wishing to turn back the tide of the calamity, we must first turn back Heaven's wrath."[69] Once again, the Taiping are abstracted as forces of cosmic judgement instead of a political threat to the Qing. Emphasizing that Heaven treats people the way parents treat their

67.「廣西起，一路來，湖南湖北。殺害了，數百萬，男女冤魂。都是我，百姓們，從前作孽。以致於，天地怒，劫數來臨。怪不道，近年來，陰兵大亂。幾十萬，無頭鬼，吵鬧三更。」*Pan Gong mianzai baojuan* 潘公免災寶卷 (Dejian zhai, 1858), 2:2a (punctuation added).

68.「吁嗟乎。觀乎人世刀兵之劫而知天心之震怒為已極也。」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo zhong 劫海迴瀾說中," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 1:11a (punctuation added). The character I translate as "heart" is *xin* 心, which is also translated as "heart-mind" or "mind," and often connotes "moral nature" or "will." Though for the sake of simplicity I translate it as "heart" here and below, the complexity of this term should not be overlooked.

69.「欲回劫運必先回天怒」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo zhong," 1:11a.

children by rewarding meritorious behavior and punishing disobedience, he highlighted three especially odious acts: disrespecting parents, harming others' lives, and disrespecting written paper and grains.[70] Between the lines of his dire warnings, Yu's message nonetheless remains optimistic—Heaven could be persuaded to desist and restore peace if only people could learn to stop angering it. In a world where parental Heaven punished its children with a horde of longhaired soldiers from the southern hinterlands threatening to topple the Confucian empire, there remained room for hope.

But in 1860, despite vociferous efforts to promote morality and philanthropy, including newly written songs titled "Huang en ge" (皇恩歌 The emperor's favor) and "Qin en ge" (親恩歌 Parents' favor), the Taiping War came for Yu Zhi, too. As Taiping forces made a strong push to take new territories in the spring, occupying Wuxi on June 1 and Suzhou only days later, Yu's family went on the run.[71] Not only were they now refugees, but his elder brother drowned, probably by suicide. Sick with grief and regret that as a scholar he was unable to slaughter the bandits himself, Yu turned to his greatest comfort: words. He wrote an essay, "Jiesan zeidang shuo" (解散賊黨說 On dispersing bandits), and had it distributed among military encampments to advise commanders to be merciful to innocents conscripted into the conflict against their will.[72] Reaching out directly to these Taiping conscripts, he also composed forty-eight songs on the theme of bandit dispersal.[73] His biographer writes that before long, spreading these songs influenced isolated fighters.[74] Reading between the lines, one senses that Yu mediated between antagonists by advising merciful tactics to the military with formal prose and in songs promising amnesty to illiterate soldiers who surrendered with vernacular songs, thus bringing a measure of peace in the wake of his brother's death.

In 1853, by blaming the dissolute residents of Nanjing, who, he believed, deserved their deaths, Yu implied that those who survived had earned their salvation, but in his final installment of "Jiehai huilan shuo," dated the same year that the war finally ended in 1864, Yu's tone is noticeably

70. Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo zhong," 1:11b.

71. For how rapidly cities fell in this offensive, see Mao Jiaqi 茅家琦, *Guo zhu "Taiping tianguo shishi rizhi" jiaobu* (Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 2001), 130–37.

72. This essay is included in Yu, *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 1: 20a–21a. For a brief discussion of the essay's contents, see Meyer-Fong, 47–48.

73. In 1861, Wu Yun mentioned these songs in a letter to Wu Xu 吳煦 (1809–1872), who served as Shanghai circuit intendant from 1859 to 1862. Lai Jinxing, 86–87.

74. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:12a–b.

exhausted, even pessimistic. "Alas," he begins again, "I now know that the reason that the great disaster has not been turned back is not because Heaven's heart cannot be changed.[75] It is because human hearts cannot be changed."[76] It is unclear if this final piece was written before Hong Xiuquan died (in early June) and the Taiping capital fell to Qing forces (in late July).[77] Even if it was indeed written after these Qing victories eliminated the immediate threat to the dynasty, massive suffering remained rampant throughout the war-torn region, with widespread famine, disease, and poverty afflicting the millions of refugees who had somehow managed to survive the conflict. Was the end of the Taiping War really proof that heavenly wrath had cooled? It probably did not look much like it.

In this essay, his longest of the three, Yu's weary gaze turns decidedly inward, recognizing a fundamental flaw in the accusatory approach taken in his earlier essays. By encouraging everyone to point out the moral flaws in those around them, he observed that he had created a chorus of millions willing to say, as if with one voice, that "people's hearts are not good," but no one was willing to acknowledge that they themselves were also bad. Now, he realized, turning back the disaster depended entirely on changing the word "people" (*ren*) to "me/myself" (*wo*), beginning with the realization that "my heart is not good."[78] Heaven remained angry because no one had realized this key fact. The chorus had to change its refrain: "Because my heart is not good, therefore Heaven's wrath has not yet ended, and the gods offer no protection. I have brought this on myself. This is my self-made retribution. Thus, I ought to be killed and dismembered; it is fitting that I be captured or immolated."[79]

As much as this final essay intends to remind readers of their own individual complicity in the ongoing disaster rather than permit smug blame on the dead for their fates, it is also a confessional of sorts for Yu. After asking his readers to look in the mirror and see their flaws, he acknowledges that he has still been talking about others and thus opened himself

75. To preserve the impact and parallelism of the original, I again render *xin* simply as "heart." Readers should keep in mind that there is a stark difference between Heaven's impartial intentions and the willful heart-minds of intractable humans.

76.「吁嗟乎。吾今而知大劫之不可回也非天心不可轉也。由人心不可轉也。」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo xia 劫海迴瀾說下," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 1:14a (punctuation added).

77. Mao, 207–12.

78. From「人心之不好也」to「我心之不好也」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo xia," 1:15a.

79.「我心之不好也。所以神明不佑也。是我之自取也。是我之自作孽也。我則該殺該剮也。我則宜擄宜焚也。」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo xia," 1:15b (punctuation added).

up to criticism for pointing at others without examining his own flawed heart. He imagines being confronted by derision, and instead of mounting a counterargument, he concedes their points with a fatigue brought on by over a decade of seemingly unending war, and a humility that is a far cry from his first "Jiehai huilan shuo" essay, ending on a deeply personal note:

> People may sarcastically retort, "Master teaches us to be correct, yet Master himself does not [teach from] a place of correctness. How dare he shamefacedly establish words to admonish the world? He takes it as something easy to restore virtue and right wrongs. It feels like his words are glib and exaggerated. In his writing, he blames and censures himself, but it only serves as material for his writing." After studying for half a lifetime, [I] still sense that writing is writing, and the self is the self . . . Therefore, I am discouraged by my failures. Therefore, I am apprehensively filled with dread and shameful remorse. Because of this, I ask, is my heart good? Is it not good? If my heart is not good, then how can I presumptuously hope to avoid disaster? Alas! From this, I know that the inability of the calamity to end is not the fault of Heaven's heart being unable to change or that people's hearts will not change. In truth, it comes from my heart being unable to change. For this reason, if I wish to change others' hearts, I must first begin with my own.[80]

Is this just more rhetoric, as Yu imagines his critics saying, or truly a personal admission of guilt? Either way, by tying the end of the calamity to the need to focus on his own heart, Yu fundamentally altered the terms on which the Taiping War and other concurrent late-Qing disasters would be resolvable. Working toward collective change, while still a worthy goal, seemed less possible when Yu's years of effort had, as represented in this essay, resulted in more finger-pointing and accusations of immorality than disaster-averting goodness. Without directly refuting his critics' accusation that his copious morality works were simply insincere rhetoric, Yu instead seems to be modeling the response he hoped would be most effective. Although he was unable to control how others anger Heaven,

80.「人將反唇相譏也。謂夫子教我以正。夫子未出於正也。又何敢靦然立言於勸世也。易之遷善改過也。祇覺其口頭滑過也。書之自怨自艾也。不過為文章作料也。讀書半生尚覺書是書而我自我也。. . . 我於是爽然失也。我於是惶然悚悪然愧也。為問我心好耶不好耶。我心不好而何能妄希免劫也。嗚呼。吾於是知大劫之不可回也非天心之不可轉也。亦非人心之不可轉也。實由我心之不可轉也。故欲轉人心當先從我始。」Yu, "Jiehai huilan shuo xia," 1:17a–b (punctuation added).

sincere individual action remained possible, even preferable. Could people, by focusing on their own choices, do enough good to turn back the apocalyptic tide? If thinking about the millions of casualties, many still unburied, or the millions of refugees, many starving and permanently displaced, made it seem like the disaster would never end, it was no wonder that blaming others became the easiest option. Yu roused his readers, and himself, by narrowing the scope for change and action down to the self alone. To return to the three suggestions in his 1858 "Jiehai huilan shuo" essay, perhaps one might focus on being filial, non-killing, and collecting written paper and grains—with this last task being the most time-consuming and meticulously trivial of all. This urge to pare crises of incomprehensible scale down to individual moral choices and action may be unnervingly familiar to twenty-first-century readers. If enough of us carry cloth bags to the grocery store, can we stop our planet from drowning in trash? If I resist turning on the air conditioning on a hot day, will I be spared from drought, wildfires, and flooding? Of course not. We're all doomed together.

Yu could not abandon the dream that his words might save the world. What could someone who had dedicated his life to teaching do if admonitory words were so weak that they could not transform even their own writer's heart? In fact, in the final decade of his life, Yu wrote and published even more than he had before. He continued to advocate that moral education was more effectively achieved through lessons infused into popular oral genres, which must somehow reach new audiences. Yu imagined a vast bureaucracy of hope supporting this outreach, transforming individual acts of virtue into collective good.

Composing, printing, and distributing morality literature was one way to translate individual effort into a social phenomenon and a means by which the wreckage of the postwar years could be restored to an antebellum utopia. Spreading morality literature created opportunities: lay devotees could pool donations ranging from mere hundreds of copper cash to dozens of silver dollars to reprint texts; activists could create literature that healed rather than harmed; and even illiterate men and women could pass on good words and teachings to their communities. Disaster and the moral means to resolve it expanded the scope of personal responsibility and the reach of private lay philanthropic organizations, gesturing toward the development of Republican religious periodical presses—some of which still advertised Yu's works more than fifty years after his death.[81]

81. For examples of charitable organizations that Yu would probably have recognized

Confucian Evangelicals and Fundamentalists

Yu's commitment to an evangelical form of Confucianism, while not widely acknowledged in scholarship on late-Qing reform movements, worked alongside (and with) fundamentalist Confucian reformist movements of the Tongzhi (r. 1861–1874) and Guangxu 光緒 (r. 1875–1908) eras. The Taiping War and Qing state's increasing weakness in response to challenges from foreign powers were dual threats to the stability of the empire. Not all took this as the ideological challenge that Yu did, however; it propelled him to advocate for new *jiaohua* tactics instead of calling for elites to simply do more of what had failed to change hearts in the past. In the sense that I give Yu and his work the label "evangelical," used also by Meyer-Fong to describe his conservatism, I intend to highlight his focus on outreach and spreading his conservative message through whatever means seemed most likely to reach impressionable listeners and spark the revival of Confucian values that would, in his view, save China.[82]

As Yu continued to advocate for popular approaches to national strengthening at the local level, following the death of the Xianfeng 咸豐 emperor (r. 1850–1861) in 1861, conservative forces at the highest level took hold of the regency of the child Tongzhi emperor in an attempt to institute a top-down restoration of Confucian values throughout the empire.[83] Comparing Yu's community-based advocacy with the priorities at the highest social stratum of this prominent group of conservative elites will highlight where his approaches deviated from the way that Restoration leaders have been represented.[84] Grounded in the certainty that Confucian moral values would guide the nation back to a stable equilibrium, Tongzhi Restoration leaders displayed none of the uncertainty and little of the creativity that makes Yu's work so fascinating.[85]

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and celebrated, see Xia Shi, *At Home in the World: Women and Charity in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Columbia University Press, 2018). Certain issues of *Yangshan banyuekan* 揚善半月刊, published by Yihua tang shan shuju 翼化堂善書局 in Shanghai, advertise reprints of Yu's *baojuan* in their print catalog. The cover for the May 1, 1934, issue is one of these advertisements. For more on Yihua tang, see You Zi'an, *Quanhua jin zhen: Qingdai shanshu yanjiu* 勸化金箴: 清代善書研究 (Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1999), 153–55.

82. Meyer-Fong also refers to Yu as "puritanical" in the same sentence. Though both terms have specific meanings and associations with Christianity, especially in the United States, they are not used to imply a comparison in this case. Meyer-Fong, 63.

83. Wright, 18.

84. Wright, 5.

85. Wright, 5.

Instead of taking their weakened dynasty as a sign that its ideological foundations were no longer sound, Restoration leaders advocated fundamentalist Confucian approaches to reinstating stable rule and rehabilitating recalcitrant subjects.

On the surface, Confucian fundamentalism, defined by Vincent Goossaert as "the rejection of all ideas and practices absent from the Confucian canonical scriptures," would seem to be the guiding principle behind the conservative efforts of both the Tongzhi Reformation and Yu Zhi.[86] Observing a close relationship between Confucian politics and religion, Goossaert notes how fundamentalists in power mounted campaigns against aspects of popular religious culture, not because these practices threatened state stability, but because they were seen to contravene the very moral order of the Confucian universe.[87] As he further explains, though these elite critics may have differed in their own convictions about correct religious practice in a Confucian framework, categories targeted by their criticism were generally the same: sectarian groups, improper cults and their mediums, communal religious celebrations, and the involvement of Buddhists and Daoists in social rituals.[88]

This third category is key in marking Yu's moral crusades as conservative rather than fundamentalist. Goossaert elaborates:

> [This constituted] criticism concerning communal celebrations: opera, large processions, nightly activities, voluntary devotional associations (pilgrimage associations, Buddhist pious societies), and, in particular, those in which women participated. Elite opposition to such forms of celebration was grounded in both concerns for social order (fear of trouble arising in mass celebrations, sometimes real, often phantasmic) and considerations of orthopraxy, or "style," and theology (communal celebrations were condemned as sacrilegious).[89]

In essence, elites who dominated political discourse in this era (and beyond) were not concerned with what interested the common people in spreading the Restoration's goals for society. They were only interested in what would make them tractable subjects again, and took that to mean

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

87. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 310.

88. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 317–18.

89. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 318.

banning popular entertainment (both religious and nonreligious, although there was rarely a clear boundary between the two). In stark contrast to these fundamentalists who dominated politics, Yu wrote texts specifically meant to be performed in popular religious contexts, from public theatrical performances to the gender-segregated spaces in which most women's religious practices took place. Even if we were to discount the *baojuan* from his corpus, Yu's composition of drama texts would disqualify him as a fundamentalist by Goossaert's criteria, since operatic ritual was also a target of bans for the threat it posed to the orderliness of the Confucian fundamentalist moral universe.[90]

Goossaert echoes William Rowe in calling the attempt by elite literati to enforce fundamentalist Confucian values and suppress Buddho-Daoist popular practices a "religious war."[91] This characterization of elite antagonism against local, popular communal practices as religious war is useful because Yu clearly understood his efforts as playing out within a framework of religious competition for the hearts of Chinese listeners. In this competitive framing, which I explore in detail in the following chapter, the battle was not so much against Buddho-Daoist practices as it was against immoral Chinese literature and imported Christianity. To win this battle, Yu supported bans on books and plays that, in his view, promoted immoral behavior, and he regularly reminded his audiences of the importance of community compact lectures—moves that fundamentalists would have celebrated.

But his war was not their war, and an evangelical Confucian has more in his arsenal than a fundamentalist, whose methods have already failed. The Taiping War was proof enough of Heaven's retribution for widespread immorality, but there were even more threats to the moral landscape of China. In an undated essay titled "Shang dangshi shu 上當事書" (Letter submitted to those in charge), Yu took such traditional reformers to task, proposing an eight-point plan for local reforms that would save China from the threat of Christianity.[92] As he elaborates these points, the specter of Christianity fades into the background as the real target of his criticism becomes clear: failures of administrators to connect with the people they planned to teach and transform. Regarding *xiangyue* lectures (the second of the eight points), which Yu believed must continue, he is unrelenting in his criticism, pointing out that the success of Christian missionaries threw

90. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 310.
91. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 318; Rowe, 436.
92. Yu, "Shang dangshi shu," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 3:5a–15b.

into sharp relief the failures of this type of *jiaohua*. Bored by lackluster lectures delivered by uncharismatic local elites, common folk would naturally be attracted to exciting new ideas in sermons delivered by exotic speakers who traveled across the world in their enthusiasm to share their faith.[93] The final two points specifically relate to creating a large body of texts designed for oral, popular performance, meant to fill the gaps created by bans on immoral performances rather than eradicate the practice entirely. Could some of that evangelical zeal for communal religious practice, if adopted by reformers, help them achieve their goals? Apologias like this one indicate that Yu was aware of how unconventional and potentially problematic his approach was. But the stakes were so high and the consequences of failing so dire that there was no way forward but through popular literature, which could engage its disorderly audiences with evangelical Confucian outreach. The lofty ideals of Restoration leaders could only be realized when moral lessons were available across society, using *all* the literary tools available to the creative and engaged reformer.

Structure of the Book

I first examine how Yu initiated and deepened his engagement with genres intended for male readers and listeners of limited or no literacy. In chapter 1,I begin with essays written in Classical Chinese, intended for Yu's peers (other aspirants to philanthropy and moral reform who perhaps lacked generous resources to dedicate to their causes) and his superiors (those with official position or wealth); he would need to convince both groups to join his campaign for new literature. As Yu acknowledges the belief of Confucian statesmen and concerned educators that vernacular literature (broadly defined) damages society, he reiterates why popular genres such as vernacular fiction and dramatic performance pose such a threat. However, it is precisely because of their dangerous power that they also provide such a compelling method to use for positive social reform. Their success at entertaining audiences is directly tied to the failure of *xiangyue* lectures to *jiaohua* society.

The works I explore in chapter 2, which predate the war, show Yu proposing a reorientation for primary education to teach basic morality instead of training students solely in the classics. Yu draws on his extensive experience teaching in elementary schools, where many of his young

93. Yu, "Shang dangshi shu," 3:8b.

students came from families that lacked the resources to allow them to study for all the years needed to sit for the exam. For such boys, what could two or three years of rote memorization of ancient, difficult texts give them once they left the classroom? And for their teachers, men who had dedicated their lives to study but had yet to attain a position in the civil service, and probably with their own history of exam failures—how could they find meaning in teaching texts that were functionally useless to all but the rarest student? The seeming pointlessness of classical education in this context led Yu to create his own sequels to early schoolroom textbooks, which instructors could use in the confidence that they imparted lifelong moral values to their students, giving them a newfound sense of purpose in their humble jobs. We also see in these materials an attempt to amuse and relate to children on their own level, while emphasizing lessons that they could carry home to their parents and siblings. Instead of teaching future exam takers, these works train children for the task of transforming their families.

Chapter 3 brings us to the outbreak of war, when Yu attempted to reach new audiences by beginning to work with *baojuan* as both an editor and author, albeit anonymously. Of the two and a half *baojuan* that share significant material among themselves and with Yu's credited works, all aimed at male audiences and published by Dejian zhai, the most popular and widely reprinted is the one explored in this chapter: *Pan Gong*. The first volume of this three-volume *baojuan* takes a recently deceased and much admired Suzhou philanthropist, Pan Zengyi 潘曾沂 (1792–1853), and makes him a mouthpiece for moral lessons that would save people from disaster. By comparing early editions of this work, I address Yu's role as editor of the first volume and author of the second and third volumes. The second volume features a hardworking primary school teacher as a main character, summoned by the heavenly bureaucracy to help tally the number of deaths in the fall of Nanjing, a role we can easily imagine Yu writing for himself. This was the most widely reprinted of all of Yu's works, with dozens of editions testifying to the impact it had on people looking for both salvation from disaster and to establish their identities as philanthropists in the model of Pan Zengyi, working to save the world through admonishing goodness. Yet even as he creatively crafted materials for new male audiences, the texts considered in chapters 2 and 3 do not yet fully challenge conservative Confucian biases against popular literature.

Yu's works and initiatives aimed at women and his morality plays for popular consumption, to which I turn my attention in the final two chapters, stretched his imagination as they do ours. On the surface, the task of

translating the morality initiatives that he hoped men would champion into the domestic tasks and rules that women should follow seems like it should have been easy. But writing main characters who would conceivably be capable of moving female listeners to action required authors to confront the constraints of gendered expectations that confined female labor and influence within the home. Furthermore, if girls and women had the same responsibility to learn and transform their families as did the male audiences targeted by his other *baojuan*, then reaching them became all the more urgent because of its difficulty. How many women could read? Who was allowed into their spaces to read to them? Assuming they agreed with Yu's moral campaigns, what were women then capable of doing to further their reach?

Even causes that seemed ready-made for female advocacy, like campaigns against female infanticide, proved to be difficult. I explore this in chapter 4 with close readings of another *baojuan* by Yu, *Xigu*, and an episode from a second *baojuan* that adapted an anti-infanticide story commonly used in Yu's other works. Both narratives make mothers who killed their own daughters into main characters that listeners are meant to admire and emulate. These mothers had committed a fault so great that most other tales about infanticide revel in relating the details of harsh heavenly retribution visited on such women. But to tell these tales effectively, Yu and the anonymous author of the second text both chose to give such women (not their infant daughters, attending midwives, or mothers-in-law) the primary role in voicing stories about rescuing themselves from karmic retribution. Without access to the same externally oriented resources or opportunities for philanthropy that Yu's male listeners might have had, might women's own voices, speaking up about their experiences of sin and redemption, be their best resource for furthering society's moral transformation? Chapter 5 looks more closely at the second text, *Liu Xiang zhong juan* (劉香中卷 The middle volume of Liu Xiang), to further explore how the needs of female audiences were imagined and catered to. Yu was not the original author, but he is instead credited as the editor of a significantly revised second edition. Reading the editions side by side, we see how dissatisfied Yu was with how the first anonymous author had revised many of Yu's simple morality tales into the longer, vernacular *baojuan* form, particularly in episodes that were likely to insult the intelligence of the very women they were supposed to educate.

Yu's considerable number of publications testify to his individual commitment to spreading goodness throughout society in both practical and imaginative ways. We can engage with his vision for socio-moral restora-

tion because of all the ways his work spoke to people who sponsored its publication and dissemination, giving it life and reach long after Yu's death. In the conclusion, I address questions related to the legacy of this vision in the late Qing and in terms of our understanding of it a century and a half later. Yu and his works are rife with contradictions, allowing them to serve many different purposes for their audiences (intended and unintended), and they remain compelling in ways that transcend time, even as their failure to bring about a popular Confucian revival is an unavoidable truth. I address this complexity with two final case studies. The first considers three very different kinds of supporters united by their admiration for *Deyi lu*, and what these men, each very different from the Jiangnan officials and gentry to whom Yu appealed for charitable contributions and support, show us about the shifting power structures of postwar society. My second case examines the disconnection between the idealized world of Confucian gender and social relations that conservative reformers hoped to bring back and the practical realities of implementation that made such dreams impossible in postwar China on the cusp of the modern era. In the complications of attempting to realize utopian visions through carefully delineated rules for aid organizations, the realities of the flawed world in which all work must be done could not be avoided. Yet Yu and those who shared his visions for how to reform and restore society show us the power of hope and the potential for creative action even in the face of apocalyptic disaster. To have done anything less would have meant abandoning their responsibility to transform society for the good of all.

1

Confucian Censorship and the Appropriation of Vernacular Literature

For Yu's expanded approach to *jiaohua* to succeed, he would have to gain the support of its traditional stakeholders, who were responsible for reforming and guiding the hearts of the common people toward socially stabilizing behavior and political loyalty. Local elites and representatives of the central imperial government alike would need to be convinced to abandon their traditional antipathy for popular customs like oral storytelling and regional theater. For *jiaohua* to expand its remit beyond normal channels, such as traditional Confucian education, government-sponsored memorials to local exemplars of filial piety and chastity, or the twice-monthly *xiangyue* lectures, Yu would have to overcome millennia of conservative prejudice against popular culture.[1]

This chapter thus focuses on how Yu, a firm believer in the socio-moral harm caused by vernacular literature, built a strong case for using vernacular literature as the most powerful tool for *jiaohua* amid the crises that threatened the Qing empire. Here, I examine Yu's works that were intended for select audiences: those with the requisite resources, whether governmental power or social capital, to enact change from the top down. In speaking to audiences of his peers and superiors, Yu worked to estab-

1. For more on the role of education as part of *jiaohua* in the Qing, see Rowe, 408–17. Yu's views on reforming elementary education will be addressed in the following chapter. On the importance of establishing shrines to local chaste and filial worthies as a civilizing tool in the Qing, see Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (University of California Press, 2004), 30–54. On the practice of *xiangyue* in the nineteenth century, see Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Washington Press, 1967), 184–205.

lish common ground with them, but also drew attention to the historical failures of *jiaohua*. What were the dangers posed by vernacular literature to the *jiaohua* mission? How could Yu make those in power who had the ability to affect large-scale planning understand that the risks were even worse than they thought? Though literary censorship and inquisitions were common approaches to objectionable literature throughout the Qing—and Yu wholeheartedly supported such efforts—he also believed they were a fundamentally flawed tool that did not go far enough to address the causes and conditions by which popular literature spread socially destabilizing immorality.

I begin by analyzing two essays taken from the chapter on immoral literature and moral publishing in *Deyi lu*, Yu's encyclopedic work on establishing philanthropic organizations and advancing moral causes. The first essay, by a prominent scholar of the mid-Qing, roots Yu's work in earlier objections to vernacular literature amid calls for their elimination. The second piece shows Yu citing this essay as evidence in his exhortation to defeat the twin enemies of *jiaohua*: immoral plays and fiction. Yu's approach was thus inspired by earlier moralists but grew quickly beyond their simplistic approach. I then turn to one of Yu's posthumously published essays, which introduces a new threat to *jiaohua* and proposes an eight-point plan to save the Qing empire from collapse. Yu is not sparing in his criticism of extant *jiaohua* efforts, blaming the weakness in the moral foundations of the Qing empire on those who were supposed to keep the common people's hearts in line with the governing philosophy. A specific target for this criticism is the *xiangyue* lectures, formalized early in the Qing by government mandate with the goal of promulgating the Shunzhi 順治 Emperor's (r. 1644–1661) "Six Maxims" (六諭 *liuyu*) on virtue to uneducated audiences even in the hinterlands.

The final two points of his plan make a case for newly written vernacular morality literature to supplement or perhaps replace the failed *xiangyue* lectures, which after 200 years had yet to achieve their goal of creating lasting social stability. He is especially careful to build the case for his morality plays. Though support grew for these plays in the final decades of Yu's life, skepticism of their appropriateness was clearly still rampant. In one of the prefaces to *Shuji tang jinyue*, Yu crafts a charming dialogue with an imaginary objector to his composition and distribution of such low-brow literature. We examine how this essay explains, point by point, why the only logical solution for the great moral illness of Qing society was the production of such works. For each of his interlocutor's questions about the propriety of such an effort, Yu explains how the great demand for

entertaining literature among the lower classes of society must be filled by moral stories, and how the very health of society was at risk if such work was not urgently undertaken.

Traditional Approaches to the Perils and Potentials of Orality

Yu did not begin by advocating for Confucian cooperation with popular culture, nor did he openly endorse such moves in all his published writings. A certain reluctance to propose or refer to ideas so opposed to mainstream Confucianism is most obvious in his compendium on morality and philanthropic organizations, *Deyi lu*, which was aimed at capturing the largest possible audience of potential founders and donors. For example, though Yu had been actively composing morality plays for over a decade by the time *Deyi lu* was published in 1869, not to mention his composition and publication of at least two *baojuan*, none of these activities are worthy of mention in this encyclopedic work.[2] Though he included a significant proportion of his own writings on other subjects in each volume, Yu mainly anthologized works written by dozens of other authors, including essays on morality, government edicts, and collections of operating rules for morality organizations. First compiled in the 1840s, while Yu was teaching primary school and developing his morality-based curriculum, *Deyi lu* was completed in 1849 before Yu moved on to publication. When about half of the woodblocks were complete, they were tragically lost in a fire. Heartbroken by the loss of his work, Yu set the project aside for nearly two decades, until an old friend who had read the original and also mourned its loss encouraged him to return to work recompiling and expanding it. In his postface to this magnum opus, dated 1869, Yu thanks this individual for networking with other sponsors to gather the funds to publish this massive work.[3] With its first preface by the politically powerful acquaintance Feng Guifen, *Deyi lu* carried significant social capital, and subsequent editions, newly printed by government officials in the 1870s and 1880s, only added to its reach and prominence.[4] Including hun-

2. See chapters 3 and 4 for details on these activities.

3. *Deyi lu*, 16:2a–b [last page].

4. On the history and known editions of *Deyi lu*, see also Pierre-Etienne Will, ed., *Handbooks and Anthologies for Officials in Imperial China: A Descriptive and Critical Bibliography* (Brill, 2020), 1084–90. See also Huang Qinglou 惠清楼, "Deyi lu banben kaolun《得一录》版本考论," *Nankai xuebao (zhexue shehuike xuebao)* 6 (2006): 126–31.

dreds of prewar and postwar documents related to morality and philanthropic organizations, *Deyi lu* is a rich collection that demonstrates Yu's hope that his peers might find in it organizational resources and arguments to support whatever just cause they wished to undertake.

Volume 11of *Deyi lu* focuses on the dangers of obscene literature and the need for publishers to take a moral stance against printing such works. It opens with a short paragraph in which Yu establishes the urgency of suppressing obscenity, citing Mencius's desire "to correct people's minds, to stop deviant speech, and to banish licentious words."[5] He then observes that the heterodoxies and obscenities that Mencius spoke of in his own time are nothing compared with those of the present age. In fact, Yu's own era was probably a hundred times worse than the Warring States period. Rooting his concern about heterodoxy in the words of a Confucian sage to highlight how much worse society had become in the two millennia since, Yu then turned to a more recent authority, Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804), to explain why obscenity was everywhere in Qing society, even though scholars had been studying the words of the sages for millennia.

Qian was a Jiangsu native who attracted attention in 1751 when he passed a special examination in Nanjing given in honor of one of the southern tours of Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1736–1795).[6] An influential historian, antiquarian, mathematician, and educator, Qian had an illustrious career spanning Beijing, Nanjing, and Ningbo. Given both his local reputation and his influence in the capital, the citation of his words in opening this chapter on combatting obscene literature further grounded Yu's suggested approaches in the mainstream concerns of the cultured elite. This short essay, originally titled simply "Zhengsu" (正俗 Rectifying customs) in Qian's collected works, was renamed "Qian Zhuting xiansheng jinhui yin xiaoshuo yi" (錢竹汀先生禁燬淫小說議 Mr. Qian Zhuting discusses banning and burning obscene *xiaoshuo*); an eye-catching new title both for its famous author and the destructive means he recom-

5.「正人心◦息邪說◦放淫辭◦」*Deyi lu*, 11:1.1a. This translation is indebted to Irene Bloom. See Irene Bloom, trans., *Mencius* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 71. In *Mencius*, the full sentence is "I, too, want to correct people's minds, to stop deviant speech, to resist perverse actions, to banish licentious words, and so to carry on the work of the three sages. 我亦欲正人心◦息邪說◦距詖行◦放淫辭◦以承三聖者◦" (punctuation added). That Yu omits "resist perverse actions" from the quote is odd but should not be taken as an endorsement of perversity.

6. For more about Qian Daxin, see Library of Congress and Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)*, (U.S. Government Print Office, 1943), 1:152–55.

mended for reforming customs.[7] Recommendations to ban and burn literature that Confucian moralists saw as obscene would have come as little surprise to Qing readers. Qian's framing of such literature, however, is sufficiently evocative and startling that rather than summarize his points, we should first look at a full translation:

> In the past there were three *jiao* (教)[8]: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.[9] Ever since the Ming, another *jiao* has been added, called *xiaoshuo* (小說).[10] *Xiaoshuo* are books that romanticize history, and although it has yet to recognize itself as a *jiao*, among the scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants there is not one who is not used to hearing it. Even children, women, and the illiterate also have heard it as if they read it themselves. Therefore, this *jiao* spreads more broadly than Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

7. See Qian Daxin, *Qianyantang wenji* 錢研堂文集, 17: 14b–15a. The version in *Deyi lu* is copied correctly verbatim.

8. Translating *jiao* in this context as "teaching," as I do when it is in the compound *jiaohua* (教化), would oversimplify its implications and associations. While scholars correctly argue that reading it as "religion" would be anachronistic, given that the term *zongjiao* (宗教) was a late-nineteenth-century import into Chinese via Japanese, to deny that *jiao* has any associations with religion before the late Qing is an overcorrection. For a discussion of the religious inflections of *jiao* in pre-twentieth-century Confucian discourse, see Peter Y. J. Wong, "Toward Religious Harmony: A Confucian Contribution," in *Confucianisms for a Changing World Order*, ed. Roger T. Ames and Peter D. Herschock (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 43–54. For a history of the term *zongjiao* and the debates surrounding its usage and translation, see Christian Meyer, "*Zongjiao* as a Chinese Conceptual Term for Religion? Genealogical Notes on its Development since the Late Qing Period," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 50, no. 1 (May 2022): 115–40.

9. Whether *Ru* 儒 ought to be translated as "Confucian" is also an issue of significant scholarly debate, which I will not enter here, and the question of whether Confucianism should be considered a religion is also contentious. With *Ru* included in this list alongside Buddhism and Daoism, which are rarely questioned as religions, the problem of how to translate and interpret *jiao* in this context is further compounded. See Anna Sun, "Four Controversies over the Religious Nature of Confucianism: A Brief History of Confucianism," in *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 17–44.

10. Like *jiao*, *xiaoshuo* will remain untranslated to focus on how it is deployed in this essay, instead of linking it directly to "novels," which it what it has come to mean in contemporary usage, often leading to anachronistic translation of its premodern usage. For a history of the term's usage to indicate genre before the Ming, as well as the shift it underwent during the late Ming, see Laura Hua Wu, "From Xiaoshuo to Fiction: Hu Yinglin's Genre Study of Xiaoshuo," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 1995): 339–71.

> Buddhism and Daoism only exhort people to goodness. *Xiaoshuo* specifically leads people to evil. Matters of adultery, evil, obscenity, and robbery, these are things that the books of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism cannot bear to directly criticize. But that other one, it certainly exhausts itself on these subjects, taking delight in talking about [them]. Taking killing people as what makes a hero, taking womanizing as what makes a romantic. There are many young men who, in a frenzy and utterly without restraint, live in idleness without any *jiao*. And then there are such books that lure them in. How can we blame them for nearly becoming beasts? People of the world are so used to this that they don't look into it, and then find it strange that punishments daily become more numerous, while thieves and bandits daily become more impassioned. How could they know that what it is about *xiaoshuo* which affects people's hearts and customs is not the result of one morning's or one evening's influence? Those with the responsibility to awaken the world and guide the people must urgently and suitably dispose of [*xiaoshuo*] through burning. Do not allow them to circulate! From within the cities spreading out into the provinces and districts, printing houses must be investigated to prevent them from committing the crime of violating the restrictions. If this is done for ten or more years, it is certain to have the result that banditry will be put down and fewer punishments will be applied. Perhaps there will be slander that my words are an unrealistic elaboration of the situation. That is seeing no further than one's eyelashes.[11]

Scholars have previously interpreted Qian's provocative framing of *xiaoshuo* as China's fourth teaching/religion to be a description of the role of Ming-Qing novels in transmitting popular religious content or incorporating ideas of unofficial or suppressed sects; another argument suggests that by the early Qing, fiction had acquired the authority of religion

11.「古有儒釋道三教自明以來。又多一教曰小說。小說演義之書未嘗自以為教也。而士大夫農工商賈無不習聞之。以至兒童婦女不識字者。亦皆聞而如見之是其教較之儒釋道而更廣也。釋道猶勸人以善小說專導人以惡。姦邪淫盜之事。儒釋道書所不忍斥言者。彼必盡相窮形。津津樂道。以殺人為好漢。以漁色為風流喪心病狂。無所忌憚子弟之逸居無教者多矣。又有此等書以誘之。曷怪其近於禽獸耶世人習而不察輒怪刑獄之日繁。盜賊之日熾。豈知小說之中於人心風俗者已非一朝一夕之故也。有覺世牖民之責者。亟宜焚而棄之。勿使流播。內自京邑。外達州郡查察坊市有刷印鬻售者科以違制之罪。行之數十年。必有弭盜省刑之效。或訾吾言為迂遠闊事情。是目睫之見也。」*Deyi lu*, 11:1.1a–b (original punctuation).

among certain audiences.[12] The last of these possibilities was proposed most recently in an article by Mengjun Li, who acknowledges that earlier interpretations of *xiaoshuo jiao* by Meir Shahar and T. H. Barrett were focused on how vernacular fiction incorporated religious content. Li turns her attention away from the religious elements to how Qian described the influence of novels (broadly defined) on audiences of impressionable readers and listeners. Li thus chooses to translate *xiaoshuo jiao* as the "cult of fiction," emphasizing that, whether or not fiction included religious information, Qian's chosen frame shows that fiction had a powerful influence on society in his time and was a threat to moral instruction, because it had a "quasi-religious status among mass audiences."[13] All three scholars are correct to highlight the complex relationship between popular literature and popular religion in the late imperial era, but they also focus on only the first few sentences of Qian's essay, without considering the kind of teaching/religion Qian describes *xiaoshuo* as, and what he believed suppressing it would achieve.

My interest in Qian's essay is twofold. In this section, I consider the significance of his full argument about *xiaoshuo*, especially its ability to reach the illiterate. I also introduce how the Qing government sought, from its earliest years, to utilize the *xiangyue* system for its collective rituals of social control, especially the twice-monthly public lectures about morality. Qian's concerns about the spread of *xiaoshuo* and the Qing administration's efforts to popularize Confucian morality beyond textual transmission represent traditional methods of engaging with the masses and their literary tastes, methods that Yu had to contend with in introducing his new approach. In the next section, I consider the rhetorical implications of choosing Qian's essay to open this volume of *Deyi lu*, with attention to how it allowed Yu to develop and shift his arguments about dealing with popular literature in the context of teaching and transforming society.

In "Zhengsu," Qian frames *xiaoshuo* as a *jiao* for a specific purpose: to

12. Respectively, these interpretations are advanced in Meir Shahar, "Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods' Cults in Late Imperial China," in *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*, ed. Meir Shahar and Robert Paul Weller (University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 186–87; T. H. Barrett, "Religious Traditions in Chinese Civilization: Buddhism and Taoism," in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (University of California Press, 1990), 158–59; and Mengjun Li, "Genre Conflation and Fictional Religiosity in *Guilian meng* (Returning to the Lotus Dream)," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2019): 331–58.

13. Li, "Genre Conflation," 350.

highlight the threat it posed to the three long-standing *jiao* of China. The threat, as Qian describes it, is particularly dire because the fourth *jiao* is so dissimilar to the original three. First, it functions as a *jiao* without identifying itself as one; by implication, it has no clerics or teachers of its own to defeat in a debate, nor cult leaders to imprison. If anything, the headlessness of *xiaoshuo* makes it even more dangerous. The values it teaches cannot be traced to a single source, but instead seem to emanate everywhere at once from the lower reaches of society. Second, the *jiao* of *xiaoshuo* is already everywhere. Orality gives it a powerful reach that the three orthodox *jiao* and their textual canons cannot compete with.[14] Qian repeats *wen* (聞 hear) twice to emphasize how familiarity with *xiaoshuo* has already spread throughout every segment of society. The ease with which *xiaoshuo* can be comprehended aurally by even the illiterate highlights that Qian is specifically talking about vernacular fiction, which when heard aloud conveys the same meaning as if one read it off the page. What canonical text written in dense Classical Chinese, such as those of the three traditional *jiao*, could ever do the same? Lastly, this undirected *jiao*, which circumvented the need for literacy, uses its considerable transformative power to teach evil, specifically by throwing social and sexual relations into chaos. Its audiences confuse murder for bravery and sex for romance, preying especially on young men who, yet to receive proper moral education, fill the void with *xiaoshuo* and are led astray.

Qian decries how this religion of depravity taught by *xiaoshuo* has had real-world consequences in encouraging banditry and requiring the government to step in with more punitive consequences for crimes. *Xiaoshuo* had been able to spread this way for centuries because of the failures of those who should have been educating those young men in a *jiao* that would lead them to goodness. Can the youth really be blamed for falling under *xiaoshuo*'s influence? Hoping that his readers would now make the connection between social disorder and the powerful forces of the

14. Qian seems to ignore how all three *jiao* did in fact make significant use of oral transmission. Whether it was articulated in the form of *xiangyue* lectures, Buddhist preaching, or esoteric Daoist secrets about internal alchemical practices that were never to be written down—just a few of several means—orality was an essential tool of all *jiao*. In another essay, Qian condemns the publication of *yulu* (語錄 recorded sayings) of Confucian philosophers because of the genre's origins in Buddhism and the fear that these vulgar works might replace the reading of classical texts. Alexander Woodside, "State, Scholars, and Orthodoxy: The Ch'ing Academies, 1736–1839," in *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu (University of California Press, 1990), 163. That *yulu* were generally written in a less formal style bordering on the vernacular may also have factored into this condemnation.

xiaoshuo jiao, Qian reserved his final point for a recommended solution. Notably, Qian's essay title was simply "Rectifying Customs." Painting in broad strokes, he did not identify specific types of *xiaoshuo* to ban and burn. The fourth religion had to be eliminated completely. If all current books could be burned and all future books banned from publication, then within ten years or so, the problem would go away forever. This scorched library policy had, however, a fundamental problem. By describing *xiaoshuo* as China's fourth *jiao*, one that undermines Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism and that was especially destructive because it spread orally without the need of texts, Qian gave *xiaoshuo* a life and energy of its own, independent of its producers and consumers. Radical as this new analytical category of *xiaoshuo* as a *jiao* was, Qian's suggestion to institute bans, punish publishers, and burn books and their printing blocks showed that he approached *xiaoshuo* as something more physical than philosophical. If even those who could not read comprehended *xiaoshuo jiao* as if they were literate, how could a solution focused on texts ever work? The Qing tried repeatedly over its tenure to ban popular novels and plays that it considered subversive or offensive.[15] That the bans needed to be continually renewed is substantial proof of their repeated failure to stem the tide of *xiaoshuo jiao*. Perhaps this fourth religion was here to stay, along with the inevitable moral decline of society.

Qian attributed the rise of *xiaoshuo jiao* to the Ming, the same era to which modern scholars also trace the spread of public lectures on Confucian values meant to communicate with audiences of commoners. Written vernacular versions of classical texts date back to the Yuan, though the contexts of their reading or recitation during this early period are less clear.[16] By the sixteenth century, popular lecturer Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541) had founded the Taizhou School, which emphasized preaching to commoners, inspired by Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) populist approach to Confucian moral cultivation. Wang proposed two revolutionary points: no particular education or arduous cultivation was required for anyone to become a sage, and the moral knowledge required was already innate to every human, if only they could recognize it. These arguments implied an imperative to spread this insight beyond the bounds of

15. For more on Qing book bans, see An Pingqiu 安平秋 and Zhang Peiheng 張培恒, eds., *Zhongguo jinshu jianshi* 中國禁書簡史 (Zhuyou zhai chuban youxian gongshi, 1992), 273–93.

16. Mair, 326–27.

traditional Confucian education. Wang Gen and his students (and their students) took a zealous approach to preaching about Confucian values to the lowest levels of society and writing moral songs they hoped would spread among the masses, though it appears that the contents of their lectures on subjects such as filial piety, timely tax payments, and harmonious social relations were far from revolutionary in their message.[17]

Wang Yangming, in a *xiangyue* that he set up in the 1520s, took a more ritualized approach than his students' marketplace preaching. His *xiangyue* contract included regulations calling for monthly meetings to review the Six Imperial Maxims of the Ming founder and to review ledgers of the meritorious and bad deeds of community members.[18] These organizations, though organized by gentry on behalf of some communities, were still technically voluntary rather than government-mandated or sponsored extensions of the imperial bureaucracy. The *xiangyue* of the Qing, however, were a new experiment in top-down *jiaohua*, and it is this system that would frustrate nearly everyone who interacted with it, from despairing emperors to bored commoners alike. As we will see later in this chapter, Yu Zhi was also unsparing in his criticism of its systemic failures.

Early in the new dynasty, Qing emperors looked to adopt certain Chinese traditions to further their control in their newly conquered territories. In 1652, to spread the Shunzhi Emperor's Six Maxims, each area was expected to appoint someone worthy to serve as a *xiangyue*, here referring to the individual who would deliver lectures on the edict. In 1659, the Board of Rites clarified this with a new set of regulations. *Xiangyue* ought to be senior members of the local community recognized for their excellent character, preferably *shengyuan* scholars; they were required to present lectures twice a month. In 1670, the next emperor, Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1661–1722), issued his own Sacred Edict. These sixteen new maxims, issued in the name of the sixteen-year-old emperor, became the new base text for *xiangyue* lectures until his son, the Yongzheng Emperor 雍正 (r. 1722–1735), added a long (roughly 10,000-character) elaboration of the Sacred Edict in 1724 and instituted reforms to expand the system in 1729, including specific locations where the lectures were to be delivered (鄉約所

17. Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 27–29.

18. Monika Übelhör, "Some Ways of Instilling Confucian Values at the Village Level," in *Norms and the State in China*, ed. Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher (Brill, 1993), 29–38.

xiangyue suo).[19] Yongzheng's son, the Qianlong Emperor 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796), did not replace the lectures' subject matter with his own writing, but he did make a number of edicts and proclamations expressing strong support for the lectures.[20]

In theory, every Qing subject should have been exposed to the hortatory benefits of the *xiangyue* lectures, but in practice, whether the lectures were successful or even delivered on the appointed schedule depended on the efforts of local officials and gentry to keep them running smoothly.[21] Enthusiasm for the lectures among both the lecturers and their audiences was mixed, and eventually even successive emperors, beginning with Qianlong, started to complain that they were ineffective. Instead of being a forum for genuine teaching, the system had many critics alleging that reviewing the Sacred Edict had become a mere formality. Disengaged lecturers could not hold their audiences' attention, and those who bothered to show up could not actually understand what they were hearing.[22] Certainly, recruiting good lecturers was more difficult than the early Qing emperors anticipated when instituting and expanding the system.[23] Yet despite all the challenges to making the *xiangyue* an effective tool for propagating morality at the lowest levels of society, the practice of lecturing simply did not die out. The chance that even the most remote rustic might be civilized by Confucian moral education tailored to his level of comprehension led successive generations of emperors and bureaucrats to continue calling for the enthusiastic implementation of *xiangyue* lectures. Orality could and should be a powerful tool of indoctrination. But as Qian succinctly observed above, it was a power most often and most effectively wielded by practitioners of the *xiaoshuo jiao*, resulting in terrible social consequences. Was there a kind of oral performance that could spread Confucian stability and counteract the pernicious influence of *xiaoshuo jiao* besides the *xiangyue* lecture? In the next section, we turn to Yu's detailed description of how obscene books and plays were ruining society and undermining genuine *jiaohua* efforts, and how he began to move beyond Qian's textual solution to the problems of orality. It would take something more than the *xiangyue* to fill people's ears with socially stabilizing virtues.

19. Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China*, 184–85.
20. Hsiao, 186.
21. Hsiao, 191–94.
22. Hsiao, 194–97.
23. Hsiao, 198–99.

Complicating "Obscenity"

When Yu compiled *Deyi lu* decades after Qian's essay was first written, he deliberately positioned the essay to open Volume 11,but also retitled it to emphasize banning and burning those *xiaoshuo* that were specifically *yin* (淫 obscene). But Qian did not advocate banning only specific types of *xiaoshuo*, but rather all of them, and Qian used the word *yin* just once when including it in a list of the immoral subjects that *xiaoshuo* delights in addressing: *jian xie yin dao* (姦邪淫盜 adultery, heterodoxy, obscenity, banditry). In changing the title, was Yu labeling all *xiaoshuo* more explicitly as *yin*, or was he working to create a subcategory within the broader genre that he thought should be banned, without labeling all vernacular popular literature as such? Unfortunately, as the compilation of *Deyi lu* spanned both prewar and postwar years, when Yu's attitude toward vernacular literature seems to have changed, it is impossible to determine which was more likely. Since the first *baojuan* that Yu was involved in writing, *Pan Gong*, was written over 1854–1855 and his first morality plays emerged in 1857, by the time he recompiled *Deyi lu* in 1869, we can be certain that he was an advocate of certain types of vernacular literature.[24] However, he chose not to advertise his morality plays anywhere within *Deyi lu*—a surprising lacuna for someone who was otherwise a tireless promoter of his own work.

Even so, Yu wove his advocacy for the power of the vernacular, used by the correct people, through the collection in more subtle ways. Occasionally, between sets of densely written regulations for charity organizations, government edicts, and admonitory essays, he included a short piece, usually no more than one or two folios in length, written in the vernacular and expounding on a topic related to the volume's theme. What was *Deyi lu*'s audience of officials and gentry meant to do with such works? The answer, I believe, is rooted in the first volume, where Yu drew on extensive materials from earlier charitable societies, a class of general philanthropic organizations first popularized in the late Ming.[25] The final nine folios of the volume include eleven examples of lectures, including some written by the two late-Ming charitable society founders Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562–1626) and Chen Longzheng 陳龍正 (1585–1645) and some excerpted from

24. For more on the authorship and dating of *Pan Gong*, see chapter 3. For Yu's early efforts with drama in 1857–1859, see Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:11a–12.

25. For more on the history of these organizations see Fuma, *Chūgoku zenkai zendōshi kenkyū*. See also Leung, *Shishan yu jiaohua*, and Joanna Handlin Smith, *The Art of Doing Good: Charity in Late Ming China* (University of California Press, 2009).

a commentary on the *Ganying pian zhijiang* (感應篇直講 Straightforward lectures on the tract on action and retribution).[26] Together, these lectures reiterate the importance of orally transmitting positive moral values in language that most listeners could understand. At the same time, the lectures gave Yu's readers who hoped to set up their own charitable societies—or any of the more specific institutions described in the subsequent fifteen volumes—somewhere to start if they doubted their own public-speaking skills. As his readers dipped into the rest of his collection, they would discover other vernacular essays to put accessible words in their mouths and to educate audiences with whom they might not normally feel comfortable interacting. Rooted in earlier moral practices, these vernacular pieces on subjects such as filial piety, cherishing grains, and infanticide complemented traditional *jiaohua* tactics like the *xiangyue* lectures.[27]

The content of *Deyi lu* reflects a conservative view of social relations and is aimed at traditional *jiaohua* stakeholders rather than the new audiences Yu hoped to teach how to transform each other. However, Yu also leaves himself enough rhetorical space for his less-orthodox proposals included in other publications. We will look at two of those essays below, but for now, let us return to the question at the opening of this section: What did Yu mean by *yin* as a *xiaoshuo* subcategory, one that he felt ought to be urgently destroyed and suppressed, in total agreement with conservatives of both earlier eras and his own times? How did this agreement still leave him the option to promote his engagement with the popular performance tradition elsewhere? Conveniently, Volume 11includes three

26. *Deyi lu*, 1:2.19a–27b. For more on Gao and Chen, see Fuma, 92–93, and Smith, 56–70. Fuma remarks that the lectures' inclusion in *Deyi lu* demonstrates the continuity of the practice over the centuries (Fuma, 108). The edition of *Ganying pian zhijiang* that I was able to access includes most of these lectures nearly verbatim. See *Ganying pian zhijiang* (Jude tang, 1888). However, this edition does not include the final section of the anti-infanticide lecture or a very short (four-column) lecture against the choice of obscene dramas for performance. Given Yu's interest in these two subjects, the extra material is probably his own addition. The addendum on infanticide is an abrupt stylistic shift from simple language to extremely colloquial speech. *Ganying pian* has no content about performance literature, so the lecture on plays could not have been copied from any commentary to that work. Unfortunately, I have been unable to access a copy of the edition of *Ganying pian zhijiang* published by Suzhou Dejian zhai in 1856. For more on lectures and *Ganying pian zhijiang* see You, *Quanhua jinzhen*, 160–62, and You, *Shan yu ren tong*, 34–40.

27. For another late Qing example of expanded preaching practices beyond the *xiangyue*, see Xu Yue, "Teaching Good and Doing Good: Late-Qing Sichuan Folk Preaching and Its Effects," *Chinese Studies in History* 55, no. 3 (2022): 231–41.

detailed lists of titles that Yu thought ought to be banned from print and performance. The first, "Ji hui yinshu mudan" (記燬淫書目單 Record of obscene books to burn), includes a number of titles one would expect to see on a Qing literati's burn list, including *Ruyijun zhuan* (如意君傳 The lord of perfect satisfaction) and *Jin ping mei* (金瓶梅 Plum in the golden vase) and its apparently many sequels—some no longer extant, probably thanks to Qing literary purges.[28] The explicit sexual content of these works is well known, despite centuries of suppression and censorship. Other works on the list might be more surprising to modern readers who are unfamiliar with the extent to which Qing conservatives saw "obscenity" as more than just sexual content. *Honglou meng* (紅樓夢 Dream of the red chamber) and its many sequels make the list, not to mention the versions of *Shuihu zhuan* (水滸傳 The water margin) and *Xixiang ji* (西廂記 Story of the western wing), which were already sanitized by late-Ming/early-Qing literary critic Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608–1661).[29] Also included is *Lü mudan* (錄牡丹 The green peony), one of the earliest extant martial arts novels, as is late Ming author/editor Ling Mengchu's 凌濛初 (1580–1644) well-known collection of short stories *Pai'an jingqi* (拍案驚奇 Slapping the table in amazement).[30]

While these and many other titles on the list may not contain explicit sex or even eroticism, they are far from didactic, focusing on entertainment, romance, and feats of heroism that at times challenge imperial authority. This list is similar but not entirely identical to one propagated decades earlier, before the war, by a group of literati who compiled and published *Quan hui yinshu zhengxin lu* (勸燬淫書徵信錄 Report on exhortations to burn obscene books); Yu's list also seems to have been incorporated into Ding Richang's list of banned books, though he included titles that Yu missed the first time around.[31] Yu's list in *Deyi lu* closes with

28. *Deyi lu*, 11:1.9b–11a. For more on *Ruyijun zhuan*, see Charles R. Stone, *The Fountainhead of Chinese Erotica:* The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction *(Ruyijun zhuan), with a Translation and Critical Edition* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

29. For more on Jin Shengtan's interventions into these popular works, see Patricia Sieber, "*Xixiang ji* Editions, the Bookmarket, and the Discourse on Obscenity: Wang Jide (d. 1623), Jin Shengtan (1608–61), and the Creation of Uncommon Readers," in *Theaters of Desire: Authors, Readers, and the Reproduction of Early Chinese Song Drama, 1300–2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Scott W. Gregory, "'The Art of Subtle Phrasing Has Been Extinguished': The Jin Shengtan Edition," in *Bandits in Print: The Water Margin and the Transformations of the Chinese Novel* (Cornell University Press, 2023).

30. For more on *Lü mudan*, see Margaret Wan, *Green Peony and the Rise of the Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (State University of New York Press, 2009).

31. For the prewar list, see Wang Liqi, ed., *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo*

the instruction, "All other *xiaoshuo* that are enough to incite sex and banditry should, without exception, be strictly prohibited and gathered for burning."[32] Unlike in the section title, where *yin* is a broad term that encompasses all the works on this list, here *yin* is used in the narrower sense that Qian also intended, specifically relating to sexual content. As the two additional lists of theatrical works to ban skew toward the romantic and sexual, Yu seems especially concerned about sexual content on the stage.[33] Similar instructions to those that end the list of banned *xiaoshuo* inform readers that the lists are not meant to be exhaustive: "All other new dramas that approach flirtations and secret assignations should all be forever banned and forbidden from selection for performance."[34]

These three extensive lists make it clear how important Yu found censorship to be in the fight against immorality, whether it be sexually or sociopolitically destabilizing. Opening the volume with Qian's essay gives Yu an authoritative foundation, one especially unsparing in its condemnation of *xiaoshuo*, on which to build his efforts. The essay might also have been included because Yu refers to it in one of his essays on popular literature and *jiaohua*, specifically citing Qian's concept of *xiaoshuo jiao* to ground his own arguments about obscene drama and fiction. In "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" (教化兩大敵論 Treatise on the two great enemies of *jiaohua*), Yu develops more detailed descriptions of the dangers posed by popular literature. While agreeing with Qian's calls for bans and destruction, he also amplifies the threat significantly, essentially explaining why prevailing containment strategies do not take matters far enough. This explanation results in an exploration of what an active, rather than reactive, Confucian response addressing the root of the problem might entail.[35]

It is unclear what contexts defined the circulation of this essay, and even when Yu wrote it. The essay is included near the end of *Deyi lu* Volume 11and at the beginning of *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*. In a colophon to *Shuji tang jinyue*, the posthumously published collection of morality plays, Zheng Guanying, who helped collect as many plays as could be located

xiqu shiliao 元明清三代禁毀小說戲曲史料 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 122–24. For Ding Richang's list: Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, 142–48.

32.「其他小說之足以誨淫誨盜者一概嚴禁收燬」*Deyi lu*, 11:1.11a.

33. "Quan shouhui xiaoben yinci changpian qi" 勸收燬小本淫詞唱片啟 *Deyi lu*, 11:1.12a–13b, and "Yong jin yinxi mudan" 永禁淫戲目單 *Deyi lu*, 11:2.9a–b.

34.「凡其他新戲之近於調情密約者一槩永禁不准點演」*Deyi lu*, 11:2.9a.

35. "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 1:3a–6a, and *Deyi lu*, 11:2.12a–14b. All following citations of this essay refer to pages in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*.

after Yu's death, mentions that "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" led the 1865–1869 Shanghai circuit intendant, Ying Baoshi, to ban obscene plays and destroy obscene books.[36] This ban may be the one detailed in a proclamation, meant to be carved on stone, that was included in *Deyi lu*, dated 1867 and credited to the Shanghai circuit intendant.[37] We also know that Yu was influential in shaping Jiangsu governor Ding Richang's 1868 ban on certain works of literature and drama, though not whether his essay on the enemies of *jiaohua* was specifically a factor.[38]

Reading "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" in conversation with Qian's essay shows how much had changed in the world of moral education by the late Qing. Both pieces establish the dire threat that obscene (broadly defined) literature posed to society, especially the damage that it had already caused, and allude to the negligence that had allowed things to reach such a state. But in contrast with Qian's certainty that a decade or so of book burnings and bans would suppress these ill effects once and for all, Yu was unconvinced that prohibitions and destruction would be enough. Alongside his grim warnings about the power of the enemies of *jiaohua*, he tapped a deep vein of anxiety, referring repeatedly to weeping with anguish over the state of collective morality. Regardless of the means of delivery, oral or textual, Yu seemed to ascribe greater power to immorality than morality, no matter the context. What hope could there be for *jiaohua* against the agents of chaos that had already taken over China?

The opening sentence of "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" portrays Yu as concerned with the heart-minds of the people (人心 *renxin*), just as he was in the three essays on the moral causes of the Taiping War that I addressed in the introduction. Whereas those essays focused on individual moral responsibility and spoke specifically of heavenly retribution, here Yu focused on the role of the state and statecraft in maintaining social order, not on supernatural phenomena such as armies sent by Heaven. "All along," Yu began, "the order and disorder of all under Heaven has been

36. The first volume of *Shuji tang jinyue* restarts pagination with each new piece of frontmatter, rendering page numbers nearly useless for citation purposes. Zheng's colophon is the final one in the volume.

37. "Shanghai daotong chishi jin yinxi banfa yongjin beishi 上海道通飭示禁淫戲頒發永禁碑式," *Deyi lu*, 11:2.21a–b.

38. Ding, 146. Y. Yvon Wang points out that even though Ding Richang moved to ban all of these "licentious" works, he had also been an afficionado of them, especially *Honglou meng*, when he was younger. See Y. Yvon Wang, "Challenging *Yin* Hierarchy: Late Imperial Antecedents of the Global Modern Pornographic Turn," *Reinventing Licentiousness: Pornography and Modern China* (Cornell University Press, 2021), https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501752971.003.0002

connected to the hearts of the people. [The state of] people's hearts is owed to *jiaohua*."[39] In the wake of the chaotic fourteen-year-long Taiping War, this could be read as a critique of prewar *jiaohua* efforts, but Yu quickly denied that potential reading using a battle metaphor of his own: *jiaohua* could not succeed unless its antagonists were first dealt with. Justifying this with a medical analogy, he drew a parallel between medicine and the solutions to moral decline: "When treating illness, if the miasmic *qi* are not first dispersed, then tonics to supplement the body cannot be tolerated."[40] Yu was also careful to praise Qing *jiaohua* efforts in detailed terms, noting how extensive the dynasty's efforts to increase education and honor exemplars had been, such that everyone *ought* to have been orderly and moral through repeated exposure to goodness.[41]

Yu then introduced the twin enemies of *jiaohua* responsible for bringing about the chaotic age through which his all readers had lived: *yinshu* (淫書 obscene books) and *yinxi* (淫戲 obscene theater). Taking this opportunity to credit Qian Daxin for this warning by briefly paraphrasing the opening lines of his essay discussed above, Yu made one significant change to Qian's formulation. The fourth *jiao* was now identified as *yinci xiaoshuo* (淫詞小說 *xiaoshuo* with obscene words), rather than the entire sweep of vernacular performance literature and fiction. As he made his case for its danger, the affective power of obscene texts and plays appeared virtually unstoppable in light of the failures of *jiaohua*.

Regarding books, he wrote:

> That virtuous fathers and teachers might instruct and enlighten for ten years cannot compare with the rapidity of change caused by a single glance at an obscene book. That there are tens of thousands of words of the sages are not sufficient to guide them, but one or two obscene books are more than enough to corrupt them.[42]

As for the plays:

39.「從來天下之治亂係乎人心。人心由乎教化。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:3a (punctuation added).

40.「譬之治病。苟邪氣未除。則補劑必不能受。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:3a (punctuation added).

41. "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:3a–3b.

42.「是賢父師訓迪十年不及淫書一覽之變化為尤速也。是聖賢千言萬語引之而不足者淫書一二部敗之而有餘也。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:3b–4a (punctuation added).

> That the state has officially canonized hundreds upon thousands of chaste and filial exemplars cannot compare with the exceptionally fast-acting impressions caused by a few performances of obscene drama.[43] That there are hundreds upon thousands of good gentlemen are not sufficient to help them, but one or two lowly actors and brothel-goers are more than enough to defeat them.[44]

In contrast to Qian, who broadly targeted all *xiaoshuo* for their power to spread disorder more rapidly and broadly than the three traditional *jiao* could inculcate goodness, Yu was far more concerned about the impact that even a brief exposure to obscenity might have in counteracting the laborious work of *jiaohua*. When "one hundred *xiangyue* lectures cannot compare with watching one obscene play," an aphorism that Yu claimed had become a common saying, what could be done?[45]

In turning attention away from the dynamics of how immorality is spread to worrying about immorality itself, Yu identified a new type of enemy, but the identification of this new foe might save *jiaohua* rather than foretell its inevitable defeat. In addition to Qian's concern about how *xiaoshuo* spreads in print and voice, Yu is also aware that immorality spreads because people actively propagate it:

> Of these two aspects, one has, by means of being carved onto blocks for publication, poisoned the literary world. The other has, by means of sound and appearances, extended its harm even beyond the curtain [to the women's quarters]. Those who write them indeed are all perverse and demented. Those who publish, distribute, select, and enact them are all shameless and depraved.[46]

Once this human element was identified, then the scope of the problem changed once again. Who ultimately brought society to the edge of col-

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43. On Qing state canonization of chastity exemplars, see Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*. On filial exemplars, see Maram Epstein, *Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love During the High Qing* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2019).

44.「是國家歲旌節孝千百人不及淫戲數回之觀感為尤捷也。是千百正人君子扶之而不足者一二賤優狎客敗之而有餘也。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:4a (punctuation added).

45.「鄉約講說一百回不及看淫戲一檯」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:4a.

46.「是二端者。一則登諸梨棗。毒固中於藝林。一則著為聲容。害且及於帷薄。在作之者固屬喪心病狂。在刊布點演者尤屬寡廉鮮恥。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:4a–b (punctuation added).

lapse: was it the creators and performers of immoral literature itself, or was it those whose negligence created a moral vacuum in which these immoral sources could spread?

Yu thus turned his attention to the generations of those who ought to have known better but who, in his view, allowed immorality to propagate through their inaction:

> How is that in the past centuries and millennia, there have been many who were teachers, standing in great numbers from the past until the present, seeing this but not ever paying attention to it? Brutal oppressors and rabble-rousers have been allowed to mislead the common people, while in the past more than a few were aware of it.[47]

What was the point of studying the words of the sages if obscenity had been allowed to spread under the very noses of those who ought to have opposed it? Yu reminded his readers of Confucius's warning that good governance included banishing the songs of Zheng (鄭) and repeated Mencius's advice to correct others' minds and eliminate deviant speech.[48] These familiar lines are no longer used to condemn the targets that the sages wanted to eliminate. Instead, they are turned toward a new purpose: shaming those who had memorized them but forgotten to apply them in practice. Yu asked his readers to consider the possibility that the songs of Zheng from the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BCE), as licentious and affective as they must have been, surely in no way compared with the extreme powers of popular obscene literature of the present. Similarly, the deviant speech of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) was surely nothing in comparison to the excesses of speech in the present era. So, if Mencius had sighed over errant thinking thousands of years ago and wished to eliminate it, why had generations of scholars ignored his command?[49]

This brings us to Yu's final point, which does not, however, fully resolve the fears he developed in the first half about the effect of obscenity on readers and viewers. Once again reminding readers that he agreed in principle with literary censorship and inquisitions, he nevertheless argued that

47.「何千百年來。擁皋比為多士師者。後先林立。乃熟視之若無覩。一任其鴟張簧鼓。惑我齊民。而曾不少為措意也。」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:4b–5a (punctuation added).

48. *Analects*, 15.11. *Mencius*, 3b.9.

49. "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:5a–b.

those actions would ultimately fail because wily, immoral people would continue to create more obscene works, and ignorant people would help spread them. The fight against *jiaohua*'s enemies needed clever, moral people to stand up against them.

> In reforming customs and changing the minds of the people, sagely people are not exempt. In the deluge of this degenerate age, who will be our Mount Dizhu (砥柱山 *Dizhu shan*)?[50] Are there no renowned superior persons in this era who, for the sake of our age, will scale the heights and shout out, forcefully bringing the thoughts of the masses in order? I fear that the evil miasma becomes daily more intense![51]

Yu then ended with a quotation taken from the Northern Song scholar-official Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), a man much admired by Zhu Xi for his commitment to collective service.[52] The best-known and widely quoted line from his essay "Yueyang lou ji" (岳陽樓記 On Yueyang tower) refers to the attitude he believed ancient paragons of benevolence would surely have held in their lives of service and even in retirement: "First feel concern for the concerns of the world. Defer pleasure until the world can take pleasure."[53] However, Yu evoked this hoary maxim only to use it against the standards of his age, quoting Fan's question, which follows the above quotation in the original, as an appeal for exemplars of his own times, "Alas! If there are not such people, then whom can I follow?"[54]

In the end, "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" leaves its readers without any suggestion of concrete, actionable solutions, even after Yu has thoroughly chastised them for their inaction with words borrowed from Confucius and Mencius. Instead of ending on a confident note, as Qian did when he

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50. Mount Dizhu is a large rock located where the Yellow River passes through the Sanmen Gorge and the waters become treacherous. Idiomatically, it stands for a force that is immovable in the midst of great pressure.

51.「習俗移人◦賢者不免◦末流橫決◦砥柱伊誰◦非有當代名世大君子出為之登高而呼◦力排眾議◦恐邪氛日熾◦」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:5b (punctuation added).

52. See Ying-shih Yü, *The Religious Ethic and Mercantile Spirit in Early Modern China*, trans. Yim-tze Kwong, ed. Hoyt Cleveland Tillman (Columbia University Press, 2021), 89–96, for a brief introduction to Fan and the cultural context of his normative statements about ideal scholar-officials.

53. See Richard E. Strassberg, trans., *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (University of California Press, 1994), 158–59, for a full translation of this essay.

54.「噫微斯人吾誰與歸」"Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:6a.

called anyone who disagreed with him "shortsighted," Yu's final rhetorical question echoes uncomfortably in the wake of his criticism of all those who had, through their passivity, allowed the strength and reach of *jiaohua*'s enemies to spread like fire and flourish like thorny weeds, to borrow two images used by Yu. Implicit in his acknowledgment that encouraging education, recognizing exemplars, and banning/burning obscene literature cannot succeed on their own is the sense that those wishing to transform society must instead take an active role in understanding those they wish to teach. *Jiaohua* could not work passively when there were other *jiao* and more compelling entertainment competing with it for the heart-minds of the common people. To assume that *jiaohua* would work without recognizing what was actively working against it was a recipe for failure.

What did Yu want those in power to do to make *jiaohua* effective again? Ying Baoshi and Ding Richang both launched prominent campaigns against theater and vernacular literature in 1867 and 1868, following their contact with Yu Zhi, though not necessarily specifically because of this essay. But just as Yu pointed out, such campaigns needed to be the beginning of an activist, evangelical *jiaohua* that fought the influence of its enemies in a new and creative way. Luckily, for any government administrator or local gentry member scratching his head to figure out what this would look like in practice, Yu had an eight-point plan to rescue the Qing from socio-moral and political collapse, and it involved creatively reimagining both traditional *jiaohua* tools and how social reformers might turn their enemies' tactics against them.

A Confucian Great Commission: Go Therefore and Make Loyal Subjects of All Chinese

Yu Zhi's collected works includes five undated letters, one of which, "Shang dangshi shu" (上當事書 Letter submitted to those in charge), seems to have been an open letter of Yu's ideas for saving the Qing from collapse.[55] However it spread, it was important enough for Yu Yue to mention it at

55. Yu Zhi, "Shang dangshi shu," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 3:5a–15b. A condensed version of this essay also appears among the prefatory materials to *Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:22a–25a. These materials were prepared by Yu in early 1874, with the intention of publishing a trilogy of morality plays, but the project was put on hold when he died later that year. It was not published until 1880. In the condensed version, all references to Christianity have been removed.

some length in his preface to Yu's collected works, comparing it with earlier exemplars of philosophical/religious polemics: Mencius's denunciation of Mohism and Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) memorial against Buddhism.[56] Yu Yue contrasted Yu Zhi's activist approach to reform with the failures of their contemporaries: Confucian scholars whose lofty discourses applied to nothing practical and were therefore useless.

"Shang dangshi shu" takes up the thread that tied together Qian's introduction of *xiaoshuo* as a *jiao* that competes with China's traditional *jiao* and weaves in Yu's development, taking this competition for the hearts of the people and building it into a struggle for the moral health of the empire. Needless to say, administrators and gentry were losing this struggle through their inability to purge *jiaohua*'s compelling, dangerous enemies from society. Concerned by the state of people's hearts and the impact this had on current affairs, Yu opened this essay similarly to the one analyzed in the previous section, although his focus was now on how *jiao* related to and supported Confucian statecraft.[57] "I believe that under Heaven," Yu wrote, "the general trend of events all depends on the people's hearts. People's hearts are determined by governance and *jiao*. People's hearts cannot be divided, therefore governance and *jiao* cannot tolerate being bifurcated."[58] The Qing remained strong, in Yu's view, because it maintained unity in promoting Confucianism as both the governing philosophy and the moral foundation of the empire. Unlike the internal threat posed by *xiaoshuo jiao* detailed in the section above, in "Shang dangshi shu," the threat is a foreign *jiao*: Christianity (天主教 *tianzhu jiao*).[59]

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56. *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji* 1:1b. See *Mencius*, 3a.5. Han Yu's essay is "Lun Fo gu biao" 論佛骨表 (Memorial on the bone of the Buddha), in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注, ed. Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (Shijie shuju, 1967), 354–56.

57. Joshua Sooter, "Yu Zhi on Christianity and the Negation of Administrative and Ideological Order in Post-Taiping China," in "The Production of the Concept of Religion in China, 1858–1898" (PhD diss., New York University, 2020). This chapter has an extended discussion of this essay. Sooter rejects any implication that *jiao* means "religion" in Yu's framing, instead relating it to the specific legal/political threat posed by Christians who obtained exemptions from community obligations after conversion, in addition to occasional immunity from legal prosecution. While this was certainly a problem, I still think we can and should read *jiao* in a religious sense in this essay without engaging anachronistically in reading it as *zongjiao* 宗教.

58.「竊謂天下之大勢全在人心。人心視乎政教。人心不可或貳。卽政教不容兩歧。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:5a (punctuation added).

59. *Tianzhu jiao*, which I translate here as "Christianity," is usually translated as "Catholic" because it specifically refers to that denomination of Christianity. However, I do not believe Yu was only objecting to Catholic proselytizing when he wrote this essay. For example, though the Taipings' ties were to Protestant missionaries, not Catholic, in

After discussing the nature of Christianity's threats to the Qing, Yu spent the body of his letter explaining eight points by which the Chinese state and its gentry partners could work to reverse its decline. But first, he had to explain what was so different about Christianity from the other *jiao* that existed alongside Confucianism in China. In quick succession, he dismissed both Daoism and Buddhism as doing nothing to interfere with the fundamental primacy of the Confucian system and refraining from undue influence on magistrates. He conceded that the Hui (回 Muslims), though culturally strange, kept to themselves on the borders and did not seek to spread out or proselytize.[60] The same restraint, Yu wrote, could not be said of Christianity in China: it was a teaching that contravened imperial authority and sought to spread in all directions—much like *xiaoshuo jiao*. Christians did not self-isolate. Instead, they offered an easy salvation that did not require vegetarian fasting or non-killing and that enticed many Chinese converts.[61] Though this doctrine worked for its Western adherents, it was inappropriate, he emphasized, for Chinese. By severing people's relationship with orthodox *jiao* (正教 *zhengjiao*), Christianity became a threat to imperial unity. Since the Christians made such an effort to proselytize their foreign teachings, Yu went on to describe how ardent conservatives should respond in kind to combat the spread of destabilizing foreign ideas.

Yu's critique sits awkwardly in the context of Chinese religious history. In drawing his readers' focus to the crisis caused by the incursions of Christian missionaries, he seemingly overlooked the historical realities of countless millenarian movements inspired by Buddhism and Daoism, the more recent Muslim-led uprisings on the Qing frontier, and most glaringly of all, the Taiping War, with its unique blend of fundamentalist Christianity, Chinese messianism, and anti-Manchu fervor. Yet he did not directly attack Christianity. His argument instead identified unexpected parallels: "Consider how Christianity worships Jesus. The main idea also results in exhorting goodness. In those foreign countries, it cannot be said that that they are not classed among the virtuous. The teachings of China's sages have not yet spread to foreign lands. Heaven gave birth to Jesus in order to transform [foreigners'] customs and govern their people. Among

Jiangnan tielei tu, Yu wrote that they "borrow their name from *Tianzhu jiao* and in place of it have created a different kind of heterodoxy"「賊借天主教為名。而又另造一種邪說。」*Jiangnan tielei tu*, 23b (punctuation added).

60. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:5a–b.

61. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:6a.

peoples and places, each has what is suitable [for each]."[62] He also avoided any direct mention of the Opium Wars that led to the unequal treaties that ended the proselytization ban (though he does vaguely refer to the treaties themselves). Instead, he praised the magnanimity the Qing government in allowing Christians to practice their teachings and build their churches, as if this were done in the spirit of friendly international relations, rather than as a consequence of humiliating military defeat.

At first, it seems like his ire was mostly directed at Chinese Christian converts, whom Yu identified as mostly members of the social underclass. He complained that they upset public order, greedily drank to excess and brawled, all the while delighting in having learned that that they could still ascend to Heaven, even without practicing vegetarian fasts or avoiding killing, while selfishly pursuing their own profit.[63] Christianity, in Yu's formulation, appealed to the basest natures of those without moral rectitude, sounding quite similar to the individuals he discussed earlier who were incited to sexual promiscuity or banditry after exposure to obscene books and drama. By claiming that Chinese converts to Christianity came from the lower classes, with their baser instincts unrestrained by values like filiality, which ought to have made them as loyal to China as to their own parents, Yu's argument subtly shifted its target, moving away from explicitly attacking Chinese Christians. If *jiao* binds the hearts of the people to their state, then who has failed when the state no longer has a hold on its people? Chinese converts to Christianity are merely one symptom of an even greater illness: the pattern of Confucian social disengagement and lack of creative approaches to public engagement, the very problem at the heart of *jiaohua* efforts, and the true target of Yu's polemics.

Framing "Shang dangshi shu" as a polemic against a dangerous competing *jiao*, as Yu Yue did in his praise, overlooks the fact that only roughly the first quarter was dedicated to discussing specifically why Christianity posed the greatest threat to China. To focus on the symptom, however, would be to miss the real cause of China's ills and the urgent treatment required. The majority of Yu's efforts were spent explaining his practical solutions point by point, detailing how traditional *jiaohua* tactics like *xiangyue* lectures failed because of his peers' lackluster performances. Other concrete steps he suggested included a variety of measures: strength-

62.「查天主教崇奉耶穌。大旨亦歸勸善。在外國不可謂非賢者流也。中國聖人之教未能徧及外國。天生耶穌。以化其俗。以治其人。人地各有所宜。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:5b (punctuation added).

63. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:6a.

TABLE 1: Subjects of the Eight Points in "Shang dangshi shu"

1: 保甲 *baojia* mutual accountability system
2: 鄉約 *xiangyue* lectures
3: 善書 *shanshu* morality books
4: 家祠 *jiaci* family ancestral shrines
5: 蒙館 *jiaguan* primary schools
6: 義學 *yixue* charity schools
7: 彈唱評話 *tanchang pinghua* oral storytelling
8: 梨園 *liyuan* theater

ening the *baojia* (保甲 mutual security) system; composing, collecting, and publishing popular songs about virtue; publishing more morality books and ensuring their delivery to remote areas; composing moral tales for oral storytellers to perform in teahouses; and reforming the world of drama so that morality plays could positively influence their audiences.[64] The latter two are most surprising given Yu's outright condemnation of popular books and performance throughout Volume 11of *Deyi lu*. But in fighting evil influences, both from the internal enemies of *jiaohua* and the ongoing invasion by a foreign competitor, Yu appeared to have chosen to adopt the enemy's weapons and to repurpose them in defense of virtue.

Yu did not give equal weight to each of his eight points. More controversial suggestions for restoring Confucian moral stability were more extensively defended and less effort was expended on priorities likely to be shared by Confucian conservatives. Of the eight points, just three occupy nearly half of the complete text: *xiangyue* lectures, charity schools, and morality plays. Unsurprisingly, given his professional roots in elementary education, Yu dedicated the longest section of the letter to revitalizing charity schools, emphasizing how they had failed their students thus far and how they might be profoundly improved with his reform methods. We will return to these points in the context of his ideas about elementary pedagogy in the next chapter. These three most extensively defended points share one significant element: they all have the potential to reach the lowest levels of society, not by teaching them how to read the Confu-

64. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:7b–15b. The *baojia* system assembled households into groups of ten, and the group was held responsible for any criminal activities perpetrated by its members. It was a means of mutual policing that had varying degrees of success, but the intent was to extend the limited scope of centralized bureaucratic authority into the intimate space of the individual home, significantly increasing the government's ability to hold its subjects accountable for breaches of legal code. For more on the practical application of this system, see Hsiao, 43–83.

cian classics, but rather through orality and functional literacy. This is what Yu says should be the primary anxiety of every Confucian social reformer—not being able to make one's moral teachings familiar to every household. But what if there was, in fact, a way to teach every household to change their ways without spending a single coin?[65] His final section on morality plays is more than just an advertisement for the dozens of dramas that he had already written. The argument about governance and *jiao* at the beginning of the letter was crafted specifically to lead to this climactic, controversial suggestion. The strongest *jiaohua* tool could not be the *xiangyue* lectures, even if they were reformed. This did not place Yu at odds with contemporaneous efforts to respond to the social chaos of the Taiping War, as described in Huan Jin's analysis of a morality text on the Sacred Edict that emerged in the 1850s and was eventually reprinted by the Qing in 1885, but it does show how Yu's proposals went further than those of his peers.[66] If the values that *xiangyue* lectures inculcated were to actually reach the segments of society who needed their transformative power, Yu was convinced that no other way existed besides oral stories and drama. Convincing those who thought popular entertainments ought to be banned and burned that some drama performances should be encouraged was not going to be easy.

Theatrical *Xiangyue*: From Lectures to Performance

Yu needed to convince his skeptical, perhaps even antagonistic, readers that the common people needed something more than a strengthened *baojia* system or updated *xiangyue* lectures if they were to transform into good and orderly subjects. At the same time, the *baojia* and *xiangyue* reforms were the first two points of his plan because they defined the common ground he shared with strict traditionalists, and he also truly believed they were fundamental principles for an orderly society, however they may have failed in the past. As familiar and potentially uninteresting as these suggestions might have seemed, Yu uses them for powerful rhetorical effect as points on which to pivot from his opening arguments against Christianity to his closing ideas that directly challenged the traditional means of Confucian education.

In an extended critical defense of a *xiangyue* tradition that had thus far

65. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:9a.
66. Jin, 67–108.

failed to live up to its potential to raise public moral standards, Yu joined the generations of earlier officials who complained about the *xiangyue* even as they reaffirmed the value of its intended function. Unlike those earlier writers, Yu brought to his critique concrete observations of how the competition had been able to successfully reach the masses through the power of orality.[67] First, he brings up Christianity to point out how its missionaries put Confucian *jiaohua* efforts to shame. *Xiangyue* lectures, having become mere formalities, had lost their moral impact. Yu points out that in practice they rarely reached beyond cities and towns into the vast rural areas of the empire. At gatherings, people needed to remain standing while listening, and the entire affair was difficult for them to tolerate for long.[68] If local *xiangyue* lectures were to compete with the foreigners' sermons, serious reforms would be needed.[69]

67. Articles in the Shanghai-based missionary periodical *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal* from the late 1860s, though emphatic about the importance of preaching, are divided on whether significant effort was needed for oral instruction to become a success or if preaching had already yielded stunning results. Probably writing within a few years of Yu's concerns about the effect of Christian missionary activities, a certain "S.A." claimed (wrongly, given the importance of preaching as part of Daoist and Buddhist rituals) that "preaching is a novelty in China. Perhaps it may be supposed antagonistic to the genius of the nation—public speaking. Except on the stage, not being much cultivated by the Chinese . . . what is the best method to pursue? How can we so preach that they will believe? . . . Doubtless, China is a land where preaching will be considered highly foolish, both by anti-missionary foreigners, and by the self-conceited native literati." As quoted in "On Preaching to the Chinese Public," *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, (January 1869), 174. In the following month's issue, however, Rev. E. W. Syle wrote, "Concerning preaching—that which in the beginning of missionary work in China was thought a thing impossible—now it has grown to be so common, so well understood, so freely to be performed, that it hardly occurs to one to enumerate it! Preaching in the city and in the country, in our own churches, and in heathen temples, in school-houses and court-yards—anywhere and everywhere . . . the preacher goes and delivers his message with no other let or hindrance." As quoted in "The Present Aspects of Missionary Work in China," *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, (February 1869), 194. Whether or not Christian preaching was as successful as Yu claimed, it does appear that there were frequent opportunities for audiences to compare its attractions with those of the *xiangyue* lectures.

68. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:8a–b.

69. In 1874, the Canton-based American missionary John G. Kerr (1824–1901) conjectured that Christian sermons had inspired a revival and reinvention of *xiangyue* lectures delivered by the members of local charitable societies. Given Yu's connection with a group of influential, philanthropically minded Guangdong businessmen in his later years, there is a chance this was due to his advocacy, but no evidence currently exists to affirm this tantalizing possibility. However, Kerr's observation indicates that the idea that *xiangyue* lectures directly competed with Christian sermons was not just a fringe

Yu appears to be reading quite clearly from the missionary playbook in his suggestions. Calling for the creation of new "Xiangyue Ju" 鄉約局, attached to urban charitable society facilities and local rural temples, Yu felt that the organization should set up long benches (perhaps like church pews?) to allow audiences to sit down while they listened, and should find five well-spoken elders of good character to deliver the lectures.[70] While one lecturer remained at the main location to preside over local services, the other four would go on the road, traveling between other locations on a schedule that ensured that no one spoke at the same place regularly.[71] Officials and the gentry should attend and stay for at least the elaboration of the Sacred Edict, while the commoners should stay after for the less-formal second half.[72] The lecturer, attentive to the busy schedules of the important people sitting before him, would keep his rambling to a minimum rather than indulging in uninhibited speech.[73] During the casual second half, after the local elites left, Yu suggested that the discussion could cover everything from the law to morality tales of rewards and retributions, so long as all was explained in a clear and simple way. A passionate lecture, Yu concluded, could inspire positive responses in all his listeners. "If we apply such efforts to *jiaohua* in this way then people's hearts and common customs will surely flourish. And in the view of the other *jiao*, this will be our *jiao*'s sages' great accomplishment. I know they will surely be joyfully comforted and, with their anger calmed, return to normal!"[74]

Though Yu defends the need for *xiangyue* lectures as a vehicle for *jiaohua*, throughout his description of reformed lectures, his suggestions reveal a deep concern for their performative aspects and ways to take basic audience needs into account. His short list of suggestions in this essay does not capture all his plans for revitalizing the practice. In 1856, Yu wrote

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theory that Yu held. See Angela Ki Che Leung, "Charity, Medicine, and Religion: The Quest for Modernity in Canton (ca. 1870–1937)," in *Modern Chinese Religion II*, ed. Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerway (Brill, 2016), 598.

70. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:8b.

71. This echoes the peripatetic "broadcast method" used by Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission, as described by Kenneth Scott Latourette in *The Nineteenth Century Outside Europe: The Americas, The Pacific, Asia, and Africa* (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1961), 438–39.

72. The benches were reserved for important figures during the first half, but commoners were allowed to sit down after the others returned to work.

73. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:9a.

74.「如此力行教化。則人心風俗定可蒸蒸日上。卽彼教之見我聖教大行也。我知其必且欣然慰而廢然返矣。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:9b (punctuation added).

a collection of new *xiangyue* lectures that would be perfect for testing his call to entertain diverse, popular audiences; unfortunately, these are no longer extant.[75] However, we might get a sense of the increase in entertainment value that he hoped to add from *Deyi lu* Volume 14, where the first of three sections is dedicated to *xiangyue* lectures. Yu fills most of this section with documents associated with a revitalized *xiangyue* that began in 1855 in his hometown, Wuxi, with which he must surely have been intimately involved. These documents include a series of undated works directly related to new and improved lecture practices, many of which are dedicated to audience comfort and interest. If *xiangyue* lectures were to compete against Christian missionaries and obscene vernacular entertainments, they would have to become a fun time for all involved.

What might this have looked like? Yu gives numerous suggestions; what follows in this paragraph are only a few of them. The speaker should never simply read the Sacred Edict out loud, which would confuse the commoners. Instead he should explain it in their own dialect and village idiom.[76] He should be engaging and dramatic, perhaps even performing vivacious motions to keep the audience from getting bored.[77] If he wanted to spice things up, he could bring in a friend to engage in a spirited conversation, resulting cooperatively in a better performance, but he was reminded to keep it no longer than the time it takes for three sticks of incense to burn down.[78] Yu reminded readers many times that people crave novelty and are easily bored by repetition. To combat boredom, lecturers might make brightly colored, large posters to illustrate morality tales to attract men and women to the performance.[79] If the lecturer had a little medical expertise and happened to hear about a difficult birth in progress or a local epidemic while giving his lecture, he could earn goodwill by offering to treat needy rural folk, perhaps as another way of competing with Christian medical missionaries arriving from abroad.[80] These and many other rules and suggestions for making *xiangyue* lectures a welcome and enjoyable experience show Yu's keen attention to the needs of their audiences.

The theatrical elements that Yu recommended for *xiangyue* lectures to become an effective tool may have given some conservative readers pause,

75. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:11a.
76. *Deyi lu*, 14:1.9a.
77. *Deyi lu*, 14:1.10a.
78. *Deyi lu*, 14:1.10a.
79. *Deyi lu*, 14:1.17a.
80. *Deyi lu*, 14:1.13b.

but at least his argument still appealed to the traditional top-down model of *jiaohua*. Though he does not say this explicitly in either the short section on *xiangyue* in "Shang dangshi shu" or the long section in *Deyi lu*, Yu wanted to make *xiangyue* lectures more like the sorts of oral storytelling and staged dramatic performances that spread *xiaoshuo jiao* without the need for text. Staid local gentry members would have to learn how to really speak to and care about the comfort of audiences of their social inferiors. Whether they were competing with *xiaoshuo jiao* or Christianity, officials and gentry had to learn to change if they were ever to reach a receptive audience. In the following section, we see how he tried to change their minds even further toward accepting oral storytelling and popular drama—and their unrefined audiences—as essential partners in the grand task of *jiaohua*.

Xiangyue-ifying Popular Performances

While it is not likely that even a fundamentalist Confucian reformer would disagree with most of Yu's explanations of the first six points in "Shang dangshi shu," the final two—virtuous oral storytelling and morality plays—would have been entirely antithetical to movements of the 1860s and 1870s.[81] Yu pulls no punches in revealing the snobbishness and prejudice that prevented his elite readers from realizing what great potential for moral education these popular genres offered. Beginning with point seven, a brief defense of moral oral stories hardly more than half a folio in length, I will spend the bulk of this section analyzing two lengthy defenses of morality plays: the first in "Shang dangshi shu" and the second in a preface to *Shuji tang jinyue*. Clearly, Yu anticipated some serious objections to this specific proposal. In the first defense, his interlocutor raises no objections but does prompt Yu with a series of leading questions requiring him to justify the effort. The second defense begins with direct ridicule from his imagined critic. It then proceeds, with surprisingly cheerful patience, to painstakingly dismantle each of the critic's concerns about the propriety of engaging with lowbrow literature in the service of a lofty goal like *jiaohua*.

For someone who, in *Deyi lu*, condemned *tanhuang* (攤簧), a type of regional prosimetric oral storytelling popular in Wu-speaking areas, as so insidious that to imprison a single *tanhuang* performer would save the

81. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 318.

morality of hundreds of thousands of listeners, Yu makes a surprising turn in "Shang dangshi shu" toward advocating that even such harmful individuals could be turned into forces for good.[82] In proposing morality *tanchang pinghua* (彈唱評話 professional sung storytelling accompanied on a stringed instrument) to his skeptical readers, Yu first acknowledges that both the genre and its performance contexts were seen as far too lowbrow for his elevated audience to ever consider engaging with them—or even admitting an interest in them.[83] But their lowliness, and the performance skills honed by their professional tellers over the years, are specifically what makes them so useful. Yu begins once again by tying his suggestions to ancient sagely practice:

> Many of the ancient officials in charge of music were selected from among the blind.[84] All that "the blind expounded and the sightless recited," the songs, poems, and words of warning, all of them were part of *jiaohua*.[85] The sages thus transformed what was useless into what was useful. At present, blind storytellers mostly have descended into the demimonde to earn a living. For this reason, the scholar-officials consider them vulgar, saying, "Even though you people realize that in hastening to deliver what is popular, you frequently drift into dissolute and salacious [topics] and greatly harm people's hearts, even a few words of admonishment or warning are of no avail in the least to keep you from making a grand finale of a dramatic piece." Wherever they go, it becomes boisterous and raucous, with many people sitting around listening to tireless nattering. This is an extremely good setting for admonishing goodness and an essential part of governance! Once its overly careless parts have been eliminated, it can guide people to goodness. Why not adapt vulgar customs to apply to present circumstances? Its people

82. *Deyi lu*, 11:2.17a.

83. This term seems to be broad by design, rather than referring to any specific genre of oral storytelling.

84. For more on the ancient tradition of blind ritual musicians, see Li Guotao 黎国韬, *Gudai yueguan yu gudai xiju* 古代乐官与古代戏剧 (Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), 143–48.

85. Here Yu echoes a passage on remonstrance from the *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the states) from the Spring and Autumn period. For more on the original context of the quoted four-character phrase, see David Schraberg, "Remonstrance in Eastern Zhou Historiography," *Early China* 22 (1997): 146–47. My translation is modified from his. In the original context, the blind performers are meant to remonstrate with a ruler, not aim their criticisms at the general populace, as Yu suggests they were doing here.

> generally are great at debate and easily move others. Especially once it has been rectified, this can be used to assist *xiangyue*. . . . In this way, every time people sit around whiling away their free time like this, it becomes none other than a place where the blind are warned and the deaf are awakened. And the orthodox *jiao*, being attached to it, is also implemented at the same time. We must not overlook it because of its vulgarity and triviality![86]

Notably, instead of condemning the contents of oral stories, Yu focuses on the performers, the people actually involved in the transmission of oral culture. In the past, Yu claims, they might have been elevated to government service, but in the present, they have had to lower themselves to performing for the lowest common denominator. Clearly something is very wrong here, and it cannot be solely the fault of the literature they perform. Yu highlights how entertainers, considered part of the lowest class of society by his contemporaries, could be recruited as essential partners in good governance. By implication, allowing them to slip into the lowest class abandoned the values practiced by the ancients and showed that officials had forgotten how to turn the useless into the useful. The prejudice against these vulgar entertainers kept elites from seeing their skill at capturing audience attention and moving their hearts. This is a far departure from Qian's suggestion that book bans would solve the problem of *xiaoshuo jiao*, an approach that ignored the human element involved in its spread and the seductive power of orality. Yu asks his readers to trust that these performers will be able to achieve similar results as *xiangyue* lecturers, without all the years of education and seniority required to be in such a position. The argument allows Yu's ongoing frustration with elitists among his imagined readers to bleed through, condemning those who might still see the entertainment world as beneath contempt. They have missed so much by failing to adapt *jiaohua* to the times and the audiences they claim to desire to transform.

In the final point of "Shang dangshi shu," advocating for morality plays, Yu continues to direct his criticism at the officials and gentry who have

86.「古人樂官多取瞽者。矇誦瞍賦均屬詩詞箴銘無一非教化所寓。聖人所以化無用為有用。今之瞍矇多降為江湖謀食一派。故士大夫鄙不屑道。若輩但知趨投時好往往流入放蕩淫穢。大為人心之害。卽有一二勸懲之語亦不過曲終奏雅無補纖毫。然而所到之處鬨動。多人列坐環聽娓娓不倦。此極好勸善地位也。為政之要。在去其太甚苟可引人入善。何妨隨俗而施況。其人多口角便利動人。尤易正可藉以為鄉約之助。. . . 如此則消閒聚坐之時無非警聵覺聾之地。而正教亦附以並行正。不必以其鄙瑣而忽之也。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:13a–14b (punctuation added).

failed in their *jiaohua* duties.[87] However, throughout this essay, Yu has assumed that teaching and transforming the people remains his readers' earnest wish, even though they have lost sight of the most effective means to do it. Yu explains how the obscenity in current popular drama is the fault of officials who overlooked its potential uses and harms. Yu begins to resemble an eager salesperson, asking readers if they would like to learn about an approach that will solve their problems without spending a single copper cash. Yu's imagined listener responds by acknowledging how much the Qing has spent on *jiaohua*, from building schools, instituting and funding the *xiangyue* lectures, and building memorials to local worthies, all of which have become mere formalities that do little to effectively spread their messages. How could Yu have a better approach that wouldn't cost even one cash?

Yu replies with his own questions, asking why everyone knows the heroes from *Shuihu zhuan* and Student Zhang and Crimson from *Xixiang ji*. It is, of course, from watching drama. Yu credits ancient government institutions with adequately managing popular entertainments so that they once aligned with orthodox Confucian values. Later officials failed to see how the content of drama should likewise be controlled, thus transforming a space that could have been used to admonish goodness and warn against evil into one that promoted banditry and sex. It is through *their* inaction that *jiaohua*'s enemy was formed. Obscene drama remained the enemy, but the power of its orality could be turned around to support *xiangyue* lectures, perhaps even becoming their natural replacement:

> They serve to assist in transforming people's hearts. When *xiangyue* lectures are given, everyone hates listening to them. If dramas could be produced using the method of *xiangyue* lectures, then wouldn't people feel nothing but joy at watching them? Sincerely acting them out a hundred times must certainly influence hundreds of thousands of the young and old, both men and women, who crowd around to watch and listen. Thoroughly imbued by what they see and hear, this surely has the wonderful ability to make subtle, intangible changes. . . . Compared with the achievements of *xiangyue*, can it be any less than a hundred times better?[88]

87. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:14a–15b.

88.「為風化人心之助。宣講鄉約人皆厭聽。若以鄉約之法出之以戲。則人情無不樂觀。誠演一百必有千百老幼男婦環觀羣聽。耳濡目染之餘必有默化潛移之妙。. . . 較之鄉約之功何啻百倍。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:15a (punctuation added).

Anyone who truly wanted to *jiaohua* to succeed, Yu implies, would be a fool to continue to use old tactics when new, significantly more effective means were available to transform society from the bottom up, instead of the top down, and at such a low cost. Yu's positive assessment of the power of actors as educators contrasts with that of an earlier nineteenth-century figure, He Changling 賀長齡 (1785–1848), who served as the governor of Guizhou (貴州) in the 1830s and has been described as an "ingenious [and] ambitious" popular educator.[89] In what Alexander Woodside characterizes as "perhaps one of the most pathetically ugly moments in Qing educational history," He, on realizing that actors were more effective popular teachers than any of his formal efforts to expand education, had troupe leaders beaten and scripts burned, instead of writing better plays for them and enlisting them as allies as Yu would recommend only a few decades later.[90]

Though he began his essay with the threat Christianity posed to the Qing, Yu uses this external threat mainly as a platform from which to critique the flaws he saw in impractical and out-of-touch efforts to reform postwar society. It was an argument he would continue making until his death. In the prefaces to his morality play collection, a project close to his heart that occupied him until his death in 1874, Yu repeatedly uses a medical metaphor to argue how popular drama was the best medicine for the illness eating away at the Chinese body politic.[91] Recall that in "Jiaohua liang dadi lun" he described that the medicinal effects of *jiaohua* would fail unless the underlying miasmic *qi* of immoral books and plays were purged from the social body. There is no mention of bans or violence in this later piece, only proposals for healing. In one of these prefaces, entitled "Da kewen" (答客問 Answering a guest's questions), Yu imagines a laughter-filled dialogue between himself and a guest who scoffs at his resolve to reform society through the creation of new popular plays.[92] Reacting to the suggestion that these new plays might simply be as superfluous as legs drawn on a snake when compared with classic dramas on moral themes, Yu responds:

> "What my guest says is true. But may I ask, did the ancients write plays to educate superior people? Or to educate inferior people?"

89. Alexander Woodside, "Some Mid-Qing Theorists of Popular Schools: Their Innovations, Inhibitions, and Attitudes toward the Poor," *Modern China* 9, no. 1 (1983): 32.

90. Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 33.

91. For example, Yu, *Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:8a.

92. *Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:16a–21a.

> My guest replied, "It was probably for both the superior and inferior—for everyone." I responded, "Superior people can learn by reading classic books. In them, they find the admonishments of the classics and histories and the wisdom of the former sages. They don't need to get any of that from watching plays. Now, the class with a middling education can benefit from all kinds of currently circulating morality books, so they need not get anything from plays, either. Thus, plays are really meant for illiterate, ignorant men and women. Not only can they not study the classics, but they also can't even read morality books. So far, only lectures by the *xiangyue* exist to enlighten their ignorance. And in modern times, most people are especially bored of hearing them. Therefore, I have specifically used plays to touch the hearts and minds of such people. Consider this: a doctor must prescribe medication according to his patient's particular illness in order heal him. So, in order to educate inferior people, I must account for the desires of inferior people, in accordance with their particular illnesses. I've written the plays as a medical prescription, composed as a treatment for all the evils that have become habitual among the inferior classes."[93]

Yu Zhi's vocation as a teacher comes out strongly as the dialogue continues. Describing his guest as an avid donor of medicine to the area, he asks which diseases are the most common so that Yu might donate the most useful medications too. He then asks if there is any need for medications that treat rare diseases, to which the guest responds, "Such rare diseases are barely seen even once in ten million people, why bother preparing them?"[94] Yu points out that classic plays with moral messages feature elite characters whose experiences are far from ordinary. Like medicines for rare diseases, they are useful only to a very few. His new plays, earthy though they may be, are like medicines for diseases common throughout the population, remedies that maximize philanthropic efforts to heal the

93.「客所言亦是。請問古人作戲為上等人說法耶。為下等人說法耶。客曰。大約上下等兼該耳。予曰。上等人讀書明理。有經史訓言儒先格論在無取乎戲也。卽中等人亦有近所傳勸善諸書在亦無取乎戲也。所以演戲者為不識字之愚夫愚婦耳。彼愚夫愚婦既不能讀書明理又不能看善書。卽宣講鄉約以曉愚蒙。而近世人情又皆厭聽。故特借戲以感動之。譬如醫者之用藥須對病立方乃得見效。既為下等人說法自須切定下等人用意乃為對病。予之所作大約按切近日下等人所犯惡習多作對病方。」*Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:16b–17a (punctuation added).

94.「此奇怪之病千萬人中所僅見。何煩製備耶。」*Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:18b (punctuation added).

moral illnesses of the poor as well as their bodily pains.[95] Popular literature, particularly vernacular performance texts written for the benefit of the illiterate masses, is the correct medicine for social reform from the bottom up.[96] Composing and distributing them is as much a philanthropic good as donating medication during a plague.

In "Shang dangshi shu," Yu appealed mostly to those in government who were in the position to influence policies on institutions like the *xiangyue* lectures and charity schools. He attempted to expand their perspectives on how traditional *jiaohua* might succeed with a few reforms, to show them how they might go beyond traditional approaches to be even more effective at saving their dynasty from collapse. Good statecraft could, and should, involve more than officials and gentry, who had already proven themselves ineffective at their task in a variety of ways. Even so, though Yu worked for the rest of his life to get morality plays to catch on among popular audiences and wealthy patrons alike, he found only marginal success. The version of himself he presents as chatting with his initially rude guest in "Da kewen" is indomitably positive and convinced of the rightness of his approach. His extended metaphor about sponsoring medications amid a pandemic perhaps indicates that he was hoping that sponsors of future editions of his plays or of acting troupes, who would learn and perform them, might be reading these words. Regardless of his audiences, whether the powerful or the wealthy (or both), the message is clear in both pieces. New institutions were needed to uphold and revitalize ancient traditions, and consequence of ignoring the dire need for these reforms was nothing less than dynastic collapse, an ongoing apocalypse that Yu tried tirelessly to avert.

"If There Were Not Such People, Then Whom Could I Follow?"

Whether we look at Yu's conservative endorsements of destroying popular literature throughout Volume Eleven of *Deyi lu*, or his polemical essays published elsewhere that push conservative Confucian scholars and bureaucrats to see beyond their social prejudices, Yu's works analyzed in this chapter are missing a persistent element that is present in much of his other work: the fear of catastrophic heavenly retribution. In these pieces, Yu is focused more on the practical considerations of spreading Confu-

95. *Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:18b.
96. *Shuji tang jinyue*, 1:21a.

cian values to make governing the populace easier than on any supernatural acts of retribution. Yet Yu's convictions about the potential uses and abuses of popular entertainment were still related to his strongly held views on popular literature, the decline of social mores, and the disasters—past, present, and future—that Heaven inevitably sent as punishment. By exploring how popular entertainments worked on their audiences and who was responsible for their spread, Yu developed a new approach to *jiaohua* that complicated the idea of a simple transmission of values from upper to lower social groups embodied in *xiangyue* lectures. What emerged was a radical idea that popular literature in a variety of genres could save the empire.

The *xiangyue* lectures already endorsed the idea that spoken words affected larger audiences than complex written statements in Classical Chinese ever could. But in the hyperliterate world of late imperial literati, it was difficult to seriously consider educational alternatives beyond centuries-old institutions and texts. Even so, Yu emphasized that in competition with powerful, dangerous enemies—popular drama and vernacular fiction—classical education lost out every time. In the next chapter, we will see how Yu's decades in primary school classrooms, among, we may assume, easily distractible students with few scholarly aspirations, forced him to come to terms with the failures of the educational system. How might teaching fulfil its true purpose, the moral transformation and improvement of all society, instead of boring little boys with rote memorization? The anxieties expressed in "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," whether years of classical education could adequately combat even one obscene book, propelled him to create new curricula and eventually reimagine the purpose of foundational educational systems. If Yu did not see any clever moralists with new techniques to *jiaohua* society whom he could follow, then he would simply have to create them himself.

2

Transformative Teaching and the Power of Morality Textbooks

Between 1842 and 1846, Yu compiled and composed seven texts for students and teachers to use in the classroom. Not all these works have survived, but based on their titles, the majority were intended for use in students' earliest years. Though Yu was only in his midthirties, since his early teens he had supported his family by teaching elementary students. These texts, all focused on instilling morality through classroom instruction, are the first citations in his *nianpu* of works he published and distributed. Taken together, they are a natural first step in what would become Yu's lifelong task of composing morality literature for audiences that he believed were missing literature tailored to their specific needs. Though all of these works were composed before the Taiping War and thus predate Yu's turn toward popular morality genres such as *baojuan* and plays, this chapter reaches back across the apocalyptic divide of the war to link Yu's early work to the heightened development of his advocacy during and after the war. In Yu's morality textbooks for elementary readers and listeners, we find the roots of his later ideas, best summarized in "Shang dangshi shu," introduced in the previous chapter, that elementary education could assume an essential role in transforming society from the bottom up. Morality texts like these, Yu claimed, could efficiently shape the hearts and minds of young boys in the classroom in ways that the classics could not, especially during the brief time most nonelite families could spare for their sons' educations.

These new textbooks and their paratextual framing materials, especially Yu's own prefaces, which explain why new collections of morality poems, tales, and vernacular classroom lectures were so important, are the

springboard for all of Yu's more creative ideas about mass education. None of these 1840s works are extant in their original or even early versions, but for the most part they were reprinted after the war, sometimes even in multiple editions.[1] Many also include paratextual materials explaining how and why supporters helped fund Yu's efforts to bring this material into the classroom, with some texts still being reproduced even in the Republican era. Some even credited miraculous healing or exam success to their contributions to reprinting these works. While this chapter looks closely at what Yu was doing in the 1840s when, in a flurry of productivity, he wrote and compiled many of these texts, it also asks what it is about these works, and Yu's proposed uses for them, that contributed to their longevity in print.

The reception of these works, along with Yu's later proposals for educational reform in elementary schools, especially charity schools, demonstrate his growing sense that traditional education could not achieve the moral transformation of society that would avert disaster. What was it about the state of elementary education in the late Qing and its commonly used texts that disillusioned Yu during his first two decades in the classroom? Dissatisfied with the limited time he had with students and the emptiness of teaching materials that had no clear moral value or defied easy comprehension, Yu transformed the role of the least-respected instructor in the Qing educational system into something new. This new primary school teacher would be one who, by merit of being in contact with the most students at the fringes of educated society, could become an essential force for widespread moral transformation of not only his young students, but also their families. With works like these in hand, a burned-out elementary school teacher like Yu would be reinvested with supreme moral purpose and a new sense of his importance in the world. He may never have been paid more than a modest stipend or been able to live in his own home, but he would know that his sacrifice was worthwhile for the benefits that his students would carry with them through their transformed lives.

To understand what Yu wanted to transform, we first must review the state of primary education in the Qing. Who was it for, where was it available, and what did its students study? How did Yu participate in this sys-

1. One text, the *Guwen guanzhi yuexuan* (古文觀止約選 Condensed selections of best examples of classical prose), appears to exist in two prewar editions in Chinese collections (see table below), but this would have been intended for much more advanced readers than the elementary textbooks that this chapter focuses on.

tem as a young student, and then soon afterward as a teacher, while also attempting to complete his own studies and advance his career by passing the civil service exams? Three extant prefaces to his early works for elementary students reveal his initial concerns about the purpose and benefits of such education. When most boys' families could not afford to educate them for more than a few years before they would need to begin working, what lessons would they take with them if they could recite the *Daxue* (大學 Great learning) or *Zhongyong* (中庸 Doctrine of the mean) by heart but remembered nothing of what they meant? What did anyone involved—the families, the boys, the instructor himself—have to show for all the time and energy invested in the classroom? As a young man who struggled to afford an education and who had, for a time, needed to withdraw from school to work after his adoptive father died, Yu had firsthand experience with the difficulties facing families who aspired to give their children a classical education. Against the odds, Yu succeeded in gaining the education that his family had worked so hard to provide for him, even during financial stress. He did not quit to learn a trade but remained in school, working in the trenches through low-paying teaching jobs in the hopes that one day he could hold a permanent position in the civil bureaucracy after succeeding against ever-greater odds to pass increasingly difficult exams. The effort had to have some greater meaning to justify all the time spent weathering the vicissitudes of academic pursuit. With his textbooks that promised their users—teachers and students alike—moral transformation and heavenly approval, Yu gave himself and countless other men like him a much-desired and newfound purpose.

Qing Elementary Education—Schools and Their Curricula

Like the *xiangyue* lectures, from the early Qing, primary education was established as another fixture of government-mandated *jiaohua* efforts. In 1652, all rural areas were required to establish community schools (社學 *shexue*), and in 1713, following an apparently successful experiment outside of Beijing in 1702, an order went out to all provinces to establish charity schools (義學 *yixue*) as well.[2] Though initially referred to by separate names, in practice, the two types of schools often had little to discriminate

2. Hsiao, 237–38. For a succinct introduction to the Qing educational system, see Meimei Wang, Bas van Leeuwen, and Jieli Li, *Education in China, ca. 1840–Present* (Brill, 2021), 2–5.

them clearly in either policy or common reference.[3] Both were institutions supported in some degree by a mixture of state and private funds. As with the *xiangyue* lectures, these schools varied greatly in terms of their longevity, reach, and impact based on the degree of support from elites and officials.[4] Nevertheless, they were seen as valuable because of their potential to transform society via education. Not only would they give young men with academic and political potential a chance to rise up in their communities, they exposed even those who would never join the civil service to the civilizing influence of the Confucian classics and associated works.[5] As we will see in this chapter, later advocates of charity schools, including Yu, also hoped that these institutions would enable their students to further spread the good morals learned in the classroom back home among their family members and communities.[6]

What did boys who attended a free or low-cost school study during their years there? While few of them were expected to succeed in the exam system, the content of the exams nonetheless exerted a strong influence over the materials used, even if educators acknowledged that these were not necessarily appropriate.[7] The regulations in 1652 that established community schools also specified the official textbooks for the curriculum. These included the Four Books and Five Classics, along with later works focusing on neo-Confucian interpretation, history, and commentary including the *Xingli daquan* (性理大全 Great compendium on human nature and principle) and the *Zizhi tongjian gangmu* (資治通鑑綱目 Outline and details of the comprehensive mirror for aid in government).[8] The mid-Qing scholar-official Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696–1771) made elementary education a priority of his *jiaohua* work when he established or took over the management of nearly 700 elementary schools in Yunnan in the 1730s. Continuing this focus as governor of Shaanxi in 1744, he ensured that local schools in his new posting were stocked with a full complement

3. Hsiao, 238–239; Leung, "Elementary Education," 384–85.

4. Hsiao, 239–240; Leung, "Elementary Education," 383.

5. Hsiao, 239; Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 18–26.

6. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 34–35. The only named source Rawski cites comes from Chen Wenshu's (1771–1843) essay on charity schools in *Deyi lu*, though she says in n. 55 that "this is a common theme running through the charitable school regulations." It is unclear if she means the regulations in *Deyi lu* specifically, which were all handpicked for inclusion by Yu, or regulations more broadly from other sources not influenced by Yu's evangelical understanding of teaching.

7. Leung, "Elementary Education," 382.

8. *Qianding daqing huidian shili* 欽定大清會典事例 (1899 ed.), 332:1b. https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=26805&page=42

of the state-required books, along with a few of his own choosing. In the century that followed its establishment, the curriculum expanded to include more texts but was also modified to account for the difficulty of some of the original works. For example, the seventy-volume *Xingli daquan*, compiled in the early Ming, was replaced by *Xingli jingyi* (性理精義 Essential meanings of human nature and principle), a concise adaptation at only twenty volumes, produced at the Kangxi Emperor's behest. Chen added some simpler texts to the list for his Shaanxi residents, such as Zhu Xi's *Xiaoxue* and the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of filial piety), as well as two of his own works—a textbook on statecraft and a compilation of miscellaneous advice.[9]

The texts above, while foundational to the intellectual life of an educated Qing man, were beyond the comprehension of an early elementary school student, who first needed to learn to read. More basic works, though missing from the official lists, were necessary, and those works might have been all that a boy of limited means was exposed to before he had to return to help with the family trade.[10] Even if education might have been free at charity schools, many families could not spare their children's labor for long.[11] Most children learning to read in the Ming or Qing dynasties began by working through the *Sanzi jing* (三字經 Three character classic), *Baijia xing* (百家姓 Hundred family names), and *Qianzi wen* (千字文 Thousand character essay). The *Sanzi jing* summarizes basic Confucian morality, and as a metrical text, lent itself easily to being recited aloud and memorized.[12] The *Baijia xing*, perhaps less riveting, lists over 500 surnames, which were useful because most of those characters also served other purposes. *Qianzi wen*, the final primer of the sequence and also the oldest, uses four-character couplets with 1,000 unique characters to introduce everything from terms for the cosmos to grammatical particles. These were such widespread curricular materials that they were collectively known as the *San bai qian* and were used in primary education for centuries, creating a shared childhood culture among their readers, who

9. Rowe, 413–15.

10. Leung, "Elementary Education," 393.

11. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 49.

12. For a brief introduction to this work, see James T. C. Liu, "The Classical Chinese Primer: Its Three-character Style and Authorship," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 2 (1985): 191–96. For more detailed analysis, see Leung Ki Che, "Sanzijing li lishi shijian de wenti《三字經》裡歷史時間的問題," in *Shijian, lishi yu jiyi* 時間、歷史與記憶, ed. Huang Yinggui 黃應貴 (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan minzuxue yanjiusuo, 1999), 32–74.

attained a basic literacy of about 2,000 characters from studying them over about a year.[13]

Once students graduated from the most basic primers, though they may have begun to memorize the Four Books for recitation, it was unlikely that their reading skills were up to the task of comprehending them as written texts, though that was often considered beside the point.[14] In contrast to the state standards for the curriculum at the upper elementary level and beyond, including exam requirements, and to centuries of convention for the curriculum at the entry level with usage of *San bai qian*, the middle reading levels included a variety of textbooks, indicating more flexibility. A diverse array of unofficial textbooks filled this space.[15] These could include *Xiaoxue*, mentioned above, and other didactic morality texts, such as *Dizi gui* (弟子規 Rules for students and children) and a class of works called *Riji gushi* (日記故事 Daily stories)—anthologies that began to be published in the Ming with stories written in simple Classical Chinese about historical moral exemplars.[16] At this stage, some instructors also chose to introduce their students to poetry. There were several commonly known poetry texts for elementary students: "Shentong shi" (神童詩 A child prodigy's poem), a long poem purportedly written by a brilliant child from the Ming about the importance of education; the variously attributed *Qianjia shi* (千家詩 Poems of a thousand masters); and the well-known—even to this day—*Tangshi sanbai shou* (唐詩三百首 Three hundred Tang poems).[17] The latter was created to make up for the haphazard choices in *Qianjia shi*, which did not in fact feature 1,000 masters (only 125),though its disorganization did not hamper it from being widely used in classrooms for centuries.[18] It was this flexible middle

13. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 47–48.

14. For more on the rote memorization of the classics and some concerns about its effectiveness, see Leung, "Elementary Education," 394–96.

15. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 50–51. See also Cynthia Brokaw, "Reading Best-sellers of the Nineteenth Century: Commercial Publishing in Sibao," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw and Kai-Wing Chow (University of California Press, 2005), 184–231, specifically 205–17 for more examples of such works circulating in the nineteenth century.

16. For more on "Daily Stories" see Zheng Meiyu 鄭美瑜, "Chuantong mengshu riji gushi tanjiu 傳統蒙書《日記故事》探究" (Master's thesis, National Taipei University, 2010). For other morality texts used in this way, see Leung, "Elementary Education," 396–97.

17. On "Shentong shi" see Zhang Zhigong 张志公, *Chuantong yuwen jiaoyu chutan* 传统语文教育初探 (Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1964), 95–96.

18. On the relationship between *Qianjia shi* and *Tangshi sanbai shou*, see Gregory

ground between the fundamentals and the classics, where teacher preference determined the chosen texts rather than tradition or government mandate, that Yu hoped to fill with morality texts purpose-written for classroom use.

Yu as Student and as Teacher

Yu spent much of his life in the classroom, becoming a teacher not many years after he had started as a student. Let us briefly consider his trajectory from student to teacher as a concrete example of how a boy of limited means might move through the education system of the late Qing, considering that Yu's decades as a teacher (and repeated exam failures) would increasingly convince him that much had to change if education were to effectively fulfill its *jiaohua* purpose. As in the official lists of curricular texts above, those used for his earliest studies were considered beneath mention in his *nianpu*. Though he almost certainly used the *San bai qian* to learn to read, probably at home, the first time his biographers mention Yu's education is in the anecdote previously referenced as a foundational moment that shaped his relationship with morality literature. When he was nine *sui* (seven years old), he began studying at a school.[19] Yu came home one day complaining that a substitute teacher used popular books and drinking songs as teaching materials. His uncle gave him a copy of *Ershisi xiao gushi* in response. His biographer notes that Yu's elementary education concluded later that year. Initially, his further education proceeded quickly. In the following year (1818),under a new instructor, Yu studied the *Daxue, Zhongyong, and Lunyu* (論語 The analects). In 1819, he moved on to the *Mengzi* (孟子 Mencius). The next year he started on the *Shijing* (詩經 Classic of poetry). Tragically, in 1821 his studies were put on hold because his uncle died, leaving the eleven-year-old Yu to support the family with farm labor.[20] Two years later, however, someone determined

Patterson, "Later Imperial Poetry Anthologies," in *Literary Information in China*, ed. Jack W. Chen et al. (Columbia University Press, 2020), 226–28.

19. Though as a general rule, ages given in *sui* are assumed to be one year more than one's age in Western calendar years, Yu was born on the nineteenth day of the eleventh lunar month of 1809 (December 25, 1809), and thus he became two *sui* when he was a mere six weeks old. Though this matters little in his adulthood, for this section on his childhood studies, it bears remembering how developmentally young he was for his age in *sui*.

20. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:2b–3a.

that Yu was competent enough to hire as a low-level elementary school teacher, teaching the fundamentals of literacy and Confucian morality to boys only a few years younger than him. His elementary school teaching is mentioned again in 1825 and 1827 in the context of how he continued to support his family and the impact of his teaching on his ongoing studies.[21] Yu also relates that from the time he was thirteen until he was nineteen and reentered school as student again (while still teaching), he studied examples of classical prose in his spare time, probably from the *Guwen guanzhi*.[22]

The *nianpu*'s attention to Yu's studies and teaching diminishes after noting that he failed the *tongshi* (童試 apprentice exam) for the first time in 1829. Though he continued his studies in the 1830s, was granted *fusheng* (附生 secondary government student) status in 1835, and finally gained admission to the provincial academy in 1839, nothing is recorded about how he supported himself and his family during this decade. It is likely that he continued teaching, because in 1842 he became particularly disillusioned with the impact of texts like "Shentong shi" and *Qianjia shi* on students. Perhaps he had direct experience when he pointed out that the use of these texts was especially a problem for students enrolled in charity schools. Existing teaching materials, Yu believed, could not impart the moral knowledge that their readers needed to take with them beyond the classroom, especially if they only had a few years in which to learn. He believed, however, that *shanshu* (善書 morality books) could be used in teaching the classics. His *nianpu* records that his first effort at a morality classroom text, *Fameng bidu* (發蒙必讀 Must-reads for teaching), was immediately in high demand and that teachers competed for its limited copies because they were delighted by its moral value. Perhaps based on the perceived success of his first work, two years later, Yu compiled two books clearly marked as competitors to "Shentong shi" and *Qianjia shi*: "Xu shentong shi" (續神童詩 Sequel to a child prodigy's poem) and *Xu qianjia shi* (續千家詩 Sequel to poems of a thousand masters).[23]

What these books looked like or included when first printed is difficult to say because no extant editions of these three earliest works predate the Taiping War. In addition to the destructive power of the Taiping War on libraries, the contexts in which Yu intended his textbooks to circulate sug-

21. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:3b–4a.
22. "Guwen guanzhi yuexuan 古文觀止約選," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4:7a–b.
23. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:6b–7a.

gest that the lack of many surviving copies should be of little surprise.[24] Whether the works were meant for distribution of a volume to each school for instructor use or one for each student, these texts were meant to be used heavily and produced quickly and inexpensively. Existing editions, printed decades after Yu first wrote them, show these characteristics in many ways. The 1865 edition of *Riji gushi xuji* (日記故事續集 Sequel to daily stories) is advertised for two different prices on its title page, 126 *wen* (文) if printed on bast fiber paper, but only 84 *wen* if printed on bamboo paper.[25] The extant copy is printed on the latter. A copy of the 1870 edition of *Xu qianjia shi* held by Harvard University shows that one of its former owners thought little enough of the work that its front and back covers, as well as some inside pages, were used as scrap paper for repeated practice of characters in both red and black ink.[26] Though the version of *Fameng bidu* that I own was printed in 1909, long after the 1842 first edition, it too shows signs of heavy use. Printed on cheap paper that was later extensively damaged by bookworms, this slim typeset edition contains a number of typographical errors that some reader corrected as they read. These books were meant to be tools, and their cheap quality and occasional signs of heavy use (or abuse, in the case of Harvard's copy of *Xu qianjia shi*) are testaments to the utility that later generations of instructors and educational philanthropists saw in Yu's works. Yu framed his justification for these new texts in terms of how existing curriculum and teaching approaches failed pupils, speaking to frustrations among educators that he knew all too well himself. These new textbooks, as the following section addresses, offered teachers inspiration and a sense of purpose, which perhaps account for a great deal of their appeal.

Pedagogical Decay and Renewal

Yu composed three texts between 1844 and 1845 intended to improve the curriculum, and in his colophons to these early texts, he paints a picture of an educational system in crisis. Writing in the decade preceding the Taip-

24. On the war's destruction of texts and postwar attempts to reconstruct what was lost, see Wooldridge, 154–61.

25. For more on these and other types of Chinese paper in circulation in this period, see Devin Fitzgerald, "Spreading Without Being Seen: Towards a Global History of Early Modern Chinese Papers," *Ars Orientalis* 51 (2021): 105–32.

26. *Xu qianjia shi* (Yihua tang, 1870), https://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990098691090203941/catalog

TABLE 2: Yu Zhi's Works for Classroom Use

Year	Title	Status of Extant Editions
1842	發蒙必讀 *Fameng bidu* (Must-reads for teaching)	Apparently printed together with 續神童詩 and 續千家詩 in 1865; this edition is possibly available in the collections of Ningbo Tianyi ge Library and Shengzhou City Library, unconfirmed. The 1909 edition of a book with this title in my personal collection is actually a reorganized and expanded version of "Xu shentong shi."
1844	續神童詩 "Xu shentong shi" (Sequel to a child prodigy's poem) Also titled *Xiaoxue shentong shi* 小學神童詩 (Lesser learning child prodigy's poems)	Widespread; short enough to include in anthologies. Reprinted in *Deyi lu* 10: 6.3a–6b.
	續千家詩 *Xu qianjia shi* (Sequel to poems of a thousand masters) Also titled *Xiaoxue qianjia shi* 小學千家詩 (Lesser learning poems of ten thousand masters)	Postface in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4: 10a–11a. Titled as 小學千家詩, Wuxi Dejian zhai, [n.d.]; this edition is held at Suzhou University Library. Shanghai Yihua tang, 1870 edition held at Harvard University Library. Available digitally via Google Books. Yilan Rijin tang, 1936 edition held at National Central Library, Taiwan.
1845	學堂講語 *Xuetang jiangyu* (Lectures for the schoolroom)	Postface in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4: 12a–12b. Edition with Japanese glosses: Ōsaka Eieidō 1880, held at National Diet Library and at Harvard University Library. Available digitally at doi.org/10.11501/754965. Yu is credited as the compiler.
	訓學良規 *Xunxue lianggui* (Good rules for teaching)	Unknown. Qing books by the same title found in catalog searches are credited to various authors, none of them Yu Zhi.

	繪圖增定日記故事 *Huitu zengding riji gushi* (Illustrated and revised daily stories)	Perhaps renamed 日記故事續集 in a later edition. Shanghai Baoxian tang, 1865. This edition opens with postface by Yu dated 1844. Held at Washington University in St. Louis Library.
1845	古文觀止約選 *Guwen guanzhi yuexuan* (Condensed selections of the best examples of classical prose)	Preface in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4: 7a–8a. Wuxi Sanhe fang, 1851. This edition is held by Suzhou University Library. A possible 1850 edition may be held at Guilin Provincial Library, unconfirmed.
	名場必得技 *Mingchang bide ji* (Must-have skills for the exam hall)	Unknown
	Later related work	
1868 (?)	學堂日記故事圖說 *Xuetang Riji gushi tushuo*	Not mentioned in *nianpu*. Overlaps with but also includes different contents in comparison with 日記故事續集 (Shanghai: Baoxian tang, 1865). Prefaces by Wu Yun and Yu Zhi dated 1868 in Suzhou Dejian zhai 1875 edition held at Harvard University Library. Some later editions available in library collections in China and in a facsimile reprint in *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集, Vol. 39, mistitled as 忠孝節義.

ing War, Yu had yet to develop a sense of moral crisis that reached the apocalyptic heights prompted by the conflict. In these critiques of early education, intended to give even those with no hope of entering the civil service a strong foundation in Confucian morality, Yu began to point out fundamental failures in others' approaches to teaching, implying that they failed to properly transform their targeted audiences. The implications would become all the more significant once war began. Yu was hardly the first educator to point out how charity schools generally failed to achieve their lofty *jiaohua* goals, to say nothing of the disconnect between teaching toward the civil service exam and the real educational needs of impoverished students who attended the institutions.[27] But Yu may have been

27. Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 11–16.

one of the earliest to argue explicitly against teaching the classics to boys who would never comprehend them, refuting the assumption of his predecessors that rote memorization and repetition would render difficult classical texts intelligible to untrained audiences.[28]

Beginning with the postface to *Xu qianjia shi*, this section examines colophons to texts including *Xuetang jiangyu* (學堂講語 Lectures for the schoolroom) and *Riji gushi xuji*. All works first written in 1844–1845, these texts and their paratexts enable an exploration of how Yu characterized the problems with elementary education in his early years as a reformist, and how his new texts attempted to provide practical, achievable solutions. All of his later morality campaigns are rooted in this basically optimistic view of pedagogy. Everyone, from children to illiterate old women, was capable of learning if they could only receive the kind of teaching that addressed their specific needs and interests. These early efforts began within the context he knew best, the schoolroom, but already display many of the hallmarks of his later works, both in his hopes for their use and in their reception and transmission afterward.

Although *Qianjia shi* was widely used to help students transition from the foundational texts of literacy to their first encounter with more complex content, many educators and literati were dissatisfied with it. While some were concerned about *Qianjia shi*'s lack of organization, Yu's objection was instead moral in nature. Though the poems were composed by famous writers and easy to recite aloud, Yu lamented their failure to instill virtue in their readers at the same time as they advanced literacy. Most students could not easily grasp their poetic meanings either. "Children who recite [them] will be perplexed and without understanding," he points out, with nearly two decades of teaching experience informing this pedagogical assessment.[29] Although prior generations of scholars had provided simple moral songs and poems for children's learning,

> all teachers consider them shallow and overlook them. It never occurs to them that the sons of poor families do not have the ability to study for long. After entering the classroom, after two or three years at most, they are finished. In these two to three years, those who teach them cannot finish explaining matters. Also, the goals of the classics transmitted by the worthies all belong to the learning of

28. Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 15–16.

29.「童年吟誦惘然無知」"Xu qianjia shi ba 續千家詩跋" in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4:10a.

> adults. Even if one were to explain them, [young students] cannot grasp the meaning. If one does not guide them with shallow, easily accessible songs, but only uses books that are not particularly essential, it is a waste of their time. The books that they have studied, they can't even explain. It is a case of having studied being just the same as not having studied.[30]

Yu's damning conclusion, that traditional approaches to teaching that do not take into account student needs or engagement were a waste of time for all involved, surely resonated with his contemporaries as much as it probably does with teachers today, over a century later.[31]

Here I wish to draw attention to two particular points of resonance with the final exasperated sentiment that the results of such study are the same as no study at all. First, based on their intense study of Zhu Xi's commentaries to the Four Books, his educated contemporary readers would surely have caught an echo of a saying attributed to Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), quoted by Zhu Xi in his prefatory section to the *Analects*. "Master Cheng said, 'People today do not know how to study. If one studies the *Analects*, and before studying one is a certain type of person, and after studying one is still that type of person, then it is as if they never studied it.'"[32] For men who had spent their lives absorbing these words in the hopes of passing the civil service exam and still found themselves year after year teaching them in the same way that they had been taught, and to children who did not share the same ambitions, how very futile it must all have seemed. In the Northern Song (960–1127), Master Cheng complained that people could not study. Eight centuries later, Yu suggested that his peers could not even teach because they refused to employ the right books or understand their students' needs.

The second resonance is somewhat removed from the immediacy of a familiar text but is one that perspicacious readers of this book may already have spotted. In chapter 1, I analyzed a short essay by the mid-Qing scholar-official Qian Daxin about the danger posed by the common peo-

30.「師每以其淺近而忽之。殊不思貧家子弟力不能多讀書。入塾二三年率多罷去。此二三年中為之師者既未必盡能講解。而聖經賢傳之旨多屬大人之學。即講亦未能領略。苟非迪以淺近詩歌而徒以不甚切要之書虛其歲月。所讀之書又不能解說。是雖讀而一如未讀也。」"Xu qianjia shi ba," 4:10a–b (punctuation added).

31. Woodside's work on mid-Qing educators highlights how much in the minority Yu was with this view. Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 19–20.

32.「程子曰:'今人不會讀書. 如讀論語, 未讀時是此等人, 讀了後又只是此等人, 便是不曾讀.'」Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* (Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 43.

ple's widespread familiarity with popular literature due to its ability to spread orally. Qian argued that this allowed it to eclipse the impact of the three traditional *jiao*—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—and spread socially destabilizing evils instead of goodness. Orality means that "even children, women, and the illiterate also have *heard it as if they read it themselves*" (emphasis added).[33] In his *Deyi lu*, Yu used this essay to open Volume 11,which focused on banning and eliminating obscene literature. However, Yu hoped to harness the dangerous power of orality to transform society through the *xiangyue* lectures, oral storytelling, and morality plays. What if educators, instead of expending their energy on vain efforts to teach students with texts that they would never grasp in their limited time in school, could draw on a power that allowed even the illiterate to understand a text as if they had read it themselves? Yu claims that *Xu qianjia shi* provides beleaguered teachers a way to give students of limited means real knowledge to take with them after they leave the classroom, all from studying simple morality poems. Even more, he offers teachers a new sense of purpose by providing a way to achieve the *jiaohua* mission of elementary education without having to choose between teaching morally neutral (or morally questionable) popular texts that hold student interest on the one hand, and the difficult, dense classics and works of master poets that leave students frustrated and confused on the other.

In his postface to *Xuetang jiangyu*, Yu is even more explicit about the importance of incorporating socially and morally relevant lessons into the elementary classroom, facilitated by the texts he has written. He begins by questioning the true point of education, reminding readers that when fathers only want their sons to gain literacy and teachers are simply doing a job to support themselves and their families, both have forgotten that education should be about teaching students how to conduct themselves as moral humans. What is the consequence of this sort of education?

> In my opinion, if children enter school and only are taught to read but are not taught how to conduct themselves, then their literacy is only a tool suitable for aiding them in doing evil and carrying out lechery. On the contrary, they are inferior to illiterate, foolish commoners who only know to respect the law and remain content with their positions. It is not that the Four Books and Five Classics are unclear on the way to be a good person, but that the words of the

33.「以至兒童婦女不識字者◦亦皆聞而如見之◦」 *Deyi lu*, 11:1.1a, (original punctuation).

> sages are profound and difficult to comprehend. Even with explication, [children] cannot understand them.[34]

Though not directly challenging the importance of the imperially mandated curriculum, Yu nonetheless questions its efficacy. Elementary schools were created with the aim of spreading morality as a stabilizing force, but according to Yu, they in fact contribute to the spread of immorality if their instructors do not care about the consequences of their teaching.[35] It would be better to be illiterate and influenced by only what one hears than to learn to read but apply the skill incorrectly. Notably, Yu has moved from students who have studied but are so unfamiliar with the texts that it is like they have not studied at all to the conclusion that it would have been better for some not to begin studying at all if they were given an education that was morally bankrupt. Yu's despair in "Jiaohua liang dadi lun"—about the power of a single glance at an obscene book to dismantle ten years of classical education—becomes ever more understandable if this is all he thought students might be gaining in the classroom.

Once again, the solution is to use Yu's newly compiled work to teach students with materials that efficiently accomplish education's true purpose: shaping moral behavior. *Xuetang jiangyu* consists of short lectures selected from other lecture sourcebooks, nearly always cited, that speak on issues like filial piety, brotherly affection, household management, and earning merit. As Yu explains, "They can be grasped quickly, just like the vernacular; even after only one reading, the children will, without exception, already understand it."[36] Moreover, students are not the only ones who might benefit from this type of education. He encourages teachers by reminding them that what they do in the classroom counts as more than just a profession, calling for them to join him in returning education to its fundamental purpose. "It is up to everyone to accumulate merit, and only for teachers is it easy. Where under Heaven can I find those who teach so

34.「竊意童蒙入學若但教以識字而不教以為人。則識字乃適足以濟其為惡逞奸之具。反不如不識字之愚氓。猶知畏法守分也。但為人之道四子五經非不詳備。而聖言幽遠解悟為難。卽與講解亦未能明了。」"Xuetang jiangyu ba 學堂講語跋," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 4:12a (punctuation added).

35. Both Chen Hongmou and the Qianlong Emperor had been concerned about this but seem not to have proposed solutions to the problem of students getting just enough education to get into trouble. Woodside, "Mid-Qing Theorists," 23.

36.「意取明快如白話一般。纔讀一過童子已無不曉悟。」"Xuetang jiangyu ba," 4:12b (punctuation added).

diligently?"[37] Engaging students with materials that could be grasped immediately once heard, not read, is important not only so students will be better people but so teachers will benefit by earning merit that the heavenly justice system will reward. Or at least one could hope so, even if in the mundane world they were seen as failed scholars, eking out a living on the edge of poverty.

With this, it becomes clear that Yu's initial observation about the effectiveness of *shanshu* that motivated him to create morality texts for the classroom also influenced how he encouraged teachers to adopt them. If sponsoring, distributing, and reciting *shanshu* generates merit, then so too would spreading these textbooks, given their salutary contents and effects on young listeners. Though he cast his works as sequels to familiar primers, they included materials that would not be out of place in a *shanshu*, especially with lurid tales of heavenly retribution and extended discourses (both poems and prose) on topics such as the beef taboo and the dangers of the four vices (alcohol, sex, wealth, and anger). *Xu qianjia shi* also included several poems produced by spirit writing, a practice popular with members of a diverse array of religious groups that produced countless texts, including many *shanshu*.

Even though Yu's 1844 colophon to *Riji gushi xuji* offers the reader much less justification for this sequel than the two colophons considered above, it also explicitly links the need for simple classroom texts with the effectiveness of *baoying* (報應 reward and punishment) tales in stirring up feelings. By implication, then, simple *baoying* tales may be the most efficient kind of teaching material available. In fact, his *Riji gushi xuji* would provide just such tales, although the issues covered in them would diverge widely from those in the varied works with the title *Riji gushi* that had circulated since the Ming. Yu links his sequel directly to this genre at the outset. Though Yu consistently refers to *Riji gushi* as if it were a single book, the term more properly refers to a genre of reference books related in form and print quality to Ming daily-use encyclopedias. As collections of stories about exemplary historical figures, their content could shift according to editorial preferences, but by the Qing, they all opened with the stories of the *Ershisi xiao gushi*. These were followed by short stories grouped under headings such as "Making Friends" (交友類 *jiaoyou lei*) and "Filial Sentiments" (孝念類 *xiaonian lei*) that varied from edition to

37.「積德在人惟師最易。安得天下之為師者皆如此用心哉。」 "Xuetang jiangyu ba," 4:12b (punctuation added).

edition.[38] In producing a sequel to this entire genre of text, Yu had only to explain that his new version updated the tales as an aid to teachers looking for more morally uplifting materials. When, in contrast, many of the tales addressed subjects such as female infanticide, cherishing written paper, and non-killing, along with descriptions and images of gruesome scenes of retribution for sins like unfilial behavior or watching obscene plays, instructors who were used to more staid, traditional content may well have been shocked.

In 1868, Yu seemed to address criticism of this shift toward tales of explicit heavenly justice in his preface to *Xuetang riji gushi tushuo* (hereafter *Xuetang riji*), another illustrated collection of morality tales for schoolroom use. There, he admonished his readers not to overlook this text because its stories resembled those about karmic causes and effects. Since many of the stories were explicitly about rewards and punishments administered by a cast of heavenly and underworld functionaries as well as deities such as the Bodhisattva Guanyin, this reproach rings a little hollow. His stories really are about karmic causes and effects, and he went on to imply that rewards will come to those who adopt his works in their teaching. Taking a more defensive tone in this later preface, he added, "Scholars who are determined to make a name for themselves but neglect lecturing to their students, leaving these sorts of books on a high shelf [i.e., neglecting to use them], how are they any different from someone who climbs a tree looking for a fish?"[39] One cannot achieve a successful career without paying attention to how much merit is earned by teaching well, and conversely, to demerits accumulated through bad teaching; neglect would lead Heaven to determine that success was not deserved.

Yu repeatedly urged instructors to spend time lecturing on morality, emphasizing the importance of oral presentation especially when students may still struggle with literacy. As such, we may wish to consider all his works for early elementary school as promptbooks for a storyteller. As teachers came to understand their role in a different way, these textbooks provided rich resources to guide them through learning a new way to

38. See Zheng, "Chuantong mengshu riji gushi tanjiu," for detailed comparisons of many different *Riji gushi* versions. For an example of a Ming edition, see *Xinke taicang zangban quanbu hexiang zhushi dazi riji gushi* 新刻太倉藏版全補合像注釋大字日記故事, in *Mingdai tongsu riyong leishu jikan* 明代通俗日用類書集刊, ed. Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan lishi yanjiusuo wenhuashi 中國社會科學院歷史研究所文化室 (Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 14:319–51.

39.「士子志在功名。而懶於為子弟講說。置此等書於高閣。是何異緣木求魚也。」Yu, "Xuetang riji gushi tushuo [xu]," in *Xuetang riji*, 1a (punctuation in original).

teach. *Xuetang jiangyu* is the clearest example of a teaching guide, with vernacular prose already clearly written out for instructors to read aloud, word for word. *Riji gushi xuji* and the later *Xuetang riji* were perhaps more multipurpose works. For a student working through the text on his own, tales in simple Classical Chinese were sometimes annotated with brief explanations of unfamiliar terms. Most stories were paired with an illustration to further help the reader grasp the unfolding action. For the most part, the tales include little explanatory commentary on the plot, though the 1865 edition of *Riji gushi xuji* includes certain stories with extra lines of commentary on the story's subject matter squeezed in before and after the tale. Sometimes these comments extend even into the frame of the next page's illustration. Unsurprisingly, these are generally stories on issues that Yu cared deeply about, including cherishing written paper, the evils of obscene books and drama, and female infanticide.[40] Yu trusted his readers to grasp the meaning of most stories, however, without needing to insert his voice too strongly. As for his suggestion that they be used as aids for lectures, it was left up to the instructors to translate simple literary Chinese into vernacular themselves.

Xu qianjia shi is the most heavily annotated of the works, with commentary following nearly every poem, as well as pronunciation guides appearing in a narrow upper register. At first glance, the commentary appears to be directed at student readers. For example, the annotation after the following poem, included in a set of twelve on filial piety credited to a certain Yu Ruming 虞汝明, asks students to reflect on their classroom conduct using a first-person voice:

> At six or seven it's time to send them to study. Working to pay tuition, the fees are often late.
> Fresh tea and food must daily be offered. They say, "this is the beginning of our son's hard work."
> [Commentary:] If I don't study diligently, how can I face my dad and mom?[41]

But on further examination, Yu's commentarial additions to the poems by

40. *Riji gushi xuji*, 1:31b, 42b, 43b, 47b–48a.

41.「六七齡時要讀書。經營脩脯費躊躇。現成茶飯朝朝奉。道是吾兒辛苦初。[in half-size characters:] 若不勤苦讀書。何以對我爺娘」*Xu qianjia shi*, 1:2b (original punctuation). Yu Ruming may refer to a Ming musician, but no poetry is associated with him. It is just as likely that this refers to one of surely thousands of other men who had the same name in early modern China.

diverse authors (including himself) appear to have been intended for the teachers to read and reflect on. Some were prompts, as the above question could be easily asked of the students listening to the poem before reciting it back to their teacher. But other annotations focus on reminding the teacher how best to do his job. For example, a set of twelve poems about rules for children in the schoolroom, credited to Tong Pinduan 童品端, begins:

> Young students enter the classroom. Clothes, neat and tidy, make a dignified expression.
> When reading, each and every word must be clear. Do not permit stupidity or putting on airs.
> [Commentary:] Teachers, take this as a lesson. From the start, do not be lenient.[42]

Though the poem addresses the children on their first day of class, it also addresses the instructor. How can these boys read clearly and behave properly if the teacher does not create the proper atmosphere to encourage their obedience? The commentary then directly speaks to the teachers, now cast as students who need to learn from the commentator's voice of authority about how to perform their jobs more satisfactorily.

As one continues to explore *Xu qianjia shi*, it becomes clear from many moments like these that Yu intentionally aimed his work at both audiences in the classroom—the students who needed moral guidance and their dispirited teachers who needed encouragement and a new sense of purpose. Fourteen poems on a theme of "Encouraging scholars" (勉士 *mian shi*) immediately follow the set of poems on classroom rules and are credited to An Shouyu 安守玉.[43] These poems address the difficulties of pursuing a scholarly career but also warn scholars not to be tempted to use their talents to produce obscene literature or spread gossip. Annotations

42.「年少書生進學堂。衣冠整潔貌端莊。讀書字字須清楚。不許癡頑學逞強。[in half-size characters:] 為師者以此為教訓第一義斷不可寬」*Xu qianjia shi*, 1:9a (original punctuation). Tong Pinduan is almost certainly a pseudonym, as its constituent characters together mean "Children's moral uprightness." There is a sense of playfulness to many attributions in *Xu qianjia shi*, which also includes poems credited to "authors" whose names are instead clever references to idiomatic sayings related to their topic. These pseudonyms may serve to obscure the fact that much of the anthology was, in fact, Yu's original work, but this is impossible to prove.

43. *Xu qianjia shi*, 1:10a–11b. While An Shouyu may be a name, it may also be a play on words meaning "Tranquilly guarding what is precious" or "How to guard what is precious?"

on two poems even note that they were spirit-written. The third- and second-from-last poems of the set succinctly capture Yu's conviction that teachers were the most essential workers in the struggle to transform society for good. In "Shang dangshi shu," he would describe this struggle more explicitly in terms of religious competition, but even in this early work, it is clear that classrooms are not only where the words of the sages were recited but also where spiritual transformation occurs and the gods are always watching.

> Don't say that children have little understanding. In every way, the guidance [they receive] depends upon their elementary school teacher.
> Diligently teach those filial disciples well. Now is the time to cultivate their conscience.
> [Commentary]: Those who are teachers can accumulate limitless hidden merits.[44]
> Teach children with utmost sincerity; its bearing on the successes and failures of a lifetime is not insignificant!
> The trick to establishing one's reputation is to first do good works, and this alone comes from diligently training the next generation.
> [Commentary]: Earlier remarks put forward *Riji gushi* and other recent tales of karmic causation as suitable for frequent lectures to develop their natural goodness.[45]

Such annotations addressed teachers directly, both to remind them how to best do their jobs and how to keep up their spirits at the same time. It appears that many teachers needed such help. Though Yu included responses to an imagined critical voice in his 1868 preface, such criticism, if it arose, did not hinder these texts' spread. Instead, his work seems to have received significant support among teachers and others receptive to his ideas. Their belief in the multiple efficacies of his works in the classrooms and on the course of their careers is evident in material dating from the 1840s to 1860s, which we examine next.

44.「漫道童年少識知。多方開導賴蒙師。好將孝弟勤勤訓。培植良心在此時。 [in half-size characters:] 為師者可以積無量陰功」 *Xu qianjia shi*, 1:11a (original punctuation).

45.「教導蒙童在至誠。終身成敗係非輕。求名要訣先功行。惟有勤勤訓後生。 [in half-size characters:] 前言往行日記故事及現前因果宜常與講說發其天良」 *Xu qianjia shi*, 1:11a (original punctuation).

Support for Yu's Morality Curriculum

Proof of early distribution and support for Yu's texts can be found in *Deyi lu*, Volume 10, which focuses on education. It should not be surprising that Yu would include endorsements of his own work within the encyclopedia he collated, but these recommendations were more than a casual mention. Rather, these statements indicate a long-term friendship and supportive relationship based on shared reform goals. Organized into six subsections, Volume 10 comprised essays and documents relating to institutions ranging from official academies to charity schools. Section 4 focuses entirely on charity schools in Guangdong.[46] The first essay, dated 1849, is titled "Introduction to Regulations for Charity Schools in Guangdong." Apparently, this and the subsequent excerpts in the section all came from a now-lost work compiled and edited by a "Mr. Wu from Lingnan" 嶺南吳氏. This writer, essentially anonymous in this context, was an important and supportive friend to Yu over the decades. We know this thanks to American missionary Young John Allen, who in 1870, excerpted this essay from the recently published *Deyi lu* for reprint in his Shanghai-based periodical *Jiaohui xinbao* (教會新報 Church news), and updated the attribution to reflect the changes in Wu's life in the ensuing two decades.[47]

Allen credits the same essay to County Magistrate Expectant, Guangdong native Wu Zongying Zishi 吳宗瑛紫石, and follows it with a brief editorial note explaining that *Deyi lu* is a recent publication compiled by Yu Zhi and sponsored by the same Wu Zongying and three of his associates. Wu was the friend, mentioned in the previous chapter, who had read the first manuscript of *Deyi lu* completed in 1849 and who mourned with Yu that the work had never come to print. His life circumstances having changed enough since then, he invited his nephew and two of his nephew's associates, all transplants from Guangdong capitalizing on Shanghai's postwar economic boom as compradors and managers in foreign-owned businesses, to sponsor the first edition of *Deyi lu* in 1869. We will come back to these sponsors and their involvement with *Deyi lu* in the 1860s, as well as this foreign missionary's interest in further reproducing excerpts in his church-related periodical at the end of this book. For now, let us return to Mr. Wu of the 1840s, an essentially anonymous individual interested in charity schools, and the section of his works in *Deyi lu* in which he writes

46. *Deyi lu*, 10:4.1a–8b.

47. *Jiaohui xinbao* (Huawen shuju, 1968), 2:865–66. This is the June 11, 1870 edition, folio page 198a–b.

just as passionately about the need to reform elementary education as Yu did in the prefaces analyzed above.

In this preface, Wu drew attention to what he perceived as the barely contained chaos of Guangdong society. People were fond of fighting, suing each other, and violence, and the cause was too few people studying books. Wu insisted that "when it comes to reforming customs, teaching children is an urgent matter."[48] The text that follows, consisting of charity school regulations adapted and revised from an earlier set, features a reiteration of Yu's points that children from impoverished families who study the classics in charity schools will waste their energy and be left confused at the end of their studies. Therefore, Wu provides teachers with a list of texts they ought to use instead. In 1849, not many years after Yu first published his morality textbooks, Wu placed them at the beginning of his list. "First use the newly carved 'Xu shentong shi' then follow it with *Xu qianjia shi*," Wu advises, following up with widely known *shanshu* such as *Taishang ganying pian* (太上感應篇 The Supreme Lord's tract on action and retribution), *Yinzhi wen* (陰騭文 Tract of hidden virtue), and *Guandi jueshi jing* (關帝覺世經 The scripture of Guandi to awaken the world). On every third, sixth, and ninth day of the calendar, teachers should take time in the afternoon to lecture on one or two *Xuetang riji* stories.[49] Within a few years of their first publication, Yu's works had found their way to the far south, where educators like Wu saw their utility in developing the sort of charity school he hoped would contribute to social stability and avert further violence.

Another example of a long-term supporter's endorsement of Yu's work can be found in Wu Yun's 1868 preface to *Xuetang riji*, included at the start of the 1875 edition. Wu traces his relationship with Yu back to 1847, just after Yu's productive stretch of textbook writing, through the war and beyond. Wu's endorsement is significant for a number of reasons. First, it was through Wu's correspondence with Shanghai circuit intendant Ying Baoshi that Yu gained an introduction to this official, who would later appoint him principal of the Guang Fangyan Guan in 1866.[50] Second, as reflected in the preface, Wu appears to have been a genuine admirer of Yu's early efforts as a student, teacher, and reformer. He praises Yu's wartime efforts to preach morality to turn back the apocalypse, noting that when others jeered at him for his attempts to rectify people's hearts and

48. *Deyi lu*, 10:4.1b.
49. *Deyi lu*, 10:4.6b–7a.
50. Lai Jinxing, 87.

reform their customs, Yu simply ignored them. Even so, he ends the preface with another warning to those who would dismiss Yu's good works: "Do not overlook this work [simply] because it seems to be at the level of village gossip!"[51]

Though some critics may have objected to these works, which introduced lurid tales of heavenly retribution and simplistic poetry (bordering on doggerel) about various moral topics, many of these textbooks found continued support from scholars at different points on the spectrum of exam and career success. Colophons attest to how these textbooks soon came to be seen as *shanshu* themselves, as sponsors described how spreading them created merit that translated into blessings from Heaven, just like classic *shanshu* or even religious scripture did. The 1870 edition of *Xu qianjia shi* closes with a brief, unsigned colophon related to a previous reprint of the poetry collection. Its author shares that after struggling to pass the lowest-level exam, he made a resolution to print and distribute a thousand copies of this text, along with "Xu shentong shi." During a spirit-writing seance, he was informed that Wenchang would reward him for these contributions and that he would pass the exam soon. In 1852, he not only passed the exam but also had a son.[52]

A longer colophon at the end of the 1875 edition of *Xuetang riji*, attributed to a pen name, "The Revived One of Jinleng" (晉睦更生氏 *Jinleng gengsheng shi*), explains in detail the author's failure to pass the exam despite forty years of effort. At a spirit-writing seance, he asked the spirits why this was so and learned that it was because he had not paid enough attention to the moral development of his students and treated his teaching position as only a job. After being admonished at length by the spirits about the importance of shaping student character, he resolved to do a better job teaching and began to keep a register of merits and demerits. When he happened on "Xu shentong shi" and *Xu qianjia shi*, he bought copies for all of his students. When he learned that the blocks for *Riji gushi xuji* were worn out and a new edition was needed, he contributed enough to the effort to print a thousand copies. Through all of these efforts, he finally earned enough merit to attain the *xiucai* (秀才) degree in 1858, knowing that the gods had rewarded him in his old age with exam success because of his good actions. Then, he mentions that when fleeing with his family from what we can assume was the Taiping War, he had the good fortune to find refuge somewhere that allowed him to meet

51. Wu Yun, untitled preface,「慎勿等之街談里說屑越視之」*Xuetang riji*, 1a–b.
52. *Xu qianjia shi*, 2:22b.

Yu Zhi in person and learn that a new book project had been completed. Assuming that this refers to *Xuetang riji*, the book in which this colophon is the final piece of paratext, we can see that even in the midst of war Yu did not abandon his efforts to print textbooks, and that these works continued to gain support from literati.[53] Finally, in a miracle unrelated to exam success, the preface to the 1865 reprint of *Riji gushi xuji* credits the resolution to carve new blocks and widely distribute new copies of the work to the writer's father's recovery from a stroke that conventional medicine and divination methods had failed to cure. To this family, this textbook had truly become an efficacious *shanshu* that earned them merit not from applying it in the classroom, but simply through its replication, as any other religious text might.[54]

Reimagining Charity Schools as *Jiaohua* Training Centers

By reframing the elementary schoolroom as a place of limitless merit-making potential, and its instructors as the most important moral guides in a boy's life, Yu sought to elevate elementary school teaching from drudgery to a noble purpose. Two or three years, which he estimated was the usual amount of time boys could spend in the classroom, would never be enough to make them conversant in the classics yet provided more than enough time to teach them how to be good people. Later, however, Yu would come to assert that merely three months of good teaching in charity schools could be sufficient to transform not just the students but their entire families for the better. To examine this logic, we return to Yu's eight-point plan to save the Qing, laid out in "Shang dangshi shu." Points two (*xiangyue* lectures), seven (oral storytelling), and eight (theater) were discussed in the previous chapter. Here, we consider points five and six, which address the role of elementary education in his reimagined approach to *jiaohua*.

In "Shang dangshi shu," Yu suggested that the Qing was in danger of collapse because the unity of Confucian governance and *jiao*, on which Qing power was based, was divided by Christian missionaries who attracted converts to their foreign *jiao*. Though the essay begins by blaming the imported religion for the precarious position of the empire in the

53. *Xuetang riji*, 10a–b. After the body text ends on 46b, pagination begins again at 1 for the paratexts.

54. *Riji gushi xuji* (Baoxian tang, 1865), 1a–b.

mid to late nineteenth century, in his point-by-point explanation of how to reform institutions or make new partners who can effectively *jiaohua* society, Yu's criticism shifts to skewer those who were in positions of influence and power but failed to achieve very much. Their indifference, incompetence, or arrogance left those at the lower levels of society vulnerable to the seductions of Christian missionaries. In point five, Yu critiques elementary school teachers in many of the same ways we saw in his textbook colophons. In keeping with the theme of the essay, he asserts that "elementary school teachers in particular are the source of *jiaohua*," but they have squandered the two to three years they have, leaving their students' minds muddled and prone to descend into baseness. "If this is not the elementary school teacher's fault, then whose fault is it?" he asks.[55] The solution was simply to hire better teachers who would use simple morality texts as part of instruction, ensuring that boys would learn life lessons that could prevent them from being misled by other ideas later in life. The classics were not mentioned here at all.

Point six narrowed Yu's focus from elementary education in general to charity schools specifically. First, he criticized how few schools were available for the needy to attend, estimating that only 1 to 2 percent of boys were able to attend at all due to the shortage. Without reform, establishing further schools would be little more than an empty gesture, however, because, as Yu finally says outright, "one studies for the sake of learning, and learning how to be a person is the most important. It is not for the sake of taking civil service exams or establishing a reputation."[56] Once the idea of sitting for the exams has been eliminated from the future of these charity school students, the nature of what should be taught and how it should be taught can change as well. No more than a few hundred characters need to be taught to give boys functional literacy. Instructors should lecture on filial piety, brotherly love, and stories of heavenly responses to good and evil. Such a curriculum would need only three months to complete, allowing schools to cycle through three classes a year. At twenty students per class, with ten schools established in each city, 600 boys could "graduate" within a single year with enough knowledge to benefit them, and without the risk of becoming like those boys who spent two to three years memorizing the classics only to attain just enough literacy to sup-

55.「蒙師尤為教化之源」and「此非蒙師誤之誰誤之者」"Shang dangshi shu," in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 3:10b–11a.

56.「讀書為學以學做人為第一義。非為科名地也。」"Shang dangshi shu," 3:11b–12a (punctuation added).

port their turn to degeneracy.[57] In spite of Yu's adversarial stance toward Christianity, it is not difficult to see reflections of missionary education in his proposed reforms: both focused on moral instruction and basic literacy through relatable and engaging stories. Yu counters an imagined objection about the short duration of these classes by asserting that before Buddhist monastics take the precepts, they only study for forty-nine days. Yu proposed that three months of Confucian moral education would equip students to *jiaohua* their families, guaranteeing that no one would fail to hear about proper conduct and morality.[58]

With his textbooks ready-made for such lecturing, filled with exciting tales about heavenly retribution such as decapitation for killing fish or a fiery death for selling popular works of fiction, Yu had already created the promptbooks necessary for this new style of elementary school education. Harnessing the power of orality, Yu deputized elementary school teachers to give miniature versions of *xiangyue* lectures, while also effectively making their students into teachers, invested with the same moral purpose and responsibility to carry their knowledge home. With the empire in crisis, even more than before the Taiping War, old ways of understanding the purpose of education and instruction could not solve the deep and ongoing problems facing society. For teaching to be effective, it would have to reach many more audiences than Confucian scholars traditionally sought to engage. Yu's suggestion for changing the purpose of charity schools in "Shang dangshi shu" is the climax of the development of ideas first introduced in Yu's early works, when he began to question whether classical education was doing its students, either new ones or those with repeated exam failures, much good. Sometimes, he thought it would have been better for students not to have studied at all. A little education could do a lot of harm if one read the "wrong" books, as was demonstrated to disastrous effect during the Taiping War.

Teachers Can Change the World

In the mid to late nineteenth century, for every scholar who passed the prefectural exams to gain *xiucai* status or the provincial exams to gain *juren* (舉人) rank, over a hundred others failed. Statistics for Yingtian prefecture in Jiangnan from 1864 show that of the estimated 16,000 candidates who took the prefectural exam, only 114 passed, a success rate of only

57. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:12a–12b.
58. "Shang dangshi shu," 3:12b.

0.7 percent. In Zhejiang, an estimated 12,000 men took the 1859 provincial exams, but there were only 94 graduates, a pass rate of 0.9 percent.[59] Even though Yu complained that there were far too few village and charity schools, there was an oversupply of failed exam candidates to staff their classrooms. Most of these teachers still hoped for an illustrious career in the bureaucracy, taking elementary school teaching as a means to an end, not a career in and of itself. But what if it could become one?

Yu was not alone in his disillusionment with the state of elementary school teaching in the late Qing, and as reactions to his works added in colophons to their later editions show, he evidently tapped into a deep vein of feeling among well-intentioned yet frustrated educators looking for a way to give their stalled careers meaning. One of Yu's pedagogical texts that may be lost forever, dated in his *nianpu* to 1845, was titled *Xunxue lianggui* (訓學良規 Good rules for teaching). A handful of possible editions of this work are located in Chinese libraries, but none are credited to Yu or linked with his many style names. We may wish instead to think of this title as one that different Qing teachers used to circulate their suggestions for good classroom management, teaching strategies, and other ways to cope with the challenging task of teaching. One such text, with a preface dated 1890 that credits the work to Tao Zifang 陶子方 (n.d.), provides a glimpse into the sort of limited encouragement that its writer, whoever he was, hoped might help his exhausted peers:

> We poor scholars have no power and no strength and cannot develop our abilities to the fullest. All that we have to be effective with are our mouths and our pens, which can slightly help supplement people's needs. At all times, take care to broadly admonish people. If someone appears lost in a misconception, say something that wakes them from it. If someone has an unrighted wrong, say something that helps it be resolved. If someone suffers a misfortune, say something that rescues them. If people are suing each other in court, say something to reconcile them. If people are doing good, say something that praises them.[60]

59. Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (University of California Press, 2000), 661–62.

60.「吾輩貧士無權無力既不能大有作。為所可自效者惟口舌筆墨二段可以消除稍補於人須要。隨時留心廣行勸化。人有癡迷。出一言以提醒之。人有冤抑。出一言以辨明之。人有急難。出一言以救援之。人有爭訟。出一言以和解之。見人為善。出一言以贊成之。」*Xunxue lianggui* 訓學良規 (n.d.), 23b (punctuation added). Accessed via the National Library of China; no available permalink.

The author goes on to admonish his readers about the importance of the written word, especially good writing rather than to gossip or decadent poetry, before concluding, "Apply your energies to useful studies."[61]

Like this author, Yu believed in the power of words, both written and spoken, to heal and harm. But Yu would surely have disagreed with the negative, self-defeated tone taken in the first sentence quoted above. Why should one be satisfied with simply advising everyone around them, when they spent hours every day with students who were brimming with moral potential? Since the elementary classroom could be the locus of all moral transformation, Yu set out to help others realize their power and strength as teachers. First, Yu began by producing numerous texts meant as promptbooks that would make teachers effective moral guides in the classroom, giving students something more accessible than the classics to shape their nature toward goodness. These textbooks, written before the war, gesture toward the crucial purpose that humble schoolteachers assume in his postwar writings, even though they had failed to advance within the exam system or attain a government posting. By teaching in his reimagined three-month morality boot camp, men at the margins of the gentry, looking in at the time-honored *jiaohua* work of the great families and government officials with envy or perhaps disappointment in themselves, might still do essential work by giving their students the foundations to become teachers themselves. Instead of mourning that most of their students would also be exam failures or never make it that far due to poverty and family circumstance, even a few months in the classroom with a teacher using Yu's textbooks and operating under his philosophy could contribute to saving the world.

In 1843, in far southern China, another village tutor, only a few years younger than Yu Zhi, also found himself frustrated with China's moral state. After another failed attempt at the prefectural examinations, he vowed never to take them again and turned to a small multivolume morality book that had sat untouched for years on a high shelf. These texts, as effective as any *shanshu* that Yu hoped to spread, opened this depressed teacher's eyes to his new grand purpose. With the evangelical zeal of a true convert, his efforts to spread the newfound morality found in these books soon cost him his teaching job, but the loss did little to dim his enthusiasm. Hong Xiuquan would spend the rest of the 1840s spreading his understanding of Christianity, starting initially from this single morality text, *Quanshi liangyan*, among groups of impoverished Hakka and other

61.「專力於有用之學也」*Xunxue lianggui*, 24b.

members of Chinese society far more marginalized than the humble schoolteacher, rallying them to his cause. Then in 1853, Hong, erstwhile schoolteacher, now Jesus Christ's younger brother, would lead the armies of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in open rebellion against the Qing, to take over Nanjing in a shocking display of strength and, perhaps, heavenly approval. As the world now teetered on the brink of the apocalypse, Yu Zhi would find his life radically transformed.

3

Salvation from Disaster via Print and Performance

Shortly, perhaps mere months, after Nanjing fell in early 1853, a short prosimetric vernacular text that promised to teach its audiences a foolproof method to survive the ongoing disaster began to circulate in nearby Suzhou. *Pan Gong mianzai jiunan baojuan* (The precious scroll of Lord Pan which will avert calamities and save from disasters; hereafter *Pan Gong*), then only a single volume (卷 *juan*), purported to be a record of two dream encounters with a recently deceased local philanthropist, Pan Zengyi. Now called Pan Gong (潘公 Lord Pan) in recognition of his responsibility for the heavenly registers of merit and demerit, he warned the dreamer that the only way to keep one's name out of the catalogs of those who deserved to die by sword or cannon fire was to swear an oath of repentance and do good. Echoing Yu Zhi's reaction to the outbreak of war in his first "Jiehai huilan shuo," also written in 1853, *Pan Gong* was clearly welcomed by many, including whoever put such words in Pan Gong's mouth, as offering the only explanation for the shocking violence, rapid collapse of cities, and terrifying bandits: Heaven had finally had enough of human depravity. Those who ignored the admonitions of moralists like Yu before the war and failed to reform were now either suffering or dead. Those so far spared from the advancing frontlines had, from this perspective, been given an opportunity to guarantee that they would be counted among the living rather than the dead when disaster arrived on their doorsteps. This salvation, however, was contingent on spreading the moral knowledge that Pan Gong shared, either by reprinting the text or performing it to earn merit.

Pan Gong spread rapidly in print, helped along by the addition of two more volumes that soon were appended to the original and further devel-

oped its narrative to amplify its promises. Scholars in recent years, including myself in earlier publications, have assumed that Yu was the anonymous author of all three volumes of the work, due to the clear overlap of materials in *Pan Gong* with those in Yu's body of work and the moral causes that he championed. Now, however, reading different early editions of this work alongside each other has led me to conclude that Yu was not the sole author of *Pan Gong*. Instead, in another instance of his tendency to frame his creations as sequels to earlier works (as in "Xu shentong shi," *Riji gushi xuji*, and *Xu qianjia shi* discussed in chapter 2), I believe that Yu, seeing the promise that the first edition of *Pan Gong* held for the transformation of its listeners, edited it for style and content and then appended two volumes of his own work, creating a three-volume version that almost completely replaced the earlier version.[1]

Beyond its rapid response to the fall of Nanjing in early 1853, when the avoidance of calamity and salvation from disaster was on everyone's minds, *Pan Gong* was Yu's first foray into engaging with literature for audiences beyond the teachers and schoolboys for whom he had written before the war. *Baojuan* had the potential to reach the sacred spaces created by lay performers speaking to segments of Jiangnan society otherwise unreached by Yu's moralizing texts. Centered on oral performance and the aural reception of a merit-making text by the laity, *baojuan* fit with Yu's mission to transform transgressive individuals into merit-makers. Yu's conviction that the Taiping's early victories represented a Heaven-sent disaster to punish lax morals led him to look for more effective means of disseminating morality. With *Pan Gong*, though Yu addressed audiences whose roles were much less clearly defined than those of his previous teacher and student readers, he still focuses on the moral responsibilities of male listeners, addressing their wives and daughters only in brief asides. With warnings against arguing with one's brothers, gambling, doing dishonest business, and watching lewd drama (lest one's wife and daughters become depraved), *Pan Gong* condemned sins and endorsed good works that overlap with everything in Yu's textbooks for boys. The materials shared among the first volume of *Pan Gong*, another *baojuan* that Yu potentially authored (*Bixie guizheng xiaozai yanshou liyuan baojuan*), and Yu's collections of morality tales, not to mention the second volume of *San*

1. An abridged edition of all three volumes, *Pan Gong mianzai lu* 潘公免災錄, (Tongshan she, 1866), uses the earlier version of Volume 1. A later edition produced in 1922 by Hongda shuju 宏大書局 in Shanghai also uses the earlier first volume. Otherwise, most editions appear to follow either one revised version or the other.

Mao zhenjun baojuan, are extensive and suggest close mutual influence, the nature of which must await further study. In the 1850s, Yu also wrote one more *baojuan*, *Xigu mianzai baojuan*, clearly aimed at female audiences and their domestic moral concerns. This text, a remarkable departure from his earlier attempts to reach largely male audiences, requires close attention and will therefore be addressed in the following chapter.

Yu was nowhere near the first literatus to use *baojuan* to preach conservative morals. *Pan Gong* and *Liyuan* both fall under what the *baojuan* scholar Che Xilun identifies as a subcategory that he terms *quanshi wen* (勸世文 admonitory essays). Che's etic categories, though they simplify the diversity of texts that call themselves *baojuan*, are extremely useful tools that identify patterns of style and usage. Che places *quanshi wen* within the larger category of *minjian baojuan* (民間寶卷 popular precious scrolls), differentiating them from *zongjiao baojuan* (宗教寶卷 religious precious scrolls). Though there is significant overlap between popular and religious *baojuan*, the specific issue here is their textual origin and whether they can be associated with identifiable religious institutions or sectarian movements. Though *quanshi wen* are included among "popular" texts, Che highlights that they were not necessarily originally from popular performance contexts or adopted for use in them. Rather, *quanshi wen* were written by literati associated with popular religious groups and circulated mostly as texts for reading rather than performance.[2]

But few examples, if any, exist in as many unique editions as *Pan Gong*, especially for a text produced so late in the long history of the genre. As the textual history of *Pan Gong* will show, even though the content was aimed at new audiences that were imagined to be receptive to moral instruction heard through *baojuan* recitation in temples or their homes, the text probably proved most compelling for its value as a merit-making opportunity. Its donors could fund reprints in pursuit of health and security, and major sponsors could position themselves within Pan Zengyi's legacy of exerting a moralizing influence on their local communities. On the one hand, *Pan Gong*'s success in reaching new audiences may have been limited. Although we have little evidence either way, Che's *baojuan* catalog does not list any manuscript copies, and I have only encountered one during the course of archival research.[3] This suggests that *Pan Gong* was neither widely adopted

2. Che Xilun, *Xinyang, jiaohua, yule: Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu ji qita* 信仰·教化·娛樂：中國寶卷研究及其他 (Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2002), 5.

3. Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目 (Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2009), 198–200. The undated manuscript, consisting of only the first and second volumes, is held at the Shanghai Library, call number 520842.

into the performance repertoire nor often recopied by hand to earn merit. But on the other hand, *Pan Gong*'s print success demonstrates just how many men who had not found career or exam success still aspired to be seen as participating in *jiaohua* efforts during the crisis, and how Yu, perhaps inadvertently, crafted just the sort of text they needed to achieve that goal.

Pan Gong was another tool by which Yu sought to expand the ability of the subjects of moral reform to become reformers themselves, though in the end he may have succeeded with a different audience than originally intended. In addition to the fascinating nature of his editing and additions to the work, which I address in detail below, the role of the text as a contemporary record of early religious reactions to the Taiping War before its resolution makes *Pan Gong* an arresting example. Each reprint produced before the war ended is a record of collective hope for salvation. The text quickly spread in many different editions: initially in cities close to the front in Jiangnan, it did not stay local for long. By 1858, it had found its way to Fujian, and by 1862 had crossed the strait to Taiwan. Long after the war ended, it was still being reprinted in newly carved editions in which existing paratextual materials were shuffled around and new prefaces added, along with additional short religious texts, and donor lists. While *Pan Gong* may have been Yu's most successful work by far, after his initial promotion of the work in the 1850s, it did not spread due to his explicit efforts but rather because it tapped into a deep need among its many reproducers. As a text born of wartime trauma, *Pan Gong* generated sustained support even in the decades after the war, which might be explained by the repeated disasters in the final decades of the Qing that kept the need for salvation on people's minds. Additionally, in my view, *Pan Gong* offered audiences more than just the promise of escape and a voice of certainty amid chaos. Though each of its three volumes tells a different story about Pan Gong's interactions with the living, their shared promise is that the text empowers its audiences to play a role like Pan's by doing good and saving others from disaster, in whatever limited way their circumstances permitted.

Each edition of *Pan Gong* connects us with a community that supported it, from the very first single-volume edition, which appeared months after the fall of Nanjing, to an edition reprinted in Japanese-colonized Tainan in 1921 from vintage blocks carved in the 1860s by a Taiwanese print house.[4] Through the figure of Pan Gong, the deified Pan Zengyi, we connect with the historical Suzhou Pan family, a wealthy clan

4. A copy of this edition is held at the Tainan Public Library in Tainan, Taiwan.

who attained high political influence thanks to the success of Pan Zengyi's father in the early nineteenth century. In the postwar years, Pan Zengyi's nephew Pan Zuyin 潘祖蔭 (1830–1890) engaged in political maneuvering, though not always ethically, to maintain the family's wealth even in Jiangnan's destroyed economy. Those who reproduced the text locally almost certainly knew of the connection between the heavenly authority of Pan Gong and the earthly power of the Suzhou Pans. The Suzhou Pans also surely knew that having one of their family members enter the public consciousness as a religious figure of unparalleled mercy and benevolence could not have hurt their regular appeals to the court for tax relief and other special considerations. *Pan Gong* is an important reminder of both the continued importance of religion in the crises of the late Qing and the key role played by religious texts as tools for elites looking to shape and maintain their cultural capital in a changing world.

Pan Gong baojuan: The Text and Its Reconstructed Textual History

The Text

Of all the texts that Yu Zhi was involved with producing, probably no work was as popular or as enthusiastically endorsed by as many different people as *Pan Gong*. Among the twenty-two editions recorded in Che Xilun's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* (the most comprehensive catalog to date of extant *baojuan*), uncataloged editions found in archives in China and beyond (including Taiwan, Japan, and the United Kingdom), and the lost editions alluded to in some prefaces, we can safely say that least forty editions of *Pan Gong* were published between 1854 and 1934.[5] More certainly existed.

Through his involvement with this *baojuan*, Yu positioned himself as a new carrier of the mantle that Pan laid down at his death in early 1853. In reprinting and redistributing the book, aspirants to the *shanren* (善人

5. Che, 198–200. See Zhang Shuxian 张淑贤, "Weiji yu yingdui: wan Qing Suzhou *Pan Gong baojuan* de xingcheng, chuanbo, yu shehui jiaohua 危机与应对:晚清苏州《潘公宝卷》的形成、传播与社会教化," *Beifang luncong* 5 (2021): 161–70, for a brief introduction to the publication history and circulation of the text. I address some of Zhang's conclusions with which I disagree later in this chapter. I come to my estimate of forty editions by combining Zhang's list of extant editions with those found through my own research.

philanthropist) honorary title appointed themselves as Pan's heirs. Pan Zengyi had died on the twentieth day of the twelfth month of Xianfeng 2 (January 28, 1853).[6] In the three decades prior, after giving up on an official position in government, Pan lived in semireclusion in Suzhou, dedicating himself to philanthropy, especially relief efforts for increasingly frequent environmental disasters such as flood and famine. When waves of disaster engulfed Jiangnan and Nanjing fell to Taiping forces on March 19, 1853, Pan Zengyi was no longer alive to offer relief, but soon his posthumous avatar, Pan Gong, promoted to a position of power in the underworld bureaucracy, offered Suzhou's anxious people a formula for escaping from the apocalypse that they feared would soon reach their city. The *Pan Gong* text addressed the root cause of the war—widespread moral turpitude—and the ways that those who wished to survive the devastation could ensure Heaven's protection.

In its first volume, Pan Gong appears in dreams in the first month of the year following his death to warn a relative, given the pseudonym Danran sheng (淡然生 Student of tranquility), of an impending disaster in which many would die.[7] He gives detailed, concrete advice for those who swore an oath to live morally to escape the coming cataclysm. The second volume begins by celebrating the thousands of families who escaped the fall of Nanjing and surrounding cities thanks to swearing such an oath. It then laments the destruction of Nanjing in detail, and follows with even greater detail about the various sins that brought about the destruction. The second half of the second volume takes audiences back in time before the fall and tells a story about a virtuous schoolteacher from Nanjing who ascends to Heaven and helps the overworked City God rectify the heavenly account books to sort the soon-to-be survivors—those who listened to Pan's advice in the first volume—from the soon-to-be dead, those who disregarded it. The City God lectures the schoolteacher on what led people to deserve their deaths, and he is also allowed to see that some of his

6. On Pan Zengyi, see Wang Weiwei 王伟伟, "Qingdai zhongqi Jiangnan diqu de cishan shiye—yi Pan Zengyi wei zhongxin 清代中期江南地区的慈善事业–以潘曾沂为中心" (MA thesis, Suzhou University, 2007), and Wang Weiping 王卫平, "Qingdai Jiangnan diqu de cishan jiaxi pu—yi Pan Zengyi wei zhongxin de kaocha 清代江南地区慈善事业慈善家系谱–以潘曾沂为中心的考察," *Xin huawen diao* 18 (2009): 61–65.

7. This has been taken to be a thinly veiled reference to another prominent Suzhou altruist, Xie Yuanqing 謝元慶 (1798–1860), as Danran 淡然 was one of his style names (號 *hao*). Wang Weiwei, 39, and Zhang, "Weiji yu yingdui," 164. Pan's mother was a Xie, so he and Pan were indeed maternal cousins.

friends will survive due to their repentance. After his service, he and his aged mother are permitted to escape, moments before the fall. The last volume imagines a bucolic encounter between Pan Gong and his tenants on two occasions when he visited them to dispense farming and moral advice, presumably in the prewar years in association with Pan Zengyi's actual interest in advising peasants on pit farming techniques.[8] He lectures them on the proper respect to be paid to the emperor and the values of honoring written paper, grains, and life, which will assure the preservation of their agrarian utopia from fire, flood, famine, plague, and war.[9]

The Origins and Spread of Pan Gong baojuan

Though the full origins of *Pan Gong* are lost to history, in recent years, scholars, previously including me, have generally accepted that *Pan Gong* is Yu Zhi's unsigned and largely uncredited work.[10] This conclusion has been based on careful work by the Taiwanese scholar Lai Jinxing in Lai's 2005 master's thesis on Yu Zhi. Lai reads the 1858 Dejian zhai edition of *Pan Gong* with close attention to details that link it with Yu's credited work, noting significant overlaps in themes and wording, along with Yu's typical habit of using his publications to promote his other works.[11] Lai also notes an early observation by Sawada Mizuho in his 1975 study of *baojuan*, where he attributed *Pan Gong*, *Xigu*, and *Sanmao zhenjun baojuan* to the same anonymous author, whom Lai then identifies as Yu.[12] Since nearly all of Yu's works were first published by Dejian zhai, a press about which we know frustratingly little besides that its output leaned

8. For Pan's farming advocacy, see Peter Lavelle, *The Profits of Nature: Colonial Development and the Quest for Resources in Nineteenth-Century China* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 33–35. For the reprint history of Pan's book of farming advice, *Fengyu zhuang benshu* 豐豫莊本書, which focused on thirty-two separate points for farmers, see Le Xin 樂鑫, "Pan Zengyi *Xiaofushan ren nian pu* zhengli yu yanjiu 潘曾沂《小浮山人年譜》整理與研究" (MA thesis, Huadong shifan daxue, 2020), 23–24.

9. For a more detailed summary of the contents of *Pan Gong* in English, see Meyer-Fong, 52–60.

10. Zhang Shuxian suggests that, with the approval of the Pan family, the first volume was written and published by one of the other great Suzhou families. "Weiji yu yingdui," 164. This is a plausible possibility. Lian Pu proposes that *Pan Gong* originated in 1855 with someone at Shanghai Yihua tang borrowing his identity. However, given the multiple sources that trace its origins to Suzhou, not Shanghai, and attest to its existence before 1855, this is impossible. Lian, 150–51.

11. Lai Jinxing, 124–35.

12. Lai Jinxing, 134.

heavily toward works by Yu Zhi, in an excellent example of academic detective work Lai drew sound and convincing conclusions based on the evidence available. Though the 1858 Dejian zhai edition makes *Pan Gong* look like a carefully written work by a single author, i.e., Yu, other editions printed between 1856 and 1858 show marked differences in content and form, complicating the picture of Yu's authorship to the point that it seems unlikely that it was so simple.

As a text written and published in the thick of war, particularly one during which destruction of texts was an ever-present problem, reconstructing when and where *Pan Gong* first appeared and how it spread is like assembling a puzzle in which half of the pieces have been forever lost. Despite this, between extant editions and prefaces to slightly later editions that discuss the difficulties readers had in finding this desirable and rare work, a picture emerges of just how quickly *Pan Gong* captured the attention of audiences and found support for widespread redistribution. This is a compelling and interesting puzzle because the available evidence leads us back into the emotionally charged months and years immediately following Nanjing's fall, and to Yu Zhi as someone that the first volume of *Pan Gong* spoke to so impactfully that he invested significant energy in editing, expanding, and publishing it, all in the hope that it would spread and save innumerable lives. We can take Yu's careful edits to Volume 1, explored in detail in the following section, and his newly written sequel volumes addressed in the section below that, as his endorsement of the inherent potential of the original as vernacular literature that might connect Yu with previously unreachable audiences. War had driven him into unfamiliar but potentially fertile literary territory.

Questions of authorship and publication history may be seen as ultimately little more than entertaining cerebral puzzles for specialists unless they can answer more significant issues related to the text. Questioning Yu's solo authorship of *Pan Gong* gives us important insight into why Yu engaged with the genre, how he gave the three-volume edition an appeal beyond that of a niche memorial to a local hero, and how he sought to translate his moral instruction beyond the classroom. One question that has been unanswerable, when we take the entirety of *Pan Gong* as sprung directly from Yu's creative impulse, is why he would have spontaneously chosen to work with this genre, *baojuan*, that is never mentioned in any of his collected writings. But when we take the later versions of Volume 1 as work that Yu crafted out of an anonymous popular religious response to the cataclysmic arrival of war, it allows us to see *Pan Gong* as another example of the pattern established in chapters 1 and 2, where Yu takes the

evangelistic methods of others and adapts them to suit his purposes. In this section, I rely on prefaces from the mid to late 1850s to document *Pan Gong*'s diffusion from a new text that appeared in Suzhou in 1853 to a text that within the decade had become widely known across southern China, promising salvation and security during a time when little assurance was to be had.

Working backward, let us first use the clues in later editions to get as close as we can to the first volume's appearance in 1853. A commonly reproduced preface, dated 1857 by Li Tongfu 李同福 (n.d.), records his gradual acquaintance with *Pan Gong* during its first few years of circulation, providing us with a singular record of how it spread that is largely supported by the fragmentary publication data.[13] Li describes how he encountered the first volume of *Pan Gong* in 1855 in Hangzhou, though it had already been in circulation in Suzhou and Changzhou since 1853. He details how in autumn 1855, Hong Fusheng 洪福生 (n.d.) produced the Hangzhou edition of *Pan Gong* along with a preface and appended paratextual materials relating to Guandi's 關帝 moral admonitions, with a specially commissioned, elaborate frontispiece by calligrapher Zhu Tailai 祝泰來 (n.d.). This edition was produced with the sponsorship of Ye Jifeng 葉霽峰 (n.d.).[14] In 1856, after obtaining a copy of the second volume, Hong had it carved, printed, and distributed along with the first. Those who read this yearned for the third volume, for which they searched for over a year until it was found, allowing a complete three-volume edition to come together in 1857. Li notes, perhaps with some envy, that the second and third volumes had already been printed in Suzhou and Changzhou in 1854.

No editions clearly dating to 1854 are extant today, whether from Suzhou or elsewhere. In her 2021 article on the publication history of *Pan Gong*, Zhang Shuxian states that the first three-volume edition was published in 1855 by Shanghai Yihua tang (翼化堂).[15] However, Zhang Xuetang 張學堂 (1838–1909) did not establish Yihua tang until 1857, call-

13. For a facsimile copy of an edition that includes this preface, see *Pan Gong chushi baojuan* ([Songyun xuan], n.d. [ca. 1862]), 5a–6a, in *Minjian sizang: Zhongguo minjian xinyang minjian wenhua ziliao huibian, di yi ji* 民間私藏:中國民間信仰民間文化資料彙編, 第1輯, ed. Wang Chien-chuan, Hou Chong, and Yang Jingling (Boyang wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 2011), 3:269–71.

14. Ye Jifeng was from Cixi county in Zhejiang province. Zhang "Weiji yu yingdui," 166n1.

15. Zhang, "Weiji yu yingdui," 165.

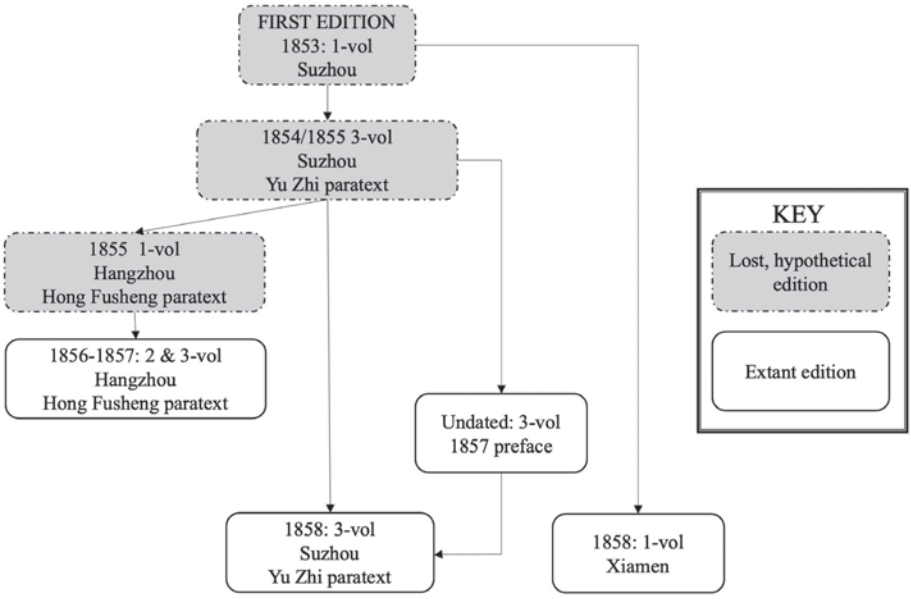


Fig.1. Proposed development of *Pan Gong* versions. Created by author.

ing this attribution into question.[16] An edition held at the Suzhou Museum of Opera and Theater (蘇州戲曲博物館 Suzhou Xiqu Bowuguan) has also been dated to 1855, however this is based on the date of Hong Fusheng's preface, not any date on a title page, which the museum's copy is lacking.[17] Even so, though a three-volume, 1855 edition from Suzhou may no longer be extant, at least one probably existed, as the three-volume 1858 edition published by Dejian zhai includes two prefaces signed by Yu, including one dated to the first month of 1855. It seems fair to take this as an indication that Yu wrote the preface for an earlier edition, not that the

16. See Zhang Zhuming 張竹銘, "Yihua tang shanshuju zhi chuangshe ji benkan faxing zhi yuanyin 翼化堂善書局之創設及本刊發行之原因," *Yangshan banyue kan* 揚善半月刊 13 (January 1, 1934) in *Yangshan banyue kan, xiandao yuebao quanji* 揚善半月刊, 仙道月報全集 (Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2005), 2:18–19. Yihua tang did print an undated three-volume edition of *Pan Gong* using the same blocks as the 1858 Dejian zhai edition, which opens with a preface by Yu Zhi dated 1855. When I reached out to Zhang to inquire about which edition she had seen, she shared images of that edition with me to confirm its 1855 publication date. It appears that she takes the preface date as the publication date, which explains the mistaken dating of the edition to before the press was founded.

17. *Suzhou xiqu bowuguan zang baojuan tiyao* 苏州戏曲博物馆藏宝卷提要, ed. Guo Laimei 郭腊梅 (Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2018), 128.

preface went unused for three years before being printed. Although Yu Zhi was clearly part of the early publication history of *Pan Gong*, 1855 is the earliest that it can be directly linked with him.

Li's account of its spread from Suzhou can still be mostly corroborated with careful attention to existing evidence, providing intriguing information on the earliest circulation of this text. The Shanghai Library holds two undated editions printed in Hangzhou that open with Zhu Tailai's calligraphy, Hong Fusheng's prefaces, and Ye Jifeng's name as a sponsor on their donor lists, matching Li's description perfectly. One edition includes only the first and second volumes, with its donor list appearing at the end of Volume 2. This edition is priced at forty-eight *wen*. The three-volume edition, with a significantly expanded donor list, is priced at sixty-eight *wen*. In the cheaper edition, signs suggest incremental additions to the donor list during subsequent print runs when sufficient donations merited reusing the blocks. Ye Jifeng appears four times, supporting a total of 1,400 copies.[18] Late in the donor list, in slightly larger characters, the date 1857 appears, marking off a final, small round of donations of more modest quantities ranging from 10 to 200 volumes.[19] The blocks for the two-volume 1856 edition were still in use in 1857, but enthusiasm appears to have shifted to the complete three-volume edition, the one that Li was excited about finally seeing that year.

The sixty-eight–*wen* (three-volume) edition, while still undated, appends a donor list to the final volume that appears to confirm the date. Before the names, it clearly breaks down the cost of each volume: Volume 1 is twenty-four *wen*, Volume 2 is twenty-six *wen*, and Volume 3 is twenty-eight *wen*, but if all three are printed together, the cost would only be sixty-eight *wen*. The list begins by reproducing, for the most part, the same names and donation amounts from the pre-1857 section in the two-volume edition, though Ye is credited with donating support for only 700 total copies instead of 1,400. Following this list of long-term supporters, perhaps copied to record their historical support, the list shifts to some donations enumerated by their monetary value (including a group of women who together donated 3,000 *wen*) and some by number of copies sponsored, ranging from 5 to 200 per donor. As in the two-volume version, changes in text size and repeated names show that the list was added

18. On this list, donors' contributions are recorded in terms of the number of copies that could be printed with their offerings.

19. *Pan Gong mianzai jiunan baojuan* (Wenjian zhai, n.d.), 2 vols. (Shanghai Library call number 481883).

to successively over an unspecified amount of time as the blocks were put into use again.[20] In total, this list records nearly ninety names of individuals or organizations that collectively sponsored thousands of imprints using the blocks stored at Hangzhou Wenjian zhai (文鑑齋).

Though we lack the single-volume 1855 edition with the same prefatory materials, these two editions nonetheless support Li Tongfu's claim that *Pan Gong* spread in Hangzhou in a two-volume edition before the three-volume edition became available, as well as corroborate the participation of Ye Jifeng as a significant supporter of Hong Fusheng's efforts. Both of Hong's prefaces are also dated 1855, suggesting that they were written to accompany an edition in that year, perhaps the single-volume edition. But what about Li's report that the first volume was already in print in 1853, mere months after the fall of Nanjing, and that only in 1854 were second and third volumes added?

Here the evidence becomes much more circumstantial. Although no single-volume edition of *Pan Gong* from 1853 has yet been located, I believe that a single-volume edition printed in 1858 in Xiamen by Wende tang (文德堂) provides us with a later copy of the earliest version. Published hundreds of kilometers away from Suzhou, this later edition perhaps suggests that its publishers were too far away to know there was already a three-volume edition in circulation. Its contents show some significant differences from the three-volume versions of Volume 1 simultaneously circulating in Jiangnan and even northern Fujian. I will address the implications of these differences below. The single-volume version also closes without a rhetorical flourish encouraging audiences to proceed to the next volume for further edification, unlike Volume 1 in the multivolume editions. I take this as an indication that no further volumes existed at the time of Volume 1's creation to direct readers toward. This sense of finality is followed by a brief postface dated 1854 that likewise makes no reference to any more volumes. The donor list that closes this copy catalogs forty-two sponsors who contributed toward the production of over 3,000 copies.[21]

Comparing the first volume of the 1858 Dejian zhai edition with three other late-1850s editions, as I will in the next section, reveals distinctions that suggest an intentional textual development, rather than developments that might be explained by natural variations over time in this genre of

20. *Pan Gong mianzai jiunan baojuan* (Wenjian zhai, n.d.), 3 vols. (Shanghai Library call number 550230).

21. *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan* (Wende tang, 1858). Held at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University. I am grateful to Dr. Xiaojing Miao for photographing this on my behalf.

literature that straddles the worlds of oral performance and printed text. Based on these close comparisons, Yu apparently edited the first volume twice: first while crafting it to fit with the contents and goals of the second and third volumes that he wrote in 1854, and then again before the newly edited 1858 edition was published by Dejian zhai. (See fig.1 for a graphical approximation of this process.) Taking advantage of the popularity of the first volume, which Li Tongfu claimed was reprinted so often that its print blocks wore out within months of its first appearance, Yu perhaps saw an opportunity to reach new audiences using a genre that was also new to him, grafting his work onto a branch he had first intentionally pruned to better bear his intended fruit.

This gives us a possible answer to the question that has so far remained unanswered about Yu's motives for working with *baojuan*, besides the sense that the trauma of watching the apocalypse unfold may have led him to seek other means of spreading the morals that he hoped would turn back the tide of disaster. In the following section, Yu's changes to the first volume will be shown to be calculated attempts to remake a work originally grounded in its protagonist's lay Buddhist faith to appeal to a wider audience of potential sponsors who believed less in the saving power of Guanyin and more in the bureaucratic ledgers of merit and demerit kept in Heaven. As such, he crafted a text that allowed diverse religious audiences to use it for their own purposes, reflected in the variation of evocative paratextual materials over subsequent years as the text became part of the devotional lives of sponsors who included Buddhists, devotees of Guandi, and literati invested in publishing *shanshu* to further *jiaohua* society.

Revising a Buddhist Text for Non-Buddhist Audiences

Pan Zengyi, in addition to his reputation for philanthropy, was well known for his deep devotion to Buddhism.[22] In this section, I compare the 1858 Wende tang *Pan Gong* printed in Xiamen with three other versions of the text to explore how its Buddhist tone was softened, and in some places erased entirely. The goal of this adaptation was to elevate Pan Gong as a hero of solely the heavenly bureaucracy, excluding his lay Buddhist devo-

22. For more on Pan's lay Buddhism, see Shao Jiade 邵佳德, "Pan Zengyi de xinyang yu shenhuo shijie: jianlun Qing zhongye Jiangnan de jushi Fojiao 潘曾沂的信仰與生活世界: 兼論清中葉江南的居士佛教," *Minsu quyi* 204 (June 2019): 99–145.

tion, and to enhance his potential as inspiration to moral reformers of any religious inclination. I also examine two other editions from the same period as intermediate texts between the early version and the 1858 Suzhou Dejian zhai edition. I take an 1858 Jiangxi edition of the recension frequently reprinted with the paratextual materials by Hong Fusheng to represent the three-volume edition published in Hangzhou in 1857, on the assumption that its first volume represents the version that Hong obtained in 1855 and first reprinted that year.[23] As an intermediary between this version and Yu's newly revised 1858 recension, I bring in an undated edition that begins with a preface dated 1857, a minor variant of *Pan Gong* that does not appear to have been reprinted at all.[24] This undated version, while largely the same as the Hangzhou recension, includes small changes that are preserved in the 1858 Suzhou edition. While a detailed comparison among these four versions of Volume 1 is beyond the scope of this chapter, a review of the differences demonstrates that major changes to the work occurred early in in the life of its single first volume, followed by gradual revisions that did not substantively change the content once it had started to circulate broadly as a three-volume work.

Befitting its protagonist's devout Buddhist practice, the Wende tang edition of *Pan Gong* includes many references to the efficacy and importance of Buddhist practices, especially reciting Guanyin's name, and avoiding disrespect of Buddhism. Most of these references are not present in the Hangzhou edition, while nearly all have been removed or muted in the Dejian zhai edition. This appears to have been a systematic attempt to make the morals put forward by Pan Gong more mainstream, rather than narrowly Buddhist, giving the text a broader appeal. For example, in the Wende tang edition, Pan Gong asserts that the worst sort of sinners are those who disrespect their parents, their in-laws, the gods, and the three treasures (三寶 *sanbao*)—the Buddha, dharma (Buddhist teachings), and sangha (monastics).[25] Later versions remove the references to religious

23. *Pan gong mianzai baojuan quanji* (Yili zhai, 1858). Held in the collections of the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, Taiwan. An incomplete facsimile of the same base text (with additional paratext) is *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, cited above. The 1883 Suzhou Ma'nao jingfang edition also reproduces this text precisely and is available in a full scan from Waseda University Library.

24. See *Pan Gong mianzai jiunan baojuan* (n.d.), in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang suwenxue congkan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏俗文學叢刊, ed. Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo suwenxue congkan bianji xiaozu 中央研究院語言研究所俗文學叢刊編輯小組, photographic reprint (Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), 358:203–350.

25. Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 7b.

disrespect and focus only on the unfilial behavior of failing to show respect to senior family members.[26] In another example, an explanation of the importance of non-killing in the Wende tang edition lists a number of animals to remind audiences of the value of their lives: "chicken, ducks, fish, and crabs, and all insects, crickets, and ants."[27] By contrast, later editions no longer reference animals that would be killed for food, perhaps because their audiences were less likely to be vegetarian Buddhists, and simply refer to ants, dragonflies, and butterflies, only creatures that might be casually killed out of annoyance or for the sake of entertainment.[28]

Such changes taken together indicate a clear editorial agenda. While Yu was not anti-Buddhist, his emendations systematically diminish the value of Buddhist practices as effective responses to the Taiping War, even leading him to overstate his case at the opening of the third volume, where it is claimed that Pan Gong is an even more merciful divine figure than the Bodhisattva Guanyin.[29] To reach this point, references to Guanyin's supremacy and efficacy in key moments in Volume 1 had to be eliminated. Although there are many examples, two will suffice. First, when Danran sheng first arrives at Pan Gong's heavenly court and learns that disaster is imminent, he asks a series of questions that link Pan's efforts to reform public morals while he was alive with the impending crisis. "Elder brother," he asks, "you once advised people to recite the Bodhisattva Guanyin's name. In the end, was it of any use?"[30] In the Wende tang edition, Pan replies with certainty and encouragement, reminding audiences that this practice will always be effective on a personal level even if Heaven has decided to punish society with shared disaster. Pan states, "At present,

26. *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan* (Dejian zhai, 1858), in *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集, vol. 23 (Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), 1:6a.

27. Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 15a.

28. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:13b.

29. Later in his life, Yu may have turned to Buddhism, though it is never mentioned in his *nianpu* or his collected writings. However, a short biographical essay about Yu is included in a collection of accounts of exemplary Buddhists and their activities, and the biographer laments that few knew about his Buddhist devotion. Xiong Ruisheng 熊潤生, "Yu Liancun weng xingshi 余連村翁行事," in *Xiuxi wenjian lu* 修西聞見錄, ed. Zhiguan [Zheng Yingfang] (n.d.) 3: 17a–b, https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/item/rb00017057. *Xiuxi wenjian lu* (Records of things heard and seen regarding the cultivation of rebirth in the Western Pure Land), compiled by Zheng Yingfang 鄭應房 from 1864–1877, included essays written by many lay Buddhists of his acquaintance. Yu is credited with three biographies in this collection.

30.「兄曾勸人念觀世音菩薩◦到底有用否◦」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 3b; and Yili zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:3a (original punctuation in the Yili zhai edition).

one's predestined fate is all dependent on the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Though many common folks of Jiangsu normally burn incense, recite the Buddha's name, practice non-killing and releasing life and other good deeds, unfortunately there are more than a few people who also do evil. For the sake of this moment, one ought to make a vow to quickly correct one's mistakes and do good, and then one can probably be redeemed."[31] In 1853, when the text was first written, perhaps this kind of hope seemed warranted, whereas a year or so later, such encouragement rang hollow in Yu's ears. The Hangzhou version instead reflects a certain ambivalence and uncertainty: "Of course you can't say it was useless. I only fear that they were unable to be sincere to the very end and that the calamity is too serious, so that one cannot completely depend on this."[32] In the Dejian zhai edition, Pan Gong says even less about his recommendation, simply telling Danran sheng that "those who sincerely recite it will naturally find it useful."[33]

The second example of the later removal of Buddhist elements comes at the end of an incense-lighting ritual that Pan Gong recommends people perform twice a day. The first stick, in the Wende tang edition, "is to pay respect to all the Buddhas, Heaven, and earth and wish the emperor myriad years [of life], and peace within the four seas."[34] In all later editions, the religious element has been stripped away, leaving only a plea for political stability and an end to war, understandable in the context of ongoing violence. Thus, the first stick "is to ask for myriad years [of life] for the emperor and that the weapons of war will forever rest."[35] The purpose of the second stick differs little between editions, with only a few words changed to wish for the end of disaster rather than the happy songs of the peasantry. Likewise, in both editions, the third stick is used to pray that more people will swear oaths to correct their errors and do good, influencing Heaven to turn back disaster through the humble sincerity of the common people. In the Wende tang edition, Pan goes on to say, "Also I advise people to daily recite 'Glory to the Name Guanyin Bodhisattva' a few thousand times. The Bodhisattva's power to protect all living beings is

31.「現在刼数全虧佛菩薩護佑。因江蘇百姓平素燒香念佛戒殺放生善事甚多無奈造惡之人亦不少。是以大刼難免。為今之計應當發愿速速改過為善或可挽回。」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 3a (punctuation added).

32.「斷不可道無用。只恐他不能誠心。然到底災殃太重。未能全靠。」 Yili zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:3a–b (original punctuation).

33.「誠心念的自然有用」Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:3a.

34.「上敬諸佛天地願皇上萬歲四海昇平」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 11a.

35.「要求皇上萬歲。干戈永息。」Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:9b (original punctuation).

most vast. My dear younger brother, hurry up and admonish [people about] this!"[36] No later editions make any mention of Guanyin or her vast power, rather ending the exhortation with Pan bidding farewell to Danran sheng, advising him to hurry back to the world of the living and share what he has learned to save others.[37] In those editions, the only time Pan recommends reciting Guanyin's name is in a newly added ritual that women should follow when replacing any printed books that they used to organize embroidery thread with blank paper notebooks. Women ought to recite Guanyin's name a hundred times and ritually burn the old books to show reverence to the characters on their pages.[38] In chapters 4 and 5, in which I address texts aimed at female audiences, we will see further how devotion to Guanyin is more firmly associated only with salvation for women rather than universal assistance for all people, even illustrious men like Pan Zengyi.

In removing references to the power of Buddhist deities and rituals to save listeners from disaster in expedient and miraculous ways, *Pan Gong* takes on a more depressing tone. Sincere hearts calling on Guanyin may obtain immediate salvation, but all of Yu's morality texts focus on the need for constant, diligent moral work, where a single severe mistake may arouse heavenly anger. In the Wende tang edition, Danran sheng, when allowed to examine the heavenly registers of those fated to die in the disaster, is impressed by the number of names that have been crossed off due to their vows of repentance. "With a sigh, he said, 'This is really a case of putting down the butcher's knife and immediately becoming a buddha'": this idiomatic expression refers to the instantaneous transformation that can happen so long as one who repents is truly sincere when they give up their evil ways.[39] No such room for optimism can be found in Yu's replacement for this exclamation, as all later versions make no mention of names eliminated from the book of the dead for last-minute repentance. Instead, he lists the types of people who have found their way into the register: "Like Buddhist monks and Daoist adepts who break their religious precepts, [there are] the gluttonous, those who commit obscenities, who oppose officials, obscure the good, and bully the weak. And all other kinds of wrongdoings too. Not a single one goes unrecorded in this book, and

36.「再要勸人每日念南無觀音菩薩数千聲。蓋菩薩保佑眾生靈感最為廣大。老弟急速勸勸。」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 11a (punctuation added).

37. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:9b.

38. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:20a.

39.「歎道。此真放下屠刀。立地成佛也。」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 8a (punctuation added).

none of them will be allowed to die a natural death." To drive this point home, Danran sheng now responds with grief instead of wonder: "When Danran saw this section, he couldn't help but be distressed, and his tears fell like rain."[40]

Substantive differences unrelated to Buddhist content also exist between the Wende tang version and the later recensions, the most striking of which is the rearrangement and editing of an additional set of unenumerated good sayings attributed to Pan Gong that follow a set of twelve numbered aphorisms, which all versions reproduce more or less without change.[41] Where the Wende tang edition then adds fourteen maxims, the Hangzhou and Suzhou versions instead have seventeen. In addition to inexplicably removing a saying against the consumption of opium, Yu adds adages against cursing, gossiping about women's perceived lack of virtue, gluttony, and the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth. He also reorders the sequence in which the sayings are given, although the only obvious organizing principle seems to be phrasal length, with thirteen five-character adages followed by the remaining four with seven characters each, perhaps to be attentive to the rhythm a performer might find while reading the text aloud. After each of the thirteen maxims from the Wende tang edition that remain in the later versions, the explicatory prose tends to be the same in the Xiamen and Hangzhou versions, even though it is often shorter in the Suzhou version, showing that Yu continued to revise the text for flow and perhaps also to improve performativity.

In contrast to the differences among versions of Volume 1, across the three later versions Volumes 2 and 3 have few major differences. Minor changes in phrasing and single characters appear throughout, but none substantively change the meaning or framing of the work; they appear for the most part to be the product of a writer tinkering with their words after a few years of having set it aside. The most significant of these ultimately minor changes between earlier and later versions is that in both sequel volumes, Yu's 1858 version intensifies the emphasis on cherishing written paper and grains. In Volume 2, he expands each single couplet that had mentioned both into two couplets with one focused on each practice, and he adds a lengthy section at the close on grain-cherishing and outhouse-cleaning. Volume 3 likewise includes several additional admonitions on

40.「僧道破戒。貪吃犯淫役吏昧良欺弱。等等罪孽。無一不歸入此冊。皆不得善終。淡然看到此處。不覺觸目傷心。淚如雨下。」Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 1:7a (original punctuation).

41. In the earlier versions, each adage has two couplets, but in the Dejian zhai edition, Yu has added two more couplets to each.

grain-cherishing. These edits may have been motivated in part by another *baojuan* that Yu published with Dejian zhai in 1858, *Xigu baojuan*, which focused on grain-cherishing practices. Similar in design, even with an explicit mention of *Pan Gong* in its brief preface, *Xigu* seems to have been designed to go along with *Pan Gong* as a companion text of sorts. Content aside, the effort put into pairing these works thematically and visually demonstrates Yu's deepening investment in creating literature designed and intended for popular performance.

Structure and Meanings of Volumes 2 and 3

If Yu was taking advantage of popular interest in the first volume to graft his own work onto it in the hopes that all three volumes would spread across Jiangnan together, what did Yu use his additional volumes for? In Volumes 2 and 3, Yu adds substantial detail and some complexity to *Pan Gong* at the cost of narrative coherence across the text's three parts, despite his efforts to align the first volume with his broader non-Buddhist aims. In these volumes, Yu creates new scenarios in which roughly the same moral admonitions that Volume 1 covers are reviewed many more times, presumably for the sake of emphasis. The same message is at the heart of each scenario: disasters are Heaven-sent to punish wrongdoers, and only the good will be able to avoid being caught up in them. If any temporal structure can be discerned within these volumes, time appears to run in reverse. The first half of Volume 2 addresses the initial wave of Taiping victories in Jiangnan in graphic detail. The second half takes place a few weeks before these horrors. Volume 3 then provides a retrospective of Pan Gong's life, from his scholarly background to his turn to Buddhism and charitable acts, before dramatizing two occasions on which he lectured his tenants about the workings of Heaven and the importance of morality. The cumulative effect, especially if all three volumes are read in succession, as the instructions at the end of each volume invite readers to do, is mostly one of boredom. Surely by the fifth or sixth time audiences are warned that failure to practice filial piety or peaceful fraternal relations will bring down disaster on a family, the message had long ago been received and understood.

The second volume begins with a long narrative ode describing the fall of Nanjing and the plight of its residents in vivid detail and with dynamic shifts of action. This intense, lyrical description of the destruction poetically renders anew the painful opening of Yu's 1853 essay "Jiehai huilan

shuo," but it fails to reproduce that essay's immediate turn from initial horror to a swift condemnation of those caught up in the violence. Instead, falling somewhere between heartfelt eulogy and haranguing warning, this opening strikes an odd tone. Are audiences meant to pity those who died in horrendous ways, or take heart that only those who deserved to die faced such gruesome fates? Following this opening, long metrical sections with highly repetitive structures, less like poems and more like tallies, detail the crimes of those who died and the virtuous acts that allowed the good to escape. The second half of the volume describes how, a few weeks before the Taiping attack, a virtuous elementary teacher named Sun Yunji 孫雲際 was summoned to Heaven by the City God to help process the excess heavenly paperwork created by the number of sinners slated to die soon. The lessons imparted from Sun's point of view as he examines heavenly moral account books and talks with the City God cover the same content as in the first volume. Sun's first glimpse at the registers allows Yu to include a long metrical list linking specific sins with particularly grotesque wartime fates, which seem disproportionate to the nature of the wrongdoing. Punishments include those who said evil things getting a spear through the throat, gushing with blood; someone who opened a teahouse staffed with popular storytellers has their head cloven in two; the gluttonous are skinned and fried alive.[42] Such imagery borrows from depictions of the ten courts of the underworld more than from the standard tropes of heavenly punishments dealt out in Yu's other works. In his morality tales for the classroom, punishments tend to come in the form of house fires, lightning strikes, or sudden illnesses. But in the second volume, the punishments become much more personal for seemingly inconsequential transgressions. Perhaps framing such gore as punishment for everyday evils was an attempt, however strained, to make sense of the unimaginable slaughter of civilians and soldiers, seen through the eyes of a horrified but morally upstanding schoolteacher.

It is perhaps unsurprising that in Yu's first foray into writing fiction, he would choose a schoolteacher for his main character and then place this virtuous avatar, who had presumably failed to secure a position in the earthly civil service, in a position where his merit attracted such attention from Heaven that his administrative skills were recognized and celebrated by the otherworldly bureaucracy.[43] Were the circumstances behind the

42. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 2:15b–16a.

43. I use "fiction" here in a broad sense. Yu would not have recognized his writing as *xiaoshuo*, nor does it precisely belong in that category, but it is safe to say, given the

summons less awful, Sun's temporary ascension to the courts of the gods would almost read like humorous wish fulfilment, with Yu inserting a version of himself into his new *baojuan*. Throughout Volume 2, the text rarely gives clear indication of the intended audience for the repeated reminders of what Heaven hates and loves, but the frame narrative would probably appeal to those who might have imagined themselves in Sun's position. Sun is then given a glimpse of some heavenly registers that allow Yu to insert a series of morality tales about Sun's friends into the text. This includes a schoolteacher whose actions sound remarkably close to those Yu criticized as bad teaching; in its happy ending, once he had an epiphany about the importance of teaching morals, he began to lecture from *Riji gushi* and adopted "Xu shentong shi" and *Xu qianjia shi* as textbooks, which saved him from dying at the hands of Taipings.[44] Similar references to Yu's work and his priorities are found throughout the second and third volumes.[45]

Volume 3 seems to be more about the performance of virtuous authority than about imparting new lessons to listeners. Pan Gong's lectures to his tenants function more as celebrations of his authority and limitless knowledge of proper moral behavior than to benefit anyone who might resemble Pan's audience while listening to a performance of this text. The volume recognizes Pan's ability to encourage his friends and family to donate funds to help the destitute in times of crisis, especially during drought and famine. Pointing out that "it truly is our excellent opportunity to earn merit," the narrator almost seems to celebrate disaster as a chance to prove one's charitable bona fides.[46] In a nod to those with fewer financial resources, the narrator briefly mentions that even families of limited means should be able to economize a little to donate to others, or perhaps they could sell their fields or borrow money to earn heavenly merit instead. The text assures its readers that during disasters, the City God gives ten times the usual amount of merit for donations of food and cash to widows, orphans, the elderly, and families with newborn infants.[47] Volume 3 especially focuses on cherishing grains and advising how to establish a grain-cherishing society among the peasantry to earn merit

composite nature of this section, which draws on Yu's morality literature, that he was not writing nonfiction.

44. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 2:21a–22a.

45. For a description of the many similarities between these volumes and Yu's other works, see Lai Jinxing, 126–35.

46.「正是我們的極好積德機會」Dejian zhai *Pan Gong* 3:3b.

47. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong* 3:3b–4a.

and avoid famines and plagues. After his tenants establish such a society on Pan's advice, they invite him back to their village to lecture again since they enjoyed it so much the first time. He delivers this lecture from a Buddhist hall (*fotang* 佛堂), where the society has its meetings, and begins by asking the assembled crowd to pause their recitation of the Buddha's name so that they might listen to his advice. Once he delivers yet another reminder about the importance of the admonitions already covered many times before in *Pan Gong*, an old man speaks up to ask Pan about something strange he did when he first entered the temple. Before paying respects to the image of the Buddha, Pan paused to bow to the dragon stele, which was a regular feature of government offices, schools, and temples in the Qing and bore an inscription wishing the emperor myriad years of life. This allows Yu to close the text with a long reminder about the importance of respecting imperial authority, extending to donating food and clothing to his armies and refusing to even entertain the idea of becoming bandits. In any other time, these reminders about repaying the emperor's favor with obedience and fealty might come across as sanctimonious. However, in the early years of the Taiping War? To a Qing loyalist like Yu, nothing could be more pressing or more essential. Despite the numbing effect of the repetition in Volumes 2 and 3, elements of Yu's chosen frames for moral lessons are highly evocative of the uncertainty of the moment in which the text was written, and of the environment of grief and fear in which firm rules and reassuring promises of Heaven's saving power for those who earned its mercy remained compelling elements.

On its own, *Pan Gong* Volume 1 dramatizes dry moralistic aphorisms, familiar to anyone with even minimal exposure to *shanshu*, within a stunningly compelling frame tale about a departed local worthy and the immediate crisis facing his community. Though it is unclear from the text itself (in any version) who the writer imagined listening to a recitation of this work, that may have been beside the point. Volumes 2 and 3 likewise read more like a *shanshu* brought to life with lightly sketched characters and weakly linked plot points. Were audiences used to popular *baojuan*, such as those about Mulian rescuing his mother or Princess Miaoshan resisting her evil father's attempts to force her to marry, going to find something to capture their attention in *Pan Gong*? It seems quite unlikely. Returning to Che Xilun's definition of the *quanshi wen* subcategory of *baojuan*, within which *Pan Gong* fits quite squarely in both its one- and three-volume versions, it is unclear if any texts from this genre found a home within the popular performance repertoire. The profusion of reprint editions is nonetheless a strong sign that the text had some kind of popularity. In the

following section, I turn from the text to the people who it was about and who supported it, beginning with the Pan family, to consider Yu's relationship with Pan Zengyi. Following this, I draw attention to the true drivers of *Pan Gong*'s spread: its hundreds of donors and sponsors under whose patronage dozens of editions were produced.

Pan Gong, Pan Zengyi, and Yu Zhi

In light of the proposition that Yu's adaptation and expansion of *Pan Gong* intended to spread the same moral values that he emphasized in his morality textbooks, at first glance, his work may appear to be shameless capitalization on the reputation of a pillar of the Jiangnan community soon after his death. No matter where the first volume originated, by dampening its Buddhist sentiments and using Pan as the voice of heavenly authority in two sequel volumes, Yu's new hybrid work succeeded because of the appeal of what it promised, perhaps bolstered by the local reputation of the figure voicing those promises to listeners. While *shanshu* audiences of the Qing were becoming used to new revelations revealed through spirit-writing seances by exalted deities, such as Guandi or Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, who had lived long ago, Pan Gong's dream revelations to Danran sheng took on an intimacy engendered by his recent death and his real impact through aiding his community.[48] This community, now reeling from the onslaught of war, may have found solace in how quickly Pan Zengyi had been apotheosized and in his continued care even in death for the living he had left behind. What was Yu Zhi doing inserting himself into this grief?

Yu almost certainly grieved Pan's loss as well, and though it is unclear if he ever met Pan directly, he had been inspired by his example and had even received donations from him for his prewar disaster-relief efforts.[49] Looking at the three-volume, full-length edition of *Pan Gong* in this light, it becomes clear that Yu held Pan Zengyi in very high esteem as a benefactor to his community. As such, Yu's efforts seem more like ways of mourning the lost moral exemplar and may even have been an attempt to honor him by carrying on his work of supporting Jiangnan amid disaster, allow-

48. For more on these deities and the texts they revealed in the Qing, see Vincent Goossaert, *Making the Gods Speak: The Ritual Production of Revelation in Chinese Religious History* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2022), especially chapter 7, "Canonizations."

49. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:6a.

Fig.2. Portrait of Pan Zengyi in his *nianpu*. From Pan Zengyi 潘曾沂 and Pan Yifeng 潘儀鳳. "Xiaofushanren nianpu 小浮山人年譜." In *Beijing tushuguan cang zhenben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊, Vol. 145 (Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1999), 467.

ing him to continue to offer aid from beyond the grave. The second volume confirms through a trustworthy schoolteacher witness that thousands were saved thanks to Pan's last-minute warning, and the third paints a charming picture of how beloved Pan was to his tenants and how warmly he cared for their moral well-being. Yu's reverence for Pan is especially clear in the detail with which he constructed the 1858 edition of *Pan Gong*, beginning with his elegiac prefaces (both dated 1855) mourning Pan's death. Despite the war, Yu managed to acquire a copy of Pan's *nianpu* (chronological biography) and reproduced the portrait of Pan included there as the edition's opening image.[50]

50. Pan Zengyi's *nianpu* does not include a publication date. For more on the *nianpu*, see Le, "Pan Zengyi *Xiaofushanren nianpu* zhengli yu yanjiu."

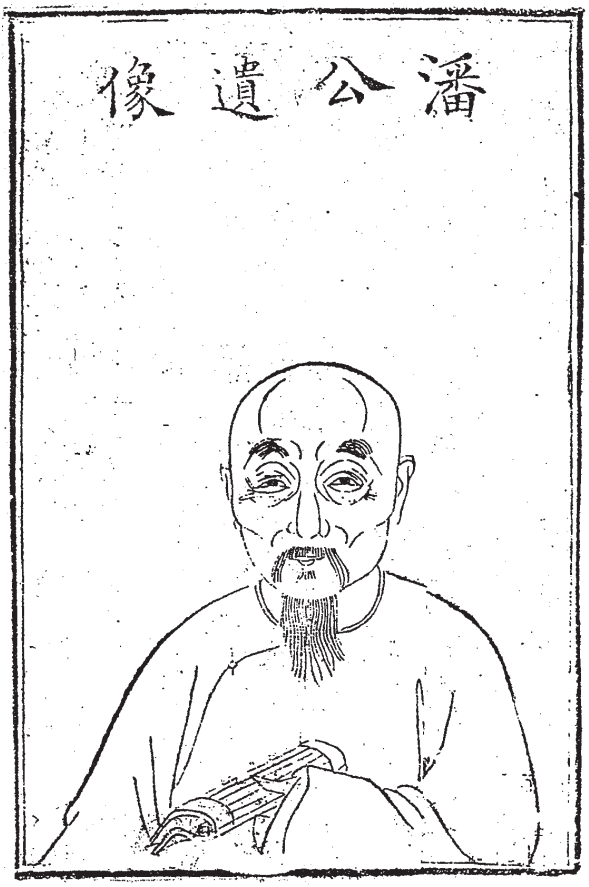


Fig.3. Portrait of Pan Gong. From Dejian zhai, *Pan Gong baojuan*. In *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集, Vol. 23 (Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), 165.

For much of the nineteenth century, the Pan family wielded significant influence not only within Suzhou but also at the imperial court. Pan Zengyi's father, Pan Shi'en 潘世恩 (1770–1854) was in high favor in Beijing, having served as the president of the Board of Rites (1801–1802), Board of War (1802–1804), Board of Revenues (1804–1806, 1813–14), Board of Civil Appointment (1806–1813, 1827, 1831–33) and the Board of Public Works (1830–1831). He was promoted first to Grand Secretary (1833–1850), then shortly after also became Grand Councilor (1834–1849).[51] The Pan family's influence did not dim with the elder Pan's death in 1854. Pan Zengyi's nephew, Pan Zuyin, who attained *jinshi* (進士) status in 1852, served on nearly as many boards in Beijing as his grandfather, though only late in his

51. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2:607–8.

career did he achieve the rank of president and Grand Councilor. Pan Zuyin was also a central figure in Taiping and post-Taiping gentry-official patronage networks in Jiangnan and Beijing.[52]

Pan Zengyi, in contrast, lacked the civil service accomplishments of his brothers and nephews. According to his *nianpu*, in his younger years, Pan had ambitions of obtaining a position in the capital. But after he had failed the *jinshi* exam five times, his 1823 *nianpu* entry records his increasing dissatisfaction with the endless social politics and dramas of the capital. The long entry for 1823 would prove to be the last autobiographical one, leaving his second son to complete the document after his death.[53] In 1824, Pan excused himself from the capital, returning home to celebrate his grandfather's eightieth birthday. Reading between the lines in Pan's *nianpu* provides detail that would have been of particular interest to Yu and other disappointed scholars who had aspired to civil service but had repeatedly failed. In his midthirties, Pan grew increasingly frustrated with his failure to secure a good position, even though his father continued to encourage him to try. In entries leading up to and including 1823, he muses on the emptiness of making so much effort for so little return. His final self-written entry shows him looking beyond these disappointments, ending with details about his participation in gathering relief for flooded areas. Pan's attention was steadily being drawn away from the superficial concerns of capital elites to the real suffering of the people.

In addition to career struggles, the mid-1820s also threw Pan into a long period of grief and poor health. After marrying in 1810, he saw a steady string of births of daughters, in 1813, 1815, and 1816, before a son, Tinggao (庭誥), was born in early 1818.[54] But in the eighth month of 1824, this only son died at seven *sui*, leaving Pan with three daughters, no heir, and no job. That same year, Pan also lost a close friend, an uncle, and his beloved childhood nanny.[55] Then, in 1825, the chronic disease that he would eventually die from began. Faced with all of these tragedies, Pan turned to Buddhism. Later, according to the epitaph composed by Feng

52. For analysis of Pan Zuyin as a political lobbyist, see James Polachek, "Gentry Hegemony: Soochow in the T'ung-chih Restoration," in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Carolyn Grant (University of California Press, 1975), 211–56. See also *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2:608–9.

53. Pan Zengyi and Pan Yifeng 潘儀鳳, "Xiaofushanren nianpu 小浮山人年譜," in *Beijing tushuguan cang zhenben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊 (Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1999), 145:542.

54. Pan and Pan, 145:514, 517, 520, 523.

55. Le, "Pan Zengyi *Xiaofushanren nianpu* zhengli yu yanjiu," 128–33.

Guifen, Pan had a visionary dream and learned that he was a reincarnation of a monk from Mount Fudu (浮渡山) in Anhui.[56] Ultimately, his religious and philanthropic dedication established his reputation in Jiangnan in an exalted position that years of networking in the capital, in the shadow of his accomplished father, had failed to achieve.

Privileged enough to leave behind the hustle of social maneuvering he had grown so tired of, Pan's stature was developed through acts of philanthropy with an emphasis on doing practical good. For men like Yu, Pan Zengyi was an example of not only admirable philanthropy but of achieving success and fame without having climbed to the heights of the civil service.[57] Pan had expressed frustration with traditional Confucian doctrine and looked beyond it for solutions. He found Buddhism; Yu dedicated himself to teaching and morality literature. Their parallel experiences of five failed attempts at advancement only to abandon the effort and retire to a life of philanthropy, experienced first by Pan and later by Yu, albeit at different levels of the economic and social hierarchy, are also significant. In producing what he might have hoped would be the definitive edition of *Pan Gong* in 1858, in his signed prefaces Yu maneuvers himself into position as a successor to Pan's *shanren* reputation in Jiangnan.

Yu Zhi and his friends were eager to map their smaller-scale philanthropic efforts onto the model provided for them by Suzhou greats like Pan Zengyi and his cousin Xie Yuanqing 謝元慶 (1798–1860); Xie was renowned for his medical philanthropy.[58] For example, Yu's *nianpu* highlights how, in 1841, a soup kitchen he founded attracted attention and donations from higher-status philanthropists, including Pan Zengyi.[59] Notably, Pan is one of only two names on the list not from Yu's hometown.[60] This donation, which must have been only one of many that Pan made to worthy causes that year, was too insignificant to bear mentioning in his own *nianpu* for the same year. Yu continued to reach out to Pan, hoping to further his connection with the inspirational *shanren*. In his 1855 preface to the Hangzhou lineage of *Pan Gong* editions, Hong Fusheng mourns that when he and Yu called on Pan Zengyi in Suzhou in 1849, they

56. Pan and Pan, 145:469.

57. Zhang, "Weiji yu yingdui," 168.

58. Lai Jinxing, 22–24. Feng Guifen, who supervised the compilation of the Suzhou gazetteer, compared Yu Zhi with these two men. Feng also wrote a preface for the first edition of *Deyi lu* and an epitaph for Pan Zengyi. For the relationship between Pan and Xie, see Zhang, "Weiji yu yingdui," 164–65.

59. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:6a.

60. The other was Xie Yuanqing. Lai Jinxing, 126.

were unable to gain admittance to see him.[61] Pan Zengyi's *nianpu* for this time shows that although he maintained active social correspondence and concern for the state of the world, he had not left the house in nine years. Though Pan was present when the two admirers sought an audience, he was not at home for them.[62] The difference in status with Pan in those prewar years, before Yu gained rank and recognition for his wartime efforts, could not be more strikingly illustrated.[63]

Given the Pan family's influence at the time the *baojuan* appeared, had they objected to its contents or representation of their relative, it is unlikely that Yu would have chosen to add to it or that *Pan Gong* could have maintained such sustained popularity afterward. Zhang Shuxian even posits that the family may have written the first volume to perpetuate the value that his status as a local exemplar had bestowed on the rest of the clan.[64] No matter where the tale of his heavenly promotion originated, a handwritten note on the cover of an 1883 Ma'nao jingfang (瑪瑙經房) edition by Pan Chengbi 潘承弼 (1907–2003), a famous book collector and librarian, reveals that it became part of accepted family lore. Dating his annotation to 1939, he writes "The drama in the first volume, with the matter of my great-uncle Gongfu appearing in a dream, is a matter of family history. . . . This insignificant one reminisces nostalgically about his ancestor's virtue."[65] Adding as it did to the widespread recognition of their family, and perhaps even contributing to the effectiveness of the philanthropic rhetoric Pan Zuyin used to press for tax reforms that would benefit wealthy Suzhou families during and after the war, the text's continued spread through Jiangnan could only have met with the family's approval.[66]

In a cynical counterpart to the idealism and sincerity expressed in the *baojuan* discussed above and to the examples from the paratext that I will address below, the Pan family and other Suzhou elites, many of them supporters of Yu's efforts, used their reputations as philanthropists to effectively line their own coffers. In a case study of tax-reform lobbying by

61. *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 3a. No mid-nineteenth-century occurrences for Hong Fusheng can be found in contemporaneous gazetteers.

62. The *nianpu* entry for 1847 records how Pan, having refused to leave home for seven years, even declined to attend his stepmother's birthday celebration. Pan and Pan, 145:570.

63. For more detail on the connections between Pan and Yu, see Wang Weiwei, 36–37.

64. Zhang, "Weiji yu yingdui," 164.

65.「此卷演唱先曾伯祖功甫公托夢事是亦吾家故實耳 . . . 小子追懷先澤」This copy is in the collection at Peking University Library.

66. Polachek, 217.

antebellum and postbellum Suzhou gentry, James Polachek narrates a real-life drama, featuring a cast of characters who make appearances throughout Yu's collected works as authors of prefaces and appendices. He contrasts the idealized picture of the Tongzhi Restoration as made up of "hardy backwoods gentrymen, charged with concern for their imperiled native communities and untainted by the petty careerism common to the normal run of bureaucrat . . . taking command of the struggle to put new life into the corruption-wracked state," with the caustic tone in an essay by one of Feng Guifen's neighbors, accusing him of hypocrisy and greed. This leads Polachek to outline the formation of a movement among certain gentry who sought to consolidate their local power bases at the expense of the grand ideals of the Tongzhi Restoration.[67] Feng, Wu Yun, Pan Zengwei 潘曾瑋 (1819–1886),[68] and Pan Zuyin applied philanthropic rhetoric to strengthen their arguments that the most heavily taxed prefectures of Jiangnan, primarily where these men and their allies owned property, should have an immediate reduction in the rice quota required of tenants and landowners.[69] This relief, granted for three years initially, was extended further after the war ended, to the great benefit of these Suzhou landowners, and "put great limits on what even the most idealistic of [Jiangsu's] provincial intendants could do to reverse the encroachments of the [Suzhou] patriciate."[70] In essence, the famous men who championed Yu Zhi as an exemplary *shanren* had vested interests in coopting the language of aid and relief to line their own pockets. The ideals of the Tongzhi reformers in Beijing, expressed in high-minded theoretical terms, were stymied in practice by Jiangsu gentry who used their charitable concerns defensively against threats to their social and economic status.

Pan's descendants and associates, it seems, had either never read or failed to take to heart a lesson, which Yu included in Pan Gong's lecture to his tenants in Volume 3, about the inability of rent reduction to affect one's fated wealth or poverty. After a family received a rent reduction and thought their surplus of rice would help their lot improve, they all fell ill and could not work, recovering only after the excess grain ran out. After hearing how rent remittances brought about disaster for the tenants, Pan Gong said, "From this, you should all see that wealth is fated. Those fated to be poor will be poor, and nothing can force it [to be otherwise]. In life,

67. Polachek, 214.

68. The younger brother of Pan Zengyi. See *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2:608.

69. Polachek, 243, and 245.

70. Polachek, 248.

doesn't everyone wish to be wealthy? You have parents above you and wives and children below you, and if you don't become wealthy how can you care for them? I'm not against you becoming wealthy. It's only good when everyone has food to eat!"[71]

His tenants, asking him the secret to wealth, learned that it could be captured in but two little words: do good (為善 *wei shan*).[72] Regardless of what the Pans and other prominent members of Jiangnan society in the wartime and postwar years did for the good of their communities, or merely the good of their own estates, many people lower on the social ladder, particularly those whose names are recorded in no other sources besides the *Pan Gong* paratexts, invested financial capital and profound hope in the goodness that this text might transmit and the transformation it might bring to them and their families in times of crisis.

Earning Merit Beyond Measure: *Pan Gong*'s Donors and Patrons

Even though *Pan Gong*'s life as a popular *baojuan* was influenced by its protagonist's reputation and family background, it spread because of the complicated desires of countless donors balancing their sense of loss (of imperial stability, of potential career advancement, of home and family) with their hopes for the restoration (of Qing supremacy, of social reputation, and of culture itself). *Pan Gong*, as a material object moving through Jiangnan during wartime, suffered destruction, loss, and recovery in tandem with its residents during successive waves of military forces advancing and retreating. In this sense, reprint efforts also became part of a larger effort to shore up and restore traditional values and lost cultural heritage. Against the fear of social collapse, a fresh edition of *Pan Gong* was a measurable sign of hope, in both the concrete capacity for reconstruction and restoration and the abstract promise of preventing future disasters. As the plethora of extant reprint editions confirms, republishing this text was incredibly popular.

Many editions close with donor lists, leaving us with brief but rich records of the hopes of hundreds of individuals who have otherwise

71.「却說潘公聽了眾人一番說話。赦了租米。反致帶累佃戶生災。因說道。你們從此看來。錢財有命。命裡窮。只是窮。不可勉強了。然而人生在世。那一个不想發財。你們上有父母。下有妻兒。若不發財。何以養活。我也巴不得你們發財。家家有碗飯吃才好。」Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 3:8a–9a (original punctuation).

72. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 3:9a.

mostly been lost to history. Each name printed (or withheld, in the case of anonymous donors) represents a desire to be part of spreading this text in the hopes of gaining some kind of salvation or benefit. Not all were looking to be saved from the Taiping War as *Pan Gong* had promised his listeners. Instead, donors' requests range from the practical to the poignant, included in lists that show both organized, collective effort as well as haphazard print-on-demand publications over unspecified amounts of time.

Editions produced during wartime understandably feature many requests for peace and safety. The earliest clearly dated extant edition, published in 1856 in Wuxi, Yu's hometown, ends with a donor list that starts with following explanation: "Donations to carve the blocks, print, and distribute the text are for the sake of wishing for protection and peace for one's family and oneself. Every wish costs 360 *wen*."[73] The list proceeds in descending order from a single donor, who made five wishes (totaling 1,800 *wen*), through to fifty donors who made only a single wish each. Yu's 1858 edition closes with nine donors, four of whom chose to remain anonymous, who sponsored a total of 1,605 copies of the work. One who sponsored 60 copies wishes for peace within his family, while another who sponsored 50 did so to repay Heaven's favor in already having allowed him to escape disaster.[74] Perhaps reflecting its geographical distance from the war, the 1858 Xiamen single-volume edition shows that its donors were focused on obtaining domestic blessings. Requests for health dominate. One man sponsored 50 volumes in the hope that his second son's illness would improve. Another man sponsored 80 volumes on behalf of his mother, and yet another 100 on behalf of his maternal grandmother.[75]

Donor lists are common paratextual additions to *baojuan* and other morality texts published in the Qing and Republican eras. Where *Pan Gong* differs from commonly circulating *baojuan* of the same period is in the attention paid to its prefaces, especially the practice of adding new prefaces to commemorate the meritorious acts of the major sponsors behind a newly carved edition. This is not to say that other widely reprinted *baojuan* circulated entirely without paratextual materials, but rather that there was less variation in the prefaces and postfaces between editions, should they exist at all.[76] Taken collectively, the existence of the many dif-

73.「募捐翻刻印施為保家安身之願每願三百六十文」 *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan*, (1856), 3:[21a–b].

74. Dejian zhai *Pan Gong*, 3:21b.

75. Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 25b–26a.

76. See Katherine Alexander, "The Precious Scroll of Liu Xiang: Late Ming Roots and Late Qing Proliferation," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 49, no. 1 (May 2021): 65–66, for a

ferent prefaces added to *Pan Gong* over the years emphasizes how many of those who reprinted it were eager to call attention to their involvement in a way that was legible to their peers, rather than to the listeners for whom the core text was ostensibly reproduced. After all, prefaces written in Classical Chinese, with some carved in a calligraphic running script rather than the functional if unaesthetic artisan-style (匠體 *jiangti*) characters used for the main text, were not meant for the "ignorant men and women" identified as the intended listening audience of *Pan Gong*'s moral admonishments by certain preface writers. Instead, adding prefatory commentary was important because the reading audience was attentive to the social meanings of contributing paratext.

Additions and subtractions to the paratext allowed new sponsors and compilers to position themselves around the core text in stances that provide insights into their motives. Though the 1858 Dejian zhai edition, the one over which Yu had the most editorial control, opens with three images (Pan Zengyi's *nianpu* portrait, the Bodhisattva Guanyin saving people from drowning, Pan Gong appearing in a dream) and three prefaces (two signed by Yu), most other editions have much simpler paratexts. Few editions reproduce all three of Yu's chosen images, if any at all.[77] Hong Fusheng's two paratextual contributions to the Hangzhou lineage of *Pan Gong* editions are much more frequently reproduced in subsequent editions than Yu's prefaces or illustrations. Li Tongfu's retrospective look at the text's early spread and publication history is less commonly reprinted. For the most part, however, new editions of *Pan Gong* were an occasion for men whose names have otherwise been lost to history to record their contributions to the text's spread. Many that predate the end of the war note the difficulty of obtaining the highly sought-after text or acknowledge the destruction of the blocks that they had hoped to use, requiring extra time and investment to bring their edition to print.

Reprinting *Pan Gong* was about more than its content; it was also about identity creation. Long after the immediacy of poetry about the brutal fall of Nanjing no longer spoke directly to those who had lived through the war, *Pan Gong* kept the memory of the war alive. The text remained important because it offered its sponsors merit and figured into the identity that

brief discussion of the only two postfaces/prefaces that are occasionally attached to the extremely popular *Liu Xiang baojuan* (劉香寶卷 The precious scroll of Liu Xiang) that predated *Pan Gong* but circulated widely in the same era.

77. To my knowledge, only two reproduce them all: the undated Yihua tang edition, which simply reused Dejian zhai's blocks, and an 1876 edition without an identifiable publisher or location that used newly carved blocks, held by Kyoto University Library.

donors sought to assert for themselves. Three examples from among many will suffice to demonstrate some ways that *Pan Gong* was reframed and reinterpreted by literati who had their own religious and social motives behind such public demonstrations of support.

We begin with Hong Fusheng's influential framing, which repeatedly and rather curiously seeks to link *Pan Gong* to the cult of Guandi, who is never mentioned within the text. First, the reverse side of the cover or title page (depending on the edition) features four three-character admonitions attributed to Guandi in Zhu Tailai's calligraphy: "Read good books, say good speech, do good deeds, be a good person."[78] Following this is Hong Fusheng's signed and dated "Wu hao yuan baizi ming" (五好願百字銘 Hundred-character inscription of five good vows), which expands on each of Guandi's admonitions, with a final vow tying them all together and guiding readers to promise to preserve good hearts (存好心 *cun haoxin*).[79] After this comes Hong's preface in which he described his attempt to visit Pan Zengyi with Yu. It begins with two couplets that Hong attributes to the *Guandi jueshi jing*, printed in large characters, which he recommends that readers copy out for display in the central hall at home.[80] Hong advises readers to reprint *Pan Gong* and print or copy out the couplet and give them as gifts for all occasions, including weddings and birthdays and for exam success. Hong sees *Pan Gong* as exactly the kind of good book that Guandi admonishes people to read, one that allows them to fulfill the other three admonitions by teaching them good sayings, giving them good deeds to follow, and thus making them into good people. Furthermore, feeling as if he has finally had the chance to meet Pan Zengyi through this text, he declares that all four of Guandi's admonitions were perfectly embodied in Pan's life.[81] Although *Pan Gong* is clearly not about Guandi, Hong viewed it through lens of his devotion to Guandi, a perspective probably facilitated by Yu's revisions to the first volume that removed overt references to Buddhist devotional practices related to

78.「讀好書◦說好話◦行好事◦做好人◦」 *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 1:n.p. These four admonitions are attributed to many different sources in the rich and complicated world of texts revealed by Guandi via spirit-writing seances in the Qing. For more on Guandi's role as an author of new texts, see Goossaert, *Making the Gods Speak*, 242–47, 267–68, and 277–85.

79. *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 1:1a.

80.「滿腔仁慈加福增壽／一切善事添子益孫」 *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 1:1b. These two couplets are lightly modified quotations from the text. For more on this text as a reflection of literati devotion to Guandi, see Barend ter Haar, *Guan Yu: Religious Afterlife of a Failed Hero* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 222–33.

81. *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 1:1a–4a.

Guanyin. As a result, *Pan Gong* could be used in the service of a different salvific deity. The latter half of Li Tongfu's 1857 preface, referenced above for its details about the text's early circulation, also pays attention to Hong's reverence for Guandi. In a lyrical conclusion, Li describes Hong's inscription on the five good vows as extending from one or two people out to millions. Li muses that these are all extensions of the vow that led Hong to compose the preceding paratextual materials, itself a result of the great vow Guandi swore to admonish and instruct the world.[82]

By connecting *Pan Gong* with the cult of Guandi, these early paratexts emphasize the work's value to Confucian religious movements of the mid-nineteenth century. In what Prasenjit Duara refers to as an "massive effort" to Confucianize the deity, during the Taiping War, the Qing promoted Guandi to the same level as Confucius in the register of official sacrifices.[83] Though Guandi had long been honored by the Qing state, beginning with a title granted in 1652, followed by a promotion in 1768, it was only during the Taiping War that imperial honors accrued with greater frequency, with four given during the war and two further in the 1870s.[84] This ascension to the upper echelon of the official pantheon was related to his political value, especially given his high status among many of the Hunan elites. This community was closely tied to shifting the Taiping War thanks to the loyalist army of Hunanese volunteers raised by General Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872).[85] But the devotion of paratextual authors was also related to Guandi's changing role from a simple martial deity who punished evildoers to a new savior who interceded on behalf of humanity with the Jade Emperor, who was bent on punishing them for their immorality. Goossaert credits a monumental 1858 forty-volume compendium of spirit-written revelations from Guandi with accelerating the spread of this savior aspect.[86] In Hong's preface, dated three years before that collection, his association of *Pan Gong* with Guandi already shows the vibrancy and force of the martial god as a moralizing power in the face of the advancing apocalypse and illustrates how widespread these beliefs were in the early years of the Taiping War.

Though the first volume's Buddhist references had been muted, and the Bodhisattva Guanyin's mercy was undermined in the opening section of

82. *Pan Gong chushi baojuan*, 1:6a.

83. Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War," *Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (November 1988): 778–95.

84. Goossaert, *Making the Gods Speak*, 267.

85. Goossaert, *Making the Gods Speak*, 277–78.

86. Goossaert, *Making the Gods Speak*, 277–78.

the third volume, Buddhist organizations were hardly discouraged from reprinting the work. Hangzhou Ma'nao jingfang, the prolific publisher of *baojuan* and Buddhist texts, which was first located in a Buddhist temple before moving into the city in the late Qing, published an edition of *Pan Gong* that includes explicitly Buddhist paratexts following the main text.[87] At the same time, the preface is decidedly not Buddhist; rather, it is directed at men who would understand its references to Confucian classics, and its discussion of *Pan Gong* associates it with mainstream *shanshu* such as *Guandi jueshi jing* and *Taishang ganying pian*.[88] Its writer, Chen Guangrong 陳光榮 (n.d.), appears to be speaking to a select group who did not need a text like *Pan Gong* to teach them morality but who may have wished to use it to transform less-educated audiences that struggled to comprehend classic *shanshu*. Presumably, these are the audiences who would be interested in the *Xin jing* (心經 Heart Sutra), assorted mantras, and the *Gaowang Guanshiying jing* (高王觀世音經 The Avalokitêśvara Sutra of King Gao) that close this edition.[89] Chen's exclusive preface allows us to see how *Pan Gong* could be simultaneously used by Buddhists and still appropriated by Confucian literati to serve their socio-moral reform purposes.

What happened to *Pan Gong* as the war faded from immediate memory and as Pan Gong's known identity as the exemplary son of Pan Shi'en no longer held any reference value for potential audiences? In a preface to an 1899 edition published in an unidentified location, Shentu Yu 申屠虞 (n.d.) begins by referencing the war in vague terms that reflect distance from its actual trauma: "I read *Pan Gong baojuan*. It contains good words that can awaken the world for the benefit of people and things and gives blessings to the long peace of our glorious Qing emperor. Its blocks were all burned up in the disorder caused by the long-haired bandits and none remain."[90] Shentu then explains how one of his cousins from the Zhang family had recently written a commentary on *Yinzhi tulu* (陰騭圖錄 Tract

87. Information on this prolific publisher is scant. See Liu Zhengping 刘正平, "Jingfang yu zongjiao wenxian de liukan—jianlun Ma'nao jingfang, Huikong jingfang 经坊与宗教文献的流刊—兼论玛瑙经房、慧空经房," *Hangzhou shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 5 (September 2017): 60–64, for a very brief introduction.

88. *Pan Gong mianzai baojuan* (Ma'nao jingfang, n.d.), 1:1a.

89. Ma'nao jingfang *Pan Gong*, 3:2.1a–3b. Pagination resumes at 1 after the body text ends on 3:20b.

90. *Pan Gong baojuan* (Xiangluanshan zhai, 1899), 1a. Shanghai Library call number 481881.

of hidden virtue, illustrated)[91] and had it printed, which then led him to look for another morality text to publish, for which he settled on *Pan Gong*. Printing *Pan Gong* was not his original plan, but after another cousin suddenly found five woodblocks for *Pan Gong* in a broken case, it seemed almost foreordained. Shentu posits that these blocks were related to some of their third uncle's own morality book–printing efforts during the Tongzhi period. On examining the full text, he and his cousins determined that *Pan Gong* was a worthy text to encourage morality in everyone: "From the family, [morality] will extend to the kingdom, and from the kingdom to all under heaven!" He continued, "Certainly there can be no one who will not happily share this impression and return to goodness. This is also a testament to the fortune of the tranquility of the great Qing!"[92]

The paratext of this edition neither includes any images of deities nor mentions any by name. Instead, it further orients *Pan Gong* along the lines of local elites and their hopes of Confucianizing society by means of the printed word. Shentu and his Zhang cousins do not appear in lists of successful exam takers or in other readily accessible biographical databases. Historically obscure now but for this edition of *Pan Gong* that records their existence and aspirations, in their own time, they sought to leave their mark on local society through active involvement in the publication of conventional morality literature. Although it seems that finding blocks for *Pan Gong*, perhaps because it was a *baojuan*, did at first give them pause, they soon realized that it aligned with their desire to celebrate and maintain Qing peace. Certainly, many editions had been printed after the Taiping War, but by 1899, the war was far enough removed from memory that Shentu could assert that all the blocks had been destroyed. The text's famous protagonist bears no mention, if Shentu even knew who the man was in the first place. By this point, *Pan Gong* had become just another *shanshu* in a textual sea that included thousands of other *shanshu*.

Despite Yu's adaptation and expansion of *Pan Gong* to reach a different type of audience than his previous writings had been intended for, both the enthusiasm for enacting one's philanthropic identity through preface writing and the contents of the prefaces show how, as time went on, evangelical Confucians, a different group from Yu's target audience, found in

91. No texts specifically by the name *Yinzhi tulu* yield results in library catalogs, but this was probably another version of the kind of illustrated morality text about Wenchang titled, variously, *Yinzhi wentu zheng/shuo/zhu/jie* 陰騭文圖證/說/注/解 (Commentary, etc., on the tract of hidden virtue).

92.「將由家而國。由國而天下。自莫不欣々然观感同歸於善乎。此亦我皇清享太平之福之一証也。」Xiangluanshan zhai *Pan Gong*, 2a–b (punctuation added).

Pan Gong something that they enthusiastically adopted by reframing the work in their own terms. Whether or not popular audiences ever adopted *Pan Gong* is impossible to tell based on its print history. The fact that between my archival research and Che's catalog of extant *baojuan* only one manuscript copy has been located could be taken as a lack of popular devotion to the work.[93] In the end, the audience that Yu was most successful at creating literature for remained men like himself, failed exam candidates and others who had been educated to believe they had a responsibility as Confucians to transform society but lacked the official position or wealth to independently direct major efforts.

Baojuan to Admonish the World

Before the war, Yu's growing concern about society's degenerative state led him to establish some organizations dedicated to offering relief in times of crises, from famine-relief kitchens to infant-protection societies, as well as others dedicated to meritorious acts such as cherishing grains and written paper. Such relief efforts were funded mostly by donors from his hometown, but he also appealed to more prominent philanthropists, gaining support from Pan Zengyi on at least one recorded occasion. Like the traditional directionality of *jiaohua*, whereby officials and gentry were to teach the common folk with *xiangyue* lectures and the peasantry was to be transformed by their exposure to such lofty ideals, charity relief was also unidirectional. Donors, drawing from their excess of resources, received merit from their acts of goodness, while recipients, helpless and in need, benefited from life-sustaining food or basic supplies.

The chaos of war, however, revealed the flaws in this system. In the practical sense, as would become increasingly clear over the course of the Taiping War, no amount of wealth or status could keep one safe from becoming a refugee or dying in a Taiping attack. Why did violence take so many, rich and poor alike? Both Yu in his first "Jiehai huilan shuo" essay and the anonymous author of the first volume of *Pan Gong* gave voice to the idea that the war was the result of collective immorality, and it was every individual's responsibility to reform to gain reprieve from Heaven's retribution. How could one earn merit in this new crisis when everyone was at fault and everyone was in need? On its very first page, *Pan Gong* emphasizes that meritorious acts are within everyone's reach, and there-

93. Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 198–200.

fore, they are everyone's responsibility: "The wealthy pay money to do good works; the good words of the poor serve as an exchange for their good intentions."[94] A few pages later, Pan Gong puts it even more simply: "The strong [should] spend money, the weak [should] spend words."[95] In this way, *Pan Gong* repeatedly argues for the value of oral transmission as a powerful force that would move heavenly officials to record their speaker's name in the registers of the saved, not the damned. These powerful words, packaged in a *baojuan* that promised by its very title to prevent disaster, carried incredible potential, should their intended audiences grasp the message that charitable acts like Pan's did not require his level of wealth or social status. The text gave everyone words of wisdom that they could spend just like the cash that the wealthy dedicated to charity, in theory empowering the powerless with the inexhaustible capital of good sentences, poems, and aphorisms.

Whether listening audiences of common folk received these messages and acted on them remains unknowable. As a *quanshi wen* type of *baojuan*, *Pan Gong* may never have captured the attention of large audiences listening to it performed aloud. But we do know that the gospel of efficient moral transformation, accessible even to the least powerful members of society, was one that Yu specifically chose to emphasize in one of his three prefaces to the 1858 Dejian zhai edition, calling on those with resources to have the text reprinted and those without funds to give voice to the text's words, promising all that they might be saved through this effort. *Pan Gong*, which early on grew from one to three volumes under Yu's enthusiastic and creative interventions, continued to be regularly reprinted for nearly a hundred years. Its spread was fueled by the efforts of major and minor donors looking either for the tangible benefits of health and safety from the merit earned by its replication, or the more intangible social benefits of being able to publicly assert one's concern for the moral state of society, especially the lower classes.

As a piece of literature, *Pan Gong* is a difficult text to enjoy, particularly in the repetitive three-volume version that quickly replaced the single-volume original. Yet it may well have been the most widely reprinted *quanshi wen*–style *baojuan* of all, a testament to its supporters' belief in its potential to reach an audience for whom traditional *shanshu* were assumed to be too difficult. In the end, the most coherent, compelling story told by

94.「富者出錢行好事◦窮人好話換心腸◦」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 1a (punctuation added).

95.「有力者出錢◦無力者出言◦」Wende tang *Pan Gong*, 3b (punctuation added).

Pan Gong is this: anyone can become a moral paragon like Pan Zengyi. Danran's dreams fade; the virtuous schoolteacher returns to the mortal realm after seven days of heavenly bureaucratic service, and spirits of Nanjing's dead dissipate into the fog of history. What remains is an identity that Yu Zhi lays claim to—that of the vocal, inspirational philanthropist—and the ambitious hope that a man like Pan Zengyi can, through his words of moral exhortation, restore a broken world to its agrarian, utopian past, one that must have seemed very far away amid war. This story was one that other men aspiring to assert their philanthropic identities could write themselves into by a variety of means, but particularly through the republication of the core text. The truly dedicated wrote new prefaces as they sponsored the work's spread throughout southern China, signing their names to this anonymous text, linking their acts of reading and distribution with the generosity that Pan Zengyi had become famous for during his lifetime. With his adaptation of the *baojuan* genre, Yu Zhi had perhaps set out to reach a wide audience of illiterate listeners, but his most visible success was setting an example for other men without political or social capital who were looking for a way to participate in *jiaohua* to establish a different sort of reputation for supporting good works. Neither powerful or powerless, they spent their limited resources on reproducing words, and in consequence, in many cases, left behind the only sources by which we in the present can know their names and their meritorious intentions.

4

Domesticity and Redemption

Homemaking to Avert Calamity

The texts I have analyzed thus far have been directed, either specifically or implicitly, at male audiences. Yu's essays on statecraft and philanthropy intentionally sought the attention of those in power, who could influence policy, and local elites with the means to fund charitable enterprises for a variety of causes. His discourses on pedagogy were meant to reform schools like those in which he had taught and to influence other schoolmasters to adopt his teaching materials, from illustrated morality tale collections, such as *Riji gushi xuji* and *Xuetang riji*, to his poetry anthology, *Xu qianjia shi*. Even in venturing to write *Pan Gong*, his main characters include a famous philanthropist, his philanthropically inclined relative, and a schoolteacher—hardly a stretch of his imagination. Given his intended male audiences, the absence of major female characters and the relative silence of the few in the background makes sense. Of the twenty-eight morality plays in *Shuji tang jinyue*, only six could be said to focus largely on women or feature important female characters, but even these were written for a mixed-gender audience, not specifically women alone.

Yu created only two works explicitly for female audiences. This chapter focuses on the first of them, *Xigu mianzai baojuan* (惜穀免災寶卷 Precious scroll of cherishing grain to avert calamities; hereafter *Xigu*), first published in 1858.[1] Representing a significant step in Yu's engagement with the *baojuan* genre, *Xigu* was a clear effort to engage directly with women on what he believed to be their own terms; it represents another way Yu sought to interest new audiences in moral transformation. Though

1. I touch on the second of these works at the end of the following chapter.

the brief preface introduces it as a companion work to *Pan Gong*, which was discussed in the previous chapter, *Xigu* differs dramatically from that *baojuan* in its narrative structure and its strong-willed, outspoken female protagonist, Granny Wang 王老娘 (*Wang laoniang*). By laying out the domestic concerns that Yu believed women must scrupulously mind if they were to keep their families safe from divine retribution, he wrote a text that functions as a tool to recruit the other half of society to his moral causes, while ensuring that they could stay within the scope of influence appropriate to their gender. As usual, in composing *Xigu*, Yu recycled and reinvented material from his earlier works. Unlike in previous works, however, significant changes remake the narratives, probably because Yu took into account certain attributes of his female audiences, and the female mouthpiece he used to speak to them.

In the first half of this book, we saw how Yu extended the responsibility for teaching and transforming society from officials and gentry to even schoolboys and male *baojuan* listeners. What kind of roles did Yu hope to inspire the other half of Chinese society to assume? In taking female characters out of the background and giving them voices to explain their moral reasoning, Yu valorized the power of female voices as tools that women could use to save themselves and each other from ignorance and disaster. Even as he firmly upheld traditional Confucian gender ethics and restrictions, he questioned how he might reach women and make them active partners in the reconstruction of China's moral and social fabric.

I begin by reviewing the types of didactic literature available for women at the time and the intentions and assumptions that these texts reflect. Based on the limited information we have on their reception, I also caution readers about the kinds of conclusions we can draw. From there, I look specifically at *Xigu*, beginning with how it was paired with *Pan Gong* when first published and how it relates to other works by Yu. By examining how Yu modified and wove together diverse materials from the wider spectrum of morality literature to fit within the framework of *Xigu*'s new and complex narrative, we gain insight into his creative process.

Writing to fit within a popular subgenre of *baojuan*, one that focused on female protagonists who heroically overcome all opposition to their religious pursuits, required a singular exemplary main character whose essential goodness (and stubbornness) was intended to inspire audiences to follow her example. Stylistically, this is a far cry from the episodic nature of *Pan Gong* with its loose narrative framework, barely holding together strings of admonitions and brief examples of retributive heavenly justice. Functionally, too, morality tales, whether in Classical Chinese prose, sim-

ple poetry, or a prosimetric vernacular form, act differently on their audiences than a narrative *baojuan* like *Xigu*. No longer simply passive observers reading/watching in horror or admiration as characters are struck down or rewarded by Heaven, audiences listening to a *baojuan* were supposed to feel compelled to act, and not just as in *Pan Gong*, which encouraged listeners to memorize its admonitions and repeat them to their friends and families. Though Wang is quick to admonish all those around her, more importantly, in her Yu created a sympathetic character whom audiences might respect not only for her ready words, but especially for her admirable deeds, giving them many examples they could apply to their own lives.

At the same time as Wang's expertise is celebrated in *Xigu*, the narrative regularly draws attention to the constraints placed on her as a woman; for example, her poverty is caused by her commitment to chaste widowhood, and she is vulnerable to physical abuse at the hands of her employer. Tying together a wide variety of narrative elements and admonitions into the coherent plot that the subgenre demanded gave Yu the space to explore moral complexities that short tales could not. Even Wang is not perfect, as she has taken up grain cherishing to make up for earlier misdeeds done in ignorance of Heaven's rules. Where might this complicated character lead the women who heard *Xigu*, if afterward they were driven to act to avert the impending disasters that their ignorance of proper domestic morality had surely brought on their homes? By inviting audiences to see themselves in Wang's redemption tale, Yu gave women the tools to save themselves and their families from disaster, a powerful departure from the largely passive and silent female characters of many morality tales. He also instructed them to spread the word to save other families around them.

Whether Yu intended to create a legion of women who publicly preached morality to other women and used their own moral failings and successes as illustrative examples is impossible to say conclusively. By moving from short-form morality tales and plays that assumed a passive reading/listening audience to a long-form narrative *baojuan* that assumed an audience who would actively seek inspiration and spread the text and its message to gain further merit, Yu needed to make major narrative shifts to meet structural requirements. In the last part of this chapter, I turn to a short anti-infanticide tale that Yu frequently referenced in his works, comparing it with changes made by a later author, who rewrote it as an episode within a longer *baojuan* inspired by Yu's work. Again, in this case, by generic necessity, a female protagonist whose voice was originally next to nonexistent in the source material is given the narrative space to

explain why she made such a deadly mistake and can actively earn merit to ensure her and her family's salvation from heavenly retribution. I close by considering the moral implications of both examples within the framework of Yu's *jiaohua* mission.

Didactic Literature for Women in Early Modern China

As much as Yu and other moralists worried about women's actions and hoped to reform them, imparting moral lessons directly to specifically female audiences proved problematic for many reasons. Ideally, in Confucian gender ethics, women would confine their interests and influence to the domestic sphere. As many have pointed out, however, this did not mean women were all physically confined at home for life, nor did it mean they lacked influence outside of their families.[2] These gendered restrictions did not apply equally to women across social classes, with women of lower classes, by necessity, experiencing fewer restrictions on movement and bearing different responsibilities, often outside the home.[3] Though individual situations could deviate from the idealized norms in countless ways, these gendered norms functionally meant that for Confucian moralists concerned with female behavior, engaging with women directly proved to be a significantly greater challenge than connecting with male audiences, who could be easily reached in many ways in the public sphere. Ideally, though not always in practice, the women of any proper home should not be exposed to male visitors outside the family, nor should they leave to associate with men outside the home.[4] In the physical space of the home, gender segregation proved to be a practical problem as much as a moral problem: to encourage women to adhere to these gender-appropriate behaviors, a male moralist must nonetheless somehow communicate with them across the very barrier he hoped to strengthen.

Moralists could always write texts that they hoped would inspire women to behave better. *Nüjie* (女誡 Lessons for women) by Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 45–117) remained in circulation in the late Qing, often as the first book of the *Nü sishu* (女四書 Four Books for Women), a late-Ming creation meant as a counterpart to the Confucian Four Books (the "for men"

2. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, (Stanford University Press, 1994), 12.
3. Ko, 6–7.
4. Ko, 144–47.

implied by its absence). The *Nü sishu* also included three later texts by women from the Tang and Ming, which describe conservative (though not always restrictive) Confucian social norms meant to help readers fully understand female virtue and its applications.[5] Not only were these works meant to be inspiring, so were their authors as representations of exemplary female authority. The assumption that female audiences are best instructed by female exemplars goes back to the earliest extant text written for women: *Lienü zhuan* (列女傳 Biographies of woman) by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE). This classic story collection of female exemplars remained in circulation for centuries, and by the early modern era, the text often appeared in fine illustrated editions produced either by commercial presses or lineage groups. Beginning in the late Ming, updated versions like *Guifan* (閨範 Female exemplars) by Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618) combined ancient tales of female valor, mostly drawn from *Lienü zhuan*, with examples from later eras that emphasized increasing early modern concerns about filial piety (especially toward in-laws rather than parents) and chastity.[6]

These texts, though widely disseminated, ran into another limitation in actually reaching female audiences. To access them, women had to either be literate or have someone literate take the time to read to them. That such works were written at all, even by women, is evidence that there were enough literate women to validate the attempt to reach them through text. Though some extreme conservatives argued against the education of women entirely, their voices have perhaps been overrepresented in our understanding of premodern Chinese women's access to literacy. In elite families, an illiterate mother would have had great difficulty fulfilling one of her primary domestic roles: teaching her son basic literacy before formal schooling with tutors or outside the home in a lineage school.[7] Many girls in these homes learned to read alongside their brothers, probably from the same primers mentioned in chapter 2, the *Sanzi jing*, *Baijia xing*, and *Qianzi wen*.[8] Though their formal education could not proceed beyond that, in the late imperial period, many women from elite families

5. For an excellent translation with critical introductions to each text, see Ann A. Pang-White. *The Confucian Four Books for Women: A New Translation of the Nü Sishu and the Commentary of Wang Xiang* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

6. See Katherine Carlitz, "The Social Uses of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü Zhuan*," *Late Imperial China* 12, no. 2 (December 1991): 117–48.

7. Ko, 158–59.

8. Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 206–7.

were accomplished writers and maintained relationships within their extended families and with female friends across the empire through writing. Some of their writings, mostly poetry, were published by family members or by rogue literati advocates of women's literary efforts; most, we assume, have been lost to time.[9] But outside of these elite families, girls and women had extremely limited access to education. As such, the female literacy rate in the nineteenth century has been estimated at 10 percent at most. By contrast, by the late nineteenth century, between 30 and 45 percent of men had attended some school and attained functional literacy.[10]

We must thus return to the realm of orality and the power of the spoken word to spread ideas among those unable to read. Moralists before Yu Zhi had already attempted such things, of course. For example, Lü Kun also composed morality songs for women to spread his moral messages about proper behavior in the women's quarters, hoping to counteract the popular songs that he heard they were learning to sing and compose themselves.[11] Yu's choice of *baojuan* instead of collected songs to reach women made sense in the late Qing, when narrative *baojuan*, particularly those featuring female protagonists, comprised a significant portion of the genre in circulation and were often closely associated with female audiences, both at the time (mostly by their critics) and in later scholarship.[12] Given the widespread popularity of *Pan Gong* immediately following its composition, perhaps Yu sought to build on its success with the creation of *Xigu*, especially by appealing to an audience that by moral necessity was beyond his direct reach. He could thus tap into a preexisting merit-making culture of textual replication that could amplify the work, and audiences would be primed to sense that exemplary protagonists were modeling behavior for them to reproduce as well.

Baojuan featuring female main characters fighting against all odds to follow their religious convictions are a distinct and easily recognizable subgenre, one that Che Xilun termed "precious scrolls narrating women's religious cultivation" (婦女修行故事寶卷 *funü xiuxing gushi baojuan*).[13]

9. Ko, 59–65.

10. Evelyn Rawski, "Functional Literacy in Nineteenth-Century China," in *Literacy in Historical Perspective*, ed. Daniel Philip Resnick (Library of Congress, 1983), 87.

11. Carlitz, "Social Uses of Female Virtue," 117.

12. On female audiences see Sawada, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, 81–83. Che Xilun explicitly highlights the suffering of female protagonists as the main reason for the tales' popularity among women in "feudal" (封建 *fengjian*) society in *Xinyang, jiaohua, yule*, 20–22.

13. Che, *Xinyang*, 5.

In most ways, *Xigu* fits perfectly within this subgenre. Granny Wang is an exemplary woman, morally superior to all she encounters, who faces derision and even violence from some but who remains undeterred from her chosen course. In a deviation from narrative norms, however, Wang is elderly, in stark contrast to the cast of beautiful young women who populate most examples of the subgenre. We might attribute this mostly to Yu's source material (more on this below), but socially, an elder woman would have had much more moral authority to advise members of the household than the teenage protagonists who feature in most examples of this subgenre.

I argue that the domestic focus and moral issues addressed in *Xigu* clearly mark it as Yu's effort to reach otherwise inaccessible female audiences. However, before proceeding further, I must offer a word of warning regarding assumptions about the subgenre of "precious scrolls narrating women's religious cultivation" and even about *baojuan* more broadly. First, no work with a female main character can be assumed to be explicitly meant for exclusively female audiences. The most widely known and reprinted example of this subgenre is *Xiangshan baojuan* (香山寶卷 The precious scroll of fragrant mountain), which tells how the Bodhisattva Guanyin was incarnated as Princess Miaoshan and recounts her struggle against a forced marriage by her father, King Zhuang.[14] Like Mulian, whose quest to save his mother from the underworld demonstrated that Buddhist practices were the ideal way to demonstrate filial piety, instead of marrying and raising descendants for the patriline, when Miaoshan is revealed as a future bodhisattva, the sacrifice of her eyes and hands to cure her father's illness signals the boundless compassion that could extend not just to her parents but to all living beings, whether male or female.[15] We should not assume that male audiences would have been alienated from this message simply because its main character is a teenage princess. She is, after all, also a future bodhisattva. Likewise, another popular *baojuan* of the late Qing, *Liu Xiang baojuan* (劉香寶卷 Precious scroll of Liu Xiang, hereafter *Liu Xiang*), features an outspoken teenage protagonist who preaches to several male audiences within the text: her father, her fiancé (and later husband), a grave attendant (and his wife), two bandits who threaten to rape her, and a mixed-gender assembly of lay believers. Lack-

14. See Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan*, rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004), and Wilt Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

15. For more on *baojuan* about Mulian, see Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: The Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China* (University of Washington Press, 2017).

ing the authority of a future bodhisattva, Liu Xiangnü nonetheless acts as if she has the right to lecture everyone she meets. The character who undergoes the most drastic transformation in the story is her husband, who changes from a narrow-minded Confucian scholar loyal only to his mother into an exemplary government official and devoted lay Buddhist; he could be intended as an example for male listeners in the imagined audience.[16] Donor lists for many late-Qing narrative *baojuan* show that both men and women contributed to their reprinting.[17]

Second, neither should we assume that most *baojuan* audiences were largely or exclusively female. The *baojuan* examined in chapter 3, which appeared to be directed at men, should make this point self-evident. However, direct evidence of the gender makeup of audiences for *baojuan* recitations is also scant prior to the twentieth century, and the most-cited example that links narrative *baojuan* with female audiences comes to us from fiction. In chapter 74 of the late-Ming novel *Jin ping mei*, two visiting nuns recite an excerpt of *Huangshi baojuan* (黃氏寶卷 Precious scroll of Woman Huang) to a crowd consisting of the primary wife and many concubines of the dissolute patriarch, Ximen Qing 西門慶, within the space of their own home. This is frequently taken as evidence for how *baojuan* were generally performed in the late Ming and extrapolated from there to include *baojuan* of the Qing as well. However, in warning historians to be careful with the face value of evidence from the *Jin ping mei*, Katherine Carlitz points out that the later negative consequences in the narrative mark this scene with narratorial disapproval. We should take its depiction of a *baojuan* recitation with care, remembering how it is used subjectively within the narrative, not as an objective description of the practice. The nuns typify the threat to the home posed by the oft-maligned *sangu liupo* (三姑六婆 three aunties and six grannies), and their presence within the home ultimately brings only disaster: Yueniang's son, Ximen Qing's only living heir, becomes a monk after the family falls apart because she spent her pregnancy listening to *baojuan*.[18]

16. For further discussion of Ma Yu's role in the narrative, see Katherine Alexander, "Virtues of the Vernacular: Moral Reconstruction in Late Qing Jiangnan and the Revitalization of *Baojuan*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016), 68–79.

17. For analysis of one extensive donor list appended to a late Qing edition of *Liu Xiang baojuan*, see Katherine Alexander, "The Precious Scroll of Liu Xiang: Late Ming Roots and Late Qing Proliferation," 66–68.

18. Carlitz, "Family, Society and Tradition," 406–7. For more on the narrative function of *sangu liupo* in the *Jin ping mei*, see Liu Ruiyu 刘汭屿, "Lun Jin ping mei zhong 'sangu liupo' de wenxue gongneng 论《金瓶梅》中"三姑六婆"的文学功能," *Nanjing shifan daxue wenxueyuan xuebao* 2 (2012): 51–57.

Considering this consequence within the narrative, there is no way to read the recitation of a *baojuan* as anything but a threat. The scene is written from the perspective of a condemnatory official, worrying about the influence of Buddhism (and outside women) on his home, echoing the way officials in the late Ming grumbled about the practice.[19] Centuries later, for Yu to write a narrative *baojuan* for female audiences in the environment where most conservative moralists opposed women's collective religious practices out of concern that lay Buddhist piety might distract women from their proper Confucian roles within the home, marks just how critical it was for him to go beyond the scope of traditionally acceptable genres to reach new audiences.[20]

The interpretive challenges posed by *Xigu* and the related anti-infanticide episode from a later *baojuan* also aimed at female audiences lie in yet another set of assumptions. One might be tempted to believe either that these depictions of outspoken women could represent some substratum of late-Qing society otherwise left out of social histories or that they might have inspired mimetic imitation. It is exciting to imagine that such works could have inspired a movement of evangelical Confucian women, fired up to preach to their friends and neighbors about moral housekeeping, and to hypothesize what they might have accomplished among women in the late Qing. We do not have any information about their impact, however. Unlike for the texts I addressed in the first three chapters, with their copious and varied paratextual materials that testify to their effectiveness and value and their sometimes extensive sponsor lists, we have no records of how women responded to either text analyzed in this chapter. Instead, we must keep in mind that we are exploring texts that were imagined to appeal to female audiences and that intended to inspire them to change behaviors that Yu saw as creating demerit for their households. At most, we can explore how Yu wrote for that imagined audience and how he imagined their moral responsibilities within the constraints on their influence imposed by Confucian gender ethics. While these restrictions may sound disappointing for our potential conclusions, this chapter reveals just how essential women's work was to the moral health of the family and, by extension, all of China.

If Yu could get his narrative *baojuan* with a female main character to

19. Carlitz, "Family, Society and Tradition," 408.

20. For more on Qing conservatism related to women's religious practices see Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple: Mapping Female Religiosity in Late Imperial China, 1550–1900," *Late Imperial China* 24, no. 2 (2003): 109–55, and Vincent Goossaert, "Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples," *Nan Nü* 10 (2008): 212–41.

be read by or to women, what moral advice would do the most good, given the expectation that a woman's influence ought to be limited to her family and home? Certainly, a woman who learned the twelve good sayings from *Pan Gong* could lecture her sons to avoid cheating people out of their wealth or eating beef and dog meat, thus doing some good for the moral education of her children, but *Xigu* reinforces the idea that domestic work itself was deeply moral. Keeping a home clean, using the right sort of kindling for the fire, cooking rice properly—all these could be done to earn merit for a woman and her family. This meant, of course, that one could also keep house in such a way as to doom the family to disaster and heavenly retribution.

Xigu Print History and Précis

Like nearly all of Yu's work, *Xigu* was first printed by Dejian zhai in Suzhou. Yu's carefully curated edition of *Pan Gong* and *Xigu* are both dated 1858. In addition to coming out the same year as *Pan Gong*, *Xigu* includes a brief unsigned preface that opens by relating it to *Pan Gong*: "The last volume of *Pan Gong mianzai* specially mentions cherishing-grain societies. From this, one can see that this is truly an important way to get rescued from disaster."[21] The body of the text does not include any further references to *Pan Gong*, however, suggesting that this link between the two texts was not meant for listening audiences but as an endorsement of the value of this new *baojuan* to skilled readers looking to understand the context before investing time in reading or distributing it. As *Pan Gong* had already been reprinted in many different editions by multiple publication houses since it first emerged in 1853–1854, Yu could depend on readers to recognize the name and grasp *Xigu*'s value in relation to this very popular work.

Extant copies in library catalogs provide only an incomplete representation of the actual reprinting and circulation of the text, but even this limited data shows that in the decades following its release, *Xigu* attained only moderate success. When Dejian zhai reprinted the work in 1887with a new title page, it reused the same blocks from 1858, which were so heavily worn that the later edition is illegible in places. Though achieving nothing close to *Pan Gong*'s popularity, *Xigu* still inspired a degree of devotion

21.「潘公免災下卷◦專言惜穀會◦可見此一端實為救劫要務◦」*Xigu*, ib (original punctuation).

among audiences in Jiangnan. *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* lists twelve editions of *Xigu*, eight of which were woodblock prints published between 1858 and 1909.[22] Republican-era catalogs of religious books for sale continued to list *Xigu* as well. One from 1938 lists a copy printed in Suzhou (publisher not identified) for sale for eight *fen* (分).[23] The remaining four undated entries in Che's catalog include one recent reprint and three hand-copied manuscripts. Three extant manuscript editions illustrate that *Xigu* was valuable for its performability, in one or both of two possible senses: a manuscript copy might indicate a personal copy made for a performer of the text to use as a script for oral performance, or it might indicate the performance of religious devotion by copying out the text to generate merit.

At thirty-four folio pages long, *Xigu* is Yu's longest sustained narrative, and perhaps understandably, it is also the most complex. By contrast, only one of his morality plays comes close, at thirty-three folios, and most are about half that length. *Pan Gong*, though much longer, is structurally more akin to a series of anecdotes and admonitions loosely stitched together by a narrative framework that exerts little guiding presence on the order in which the morals are introduced. Though, as we will see below, *Xigu* is also a composite text assembled from many different pieces of grain-cherishing lore, Yu weaves his pieces together into a story told through a small cast of main characters, whose actions may be understood as coherent within the narrative flow.

Because there have been no prior studies on *Xigu* and its story will be unfamiliar, the following paragraphs provide a lengthy summary of the work. *Xigu* can be roughly divided into two halves, the first concerned with all aspects of grain cherishing as part of moral housekeeping, while the second takes Wang on a journey, which ultimately reveals that her grain-cherishing practices attracted the attention of no less than Guanyin herself. One element of grain cherishing, which may turn the stomachs of contemporary readers but seemed to require no special framing or introduction for Yu's late-Qing audience, involves the many ways grain can be disrespected through fecal contamination. This involves food accidentally

22. Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 317. By contrast, Che's entry for *Pan Gong* includes twenty-two printed and manuscript editions (198–200), while *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the *baojuan* edited by Yu Zhi and the subject of the following chapter, is not listed at all.

23. Gregory Adam Scott, "Beijing foxue shuju foxue tushu mulu 1938 北京佛學書局佛學圖書目錄 1938," Harvard Dataverse, V1, 2023, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/SAOBUR

dropped in outhouses, as well as significant concern for grains that pass through the body undigested. The text emphasizes all the ways that carelessness toward grain is pervasive, with devastating consequences, and the only solution is for women to work harder to be aware of every possible way their families might violate Heaven's prohibition on desecrating grain.

Xigu opens with a meditation on why cherishing grain is an essential moral practice, one that, if ignored, will result in deadly retribution: thunder will strike down individuals and whole communities will suffer famine. It explains that grains are a gift from Heaven to sustain life, and when Heaven sees people disrespecting this essential resource, it becomes extremely angry.[24] The narrative then begins by introducing how Granny Wang, nee Zhao 趙, became a kitchen maid in Squire Chen's 陳員外 household in Dantu (丹徒), of Zhenjiang prefecture (鎮江府). Widowed young, she resolved to maintain her chastity even though local men tried to seduce her and her in-laws attempted to sell her off into a forced remarriage. She fled to work as a domestic in the Chen estate rather than succumb to their machinations.[25] In addition to her husband's death, her life before becoming a servant was also marred by the death of her mother-in-law and her eldest son in retribution for drowning her third daughter at birth under pressure from her mother-in-law.[26] By the time the story begins, Wang has been working at the Chen estate for over thirty years, mourning the loss of her family without understanding why such tragedy befell them; this state changed only three years prior to the narrative present, when she met a Daoist nun who explained heavenly retribution for female infanticide. The nun also explained that through the practice of cherishing grain, Wang could begin to atone for the crime. Since then, Wang had fully devoted herself to the discipline, eager to earn back Heaven's favor.[27]

Audiences are then led through what this means in practice with a series of episodes in which Wang is either challenged by skeptical secondary characters for her devotion or celebrated for her attention to detail in rescuing grain from desecration. A young maid, Chunmei 春梅, questions why Wang is searching through the kindling for the kitchen stove, picking out stray grains still attached to the rice stalks, and then complains that the master's rice is talking too long to cook

24. *Xigu*, 1a.
25. *Xigu*, 2a.
26. *Xigu*, 3a–b.
27. *Xigu*, 3b.

because Wang is picking through it to remove all of the indigestible unhusked grains, which will simply end up in the sewage.[28] She taunts Wang for pawning clothing to hire a local widow to glean grains left behind after the harvest, especially since once the woman is paid, Wang also gives her the recovered grains to help her survive through the winter.[29] Then, Chunmei comes close to falling afoul of heavenly retribution for disrespecting grain. She stole a sesame cake from the kitchen and hid in the outhouse to eat it but dropped it down the hole when startled. As thunder rumbles closer and closer, Chunmei begs for help until someone fishes the cake out of the pit and Chunmei finishes eating it, stopping the thunder. They discover that the thunder was also coming for a ten-year-old boy in the same village because he threw a half-eaten rice dumpling in the privy. His quick-thinking mother, hearing the rumbling, interrogated him, discovered the truth, and made him eat the other half, thus also saving his life from heavenly retribution.[30]

Chunmei's brush with death gets Wang thinking about how much undigested grain must be in the outhouse pit, rotting in the waste and attracting Heaven's anger on the household. She approaches the family bookkeepers, hoping to find some money to hire someone to clean all the privies, but finds the household skeptic, Zhou Fengshan 周鳳山, on duty rather than the devout, kindly Jiang Futian 蔣甫田. Jiang Futian is devoted to cherishing written paper, while Zhou is an avowed religious skeptic until confronted with Heaven's power at the end of the text. Unsurprisingly, Zhou denies her request, so Wang invents an excuse to invite her friend, a nightsoil barge operator, to clean the outhouse anyway. This lengthy episode teaches audiences the essential precautions to take when attempting this dangerous work: fumigate the pit with fragrant smoke, drink strong liquor and stuff your nostrils with garlic cloves before getting down in it, and scrub the bottom of the pit with ashes once clean. Then, all waste must be filtered through baskets in fresh running water to recover undigested grains and any money that was accidentally dropped down the hole.[31] Wang pays the crew with the recovered cash and saves the undigested grain, all two and a half *sheng* 升 (roughly a pint) of it, for her own medicinal use. After washing and drying it in the sun, she grinds it into flour and makes a cake, which she eats to miraculously cure a long-term

28. *Xigu*, 4a–5a.
29. *Xigu*, 8b–9a.
30. *Xigu*, 10a–11a.
31. *Xigu*, 11b–15a.

respiratory disease.[32] Wang's success with outhouse cleaning gains her an honorable reputation among the villagers, and many are inspired to imitate her, including the devout Jiang Futian.[33] The first half of the *baojuan* ends with a series of short episodes about how Wang dealt with messy children flinging rice everywhere as they eat, cleaning rice from *zongzi* (粽子) leaf wrappings at the end of the Duanyang festival (端陽節 *duanyang jie*), and replacing the use of rice-flour water for starching clothes with starch from grain-free sources.[34] Cumulatively, the stories warn audiences that potential demerits for grain desecration are easy to accumulate, that the consequences for the family are potentially devastating, and that constant vigilance is required to assure that no grain is wasted by going unconsumed and undigested.

At the halfway point, the story takes an abrupt turn from the quotidian world of the household and village life to a series of terrifying omens that put Squire Chen on edge, including his wife suddenly falling ill. He decides to take a lavish offering of gold and rice to the monks on Putuo Shan (普陀山) on the assumption that this will absolve him of all his bad karma.[35] Wang is allowed to come along to give the monks a small quantity of unhusked grains that she accumulated over the years of picking through kindling and rice.[36] When they arrive on the island, Chen makes his approach to the monastery in a grand procession, stopping to burn large quantities of incense at each shrine along the way, fully expecting a gracious welcome when he arrives, thanks to his largesse. Once he reaches the gates of the monastery, he is turned away and his gifts are rejected, while Wang is solicitously ushered in for a tour of the holy sites and tea shared privately with the abbot.[37] After Chen throws a tantrum, the abbot explains to him that his offerings are tainted with his bad deeds and will do him no good. The only way to find absolution is to return home and rectify his heart. Adding insult to injury, a simple-minded monk begins screaming at Chen that he is a monster, a dog-headed beast polluting their sacred space. Chen flees in anger and orders the boat to take him home, leaving Wang behind. Bookkeeper Zhou discovers that all the incense they burned on the pilgrimage up the mountain has been returned to their bags. Even Guanyin has rejected their offerings.[38]

32. *Xigu*, 13b.
33. *Xigu*, 16b–17a.
34. *Xigu*, 15a–16b.
35. *Xigu*, 17b–18b.
36. *Xigu*, 18b–19a.
37. *Xigu*, 19b–21b.
38. *Xigu*, 22a–26a.

Wang, uncomfortable with the monks' attention, makes excuses to leave the monastery after a feast in her honor, only to discover that she has no way home. A kindly old woman appears with a boat offering to help, saying that Wang simply needs to close her eyes and grasp her skirt to be home again. Within half an hour, the old woman, the Boddhisatva Guanyin in disguise, drops Wang off at the front gate of the Chen estate and disappears.[39] Wang gets back to work. Two weeks later, Chen arrives home from the pilgrimage. Furious to see that Wang has beat him home, he viciously attacks her after a meal when she begins to crawl on the floor to pick up all the rice he spilled while ranting about the ungrateful monks. Without delay, the Jade Emperor dispatches thunder gods to kill Chen with a thunder strike.[40] The Chen estate falls apart after this and Wang, having no job, moves in with her son's family, where they live in comfortable but limited circumstances.[41]

In retirement, Wang cannot stop thinking about the baby girl that she drowned at birth over thirty years prior. She begins telling the pregnant women in her village about the price of infanticide, offering to help them with whatever rice she can scrounge if they are worried about feeding another family member. She uses her own example of losing a son in exchange for killing a daughter to warn everyone she can, changing many minds. Her son's family then discovers 30,000 pieces of silver hidden in a wall of their home during renovations. Wang lives to be 100 and dies in a seated position while reciting Buddha's name. Of her five grandsons, three became minor officials and another studied alongside Bookkeeper Jiang's son. Both passed the capital exam, becoming wealthy magistrates. Everyone believed this good fortune was due entirely to merit Wang accumulated from cherishing grains.[42]

The Textual Genealogy of *Xigu*

When examined as a whole, *Xigu* emerges as much more than the sum of its collected parts. In this section, I examine texts that were integrated into *Xigu*, including a drama script about cherishing grain by Yu, some simple morality tales, and admonishments about general grain-cherishing practices, to see how Yu went about assembling parts from other sources

39. *Xigu*, 26b–27b.
40. *Xigu*, 28a–30a.
41. *Xigu*, 30b–31b
42. *Xigu*, 32a–33b.

to build this *baojuan*. Though the major characters and plot points of *Xigu* can be traced to source materials in a wide range of parallel genres of morality literature, the resulting work is not just a derivative patchwork. Its dramatization of disconnected morality tales and the cohesion imposed on them by their shared framework creates a sense of investment in characters, who, as audiences watch them confront and learn from different dilemmas, ultimately give the moral conclusions of their fates greater weight.

At roughly the same time as he wrote *Xigu*, Yu also wrote a stage drama version of Granny Wang's story, titled *Lao nian fu* (老年福 Blessings in old age). According to his *nianpu*, in 1857, Yu began to worry that the *xiangyue* lectures had become so boring that they could no longer hold audience attention, so he began trying to write vernacular songs to reform society. By 1859, he had written more than ten new morality plays, which he began to have performed in two towns near his own.[43] These details point to a period of intense creativity in 1857–1858 out of which *Xigu* and his first set of morality plays emerged. Though *Shuji tang jinyue*, his collection of twenty-eight morality plays, was only published posthumously in 1880, it includes a preface written by Yu dated in the first lunar month of 1860, which may be related to the way the *nianpu* describes "assembling" (集 *ji*) the plays together in 1859.[44] In colophons to the posthumous collection, both dated 1880, Xie Jiafu 謝家福 (1847–1896) and Zheng Guanying, who completed the task of locating as many of Yu's plays as possible after his death, describe the complicated process of recovering the scattered works in various formats and states of completeness.[45] In the end, although Yu wrote forty plays, only twenty-eight could be found or reconstructed for publication in *Shuji tang jinyue*. Xie specifically mentions that the process was helped by recovering nine "original print editions" (原刊本 *yuankan ben*), one of which was *Lao nian fu*.[46] I agree with David Rolston's assumption that these nine plays were probably those coinciding with the 1859/1860 dates from the *nianpu* and Yu's preface; apparently, these nine plays were the only ones printed in his lifetime.[47]

43. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:11a–12.

44. The first volume of *Shuji tang jinyue* restarts pagination with each new piece of frontmatter, rendering page numbers unhelpful for citations. Yu's preface is second, following one by Yu Yue.

45. See Huang Hongshan 黄鸿山 and Wang Weiping 王卫平, "Wan Qing Jiangnan cishanjia qunti yanjiu—yi Yu Zhi wei zhongxin 晚清江南慈善家群体研究—以余治为中心," *Xuexi tanshuo* (June 2011): 204, for more on Xie.

46. Xie's untitled colophon is the second to last in the volume.

47. Rolston, 238–39, 239n88, and 240n91.

In *Lao nian fu*, Yu drew on some of the same source material that went into *Xigu*, with the play's title foreshadowing its ending, where Wang's family becomes wealthy as a reward for cherishing grain. As in *Xigu*, she is an elderly kitchen maid, but at the household of a Squire Lu 陸員外. She bickers with Chunmei briefly about grain cherishing, goes along with Squire Lu on his futile pilgrimage to Putuo shan, receives a magical ride home from Guanyin, and moves to live with her son after the squire's home burns down as heavenly retribution. They find Heaven-sent money and the play ends happily. Further tying them together, the works share a few lines of dialogue verbatim, and similar though not entirely identical descriptions in other sections, especially in the opening pages and the dialogue between the abbot and squire when the former rejects the latter's offerings.[48] But that is essentially where the similarities between the play and the *baojuan* end.

Running to only seventeen folio pages, less than the *baojuan*'s thirty-four, *Lao nian fu* is both more focused and more scattered than the *baojuan*. The plot is simple and linear, and its characters are sketched out in only the lightest terms. Wang does not explain her motives for dedicating her life to cherishing grains. Chunmei appears only for roughly two folio pages of dialogue at the beginning and again for about two folio pages at the end. There are no extended instructions for outhouse cleaning nor the pair of bookkeeper characters from the *baojuan*. Instead, *Lao nian fu*'s seventeen folio pages of dialogue and song are significantly padded with colorful exchanges that do not advance the plot but were meant to add entertainment or shock value. For example, following Squire Lu's return, two weeks after Wang's miraculous trip home with Guanyin, he and Chunmei banter about whether her sudden appearance might mean that she is a ghost. Lu concludes that no matter what she is, Wang still needs to get back to work in the kitchen to cook him a meat-filled meal to break his vegetarian fast.[49] When his house catches on fire in heavenly retribution for his many sins, especially attacking Wang, four athletic actors are directed to appear on stage waving red flags around him, Chunmei, and one of his servants to dramatize how they all burn to death in the conflagration.[50]

Stage directions also call for the clown (丑 *chou*) role type to play three different characters, meaning that this actor had the most lines of anyone

48. For example, compare *Xigu* 2b with *Lao nian fu* 1a, and *Xigu* 22a–23b with *Lao nian fu*, 9b.

49. *Lao nian fu*, 13a.

50. *Lao nian fu*, 14a–b.

in the play. First, as two different antagonists (including the servant who ultimately burns to death), these clown-based characters make fun of Wang and bicker with the monks. As Wang's son, he is depicted as clueless to the point of stupidity. The final discovery of the silver is played entirely for laughs; it begins by setting off firecrackers backstage to signal the arrival of the God of Wealth. The son runs onstage wailing that his vegetable field is being invaded by white rats coming out of a hole in the ground. On excavating further, he finds "horse hooves," a common shape for silver ingots, but one that is apparently beyond his comprehension. Wang recognizes them as silver ingots, after which her son exclaims, "Ingots? But how could silver ingots grow when we didn't plant silver ingot seedlings?" He then suggests that this windfall is ill gotten, not Heaven-sent.[51] Even if the humor was expected given the conventions of the stage, or at least what Yu Zhi thought would hold the attention of a crowd of commoners, the clown's humor undermines the play's moral earnestness. Following a brief song from Wang about the rewards of cherishing grain, the play ends. None of these many attempts at humor can be found in *Xigu*, in which Yu appears to assume that his audience needs no such pedestrian distractions to keep them focused on its moral messages.

Xigu and *Lao nian fu*, creations of Yu's imagination for two very different audiences—women in the habit of listening to *baojuan* for inspiring narratives for the former, and bored commoners in need of edifying amusements for the latter—both have their roots in the rich and understudied world of short morality tales circulating in the Ming and Qing. Collections of such tales abound in popular religious printed works of the time. Examples of such collections in Yu's works that we already encountered include those dedicated specifically to morality tales, such as *Riji gushi xuji* and *Xuetang riji*. Short morality tracts like *Taishang ganying pian* also accumulated tales that testified to the reliability of their admonitions, leading to greatly expanded editions, sometimes with elaborate illustrations.[52] Morality tales can also be found in smaller, more topical groupings in morality-related compendia like Yu's *Deyi lu* or the mid-Qing anthology *Jingxin lu* (敬信錄 Record of devotion and belief), used to illustrate real-world consequences for ignoring (or following) the texts' recommended behaviors.

51.「元寶。我們的元寶連秧都沒有下。怎麼長出來的呢。」 *Lao nian fu*, 16a–b (original punctuation).

52. For some of these, see Catherine Bell, "Stories from an Illustrated Explanation of the *Tract of the Most Exalted on Action and Response*," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton University Press, 1996), 437–45.

One kernel of inspiration for *Xigu* and *Lao nian fu* is preserved in the section of *Deyi lu* that lays out rules for grain-cherishing societies.[53] It is one of eleven morality tales written in simple Classical Chinese, ranging from two to seven columns long, in a section titled "Xigu hui jiyan" (惜穀會紀驗 Recorded examples for cherishing grain societies). Set in Yixing (宜興), the protagonists are a wealthy man surnamed Gu 顧 and an unnamed old woman who works for him. The wealthy man had been ill for some time, so he makes a vow to take 1,000 gold pieces to the monks of Putuo, while the poor woman from the kitchen takes three *dou* (斗), or about seven dry gallons, of unhusked rice that she collected from both the stalks in the straw meant for the kitchen fire and the rice before cooking. The rich man's gold is flatly refused, whereas monks come out of the gate to collect the woman's rice and say that it is worth far more to them than the gold. At this, Gu returns home in anger, and his house burns down. Because his sickness cannot be cured, he also dies. In contrast, the kitchen woman's sons and grandsons get rich by farming, and some pass the civil service exam. She dies at ninety years of age while chanting the Buddha's name in a seated position. None of the other tales in this section show up in *Xigu*.

In contrast to the play's prioritization of entertainment, *Xigu* enabled Yu to include as much helpful information about cherishing grain as part of moral housekeeping as he could fit into the narrative framework. As such, much of the general advice about cherishing grain in *Deyi lu* and *Xuetang riji* is dramatized by Wang or other characters she inspires. For example, early on in *Xigu*, Wang realizes that she cannot take enough time off from her kitchen job to collect grains after the harvest and hires a local widow to work for her instead. Wang thus embodies the generalized advice that Yu had given in his chapter on grain-cherishing societies in *Deyi lu* and illustrated in *Xuetang riji*.[54]

An interesting conjunction of tales and grain-cherishing advice can be found outside of Yu's corpus, linking *Xigu* to materials beyond Yu's enormous, self-referential, and repetitive oeuvre. The 1860/1880 edition of *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan* (眾喜粗言寶卷 The precious scroll of Zhongxi's coarse words) includes a short section of tales and facts about cherishing grain inserted by the anonymous editor.[55] Significant details of two of these three tales and all the generalized advice about outhouse cleaning

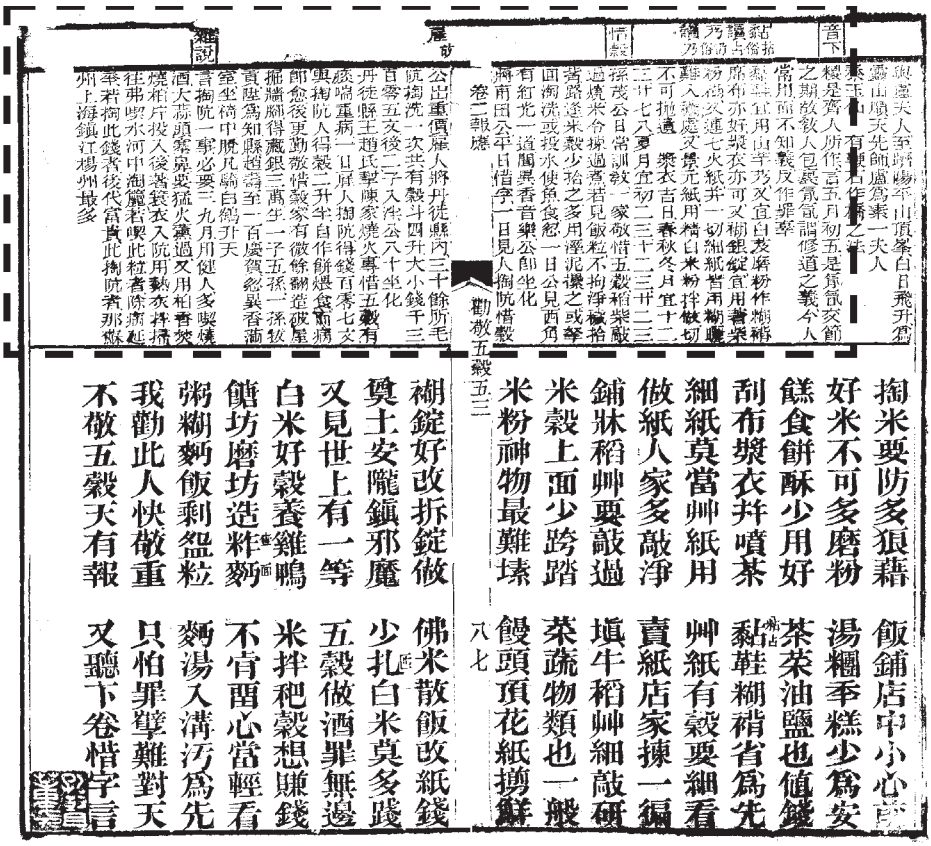
53. *Deyi lu*, 12:2.10.
54. *Deyi lu*, 12:2.13b; *Xuetang riji*, 17b.
55. *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan* (Ma'nao jingfang, 1880), 2:87a–b.

that follow find their way into *Xigu*, while these tales are otherwise absent from Yu's collected works. I have not been able to track these tales back to the single source from which *Zhongxi*'s editor and Yu both copied them, but its existence remains probable, if hypothetical—a missing element of the vibrant world of popular morality literature and wisdom where elements were constantly borrowed and exchanged with each other and in which Yu's publications circulated.

The main body text of *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan* presents itself as the autobiography of one Chen Zhongxi 陳眾喜 (fl. nineteenth century), the leader of a heterodox sect who ascended to Heaven in 1850. Divided into 108 chapters that cover his life story, religious conversion, perspectives, and preparation to ascend, the *baojuan* is over twice as long as other commonly circulating precious scrolls. The work comes to over 400 folio pages in five volumes, its length due in part to another anomaly—a dual-registered format common to daily-use encyclopedias and drama miscellanies but not to *baojuan* or *shanshu*.[56] The upper register is frequently used to provide explanatory commentary on the text below, parsing terms that Chen Zhongxi assumed his listeners understood. The anonymous editor who created the extensive notes clearly expected that listeners would require more explanation, as well as help pronouncing difficult characters. (See fig. 4 for an example of this layout with the information and stories discussed below highlighted within the dotted lines.) Between these headnotes, marked with the notation *yinxia* (音下 sounding on below), the columns are filled with additional information. This content ranges from a few simple morality tales, if the space between notes was limited, to extended lists of real and imaginary countries of the world, summaries of other *baojuan*, descriptions of luminaries from different religions, home remedies for all manner of illnesses, folk wisdom on domestic animals, methods to ensure conception and birthing of an infant of the preferred sex, and copious advice for moral housekeeping. In a sense, it replicates the form and much of the function of the daily-use encyclopedias popular in the late Ming but without advertising itself as such or providing as much coherence.[57]

56. For more on this text, see Cai Yingchun 蔡迎春 and Huang Laiming 黃黎明, "'Zhongxi baojuan' banben kaolun《众喜宝卷》版本考论," *Tushuguan zazhi* 36, no. 7 (2017): 89–102, and Cai Yingchun, "Zhongxi cuyan yanjiu《眾喜寶卷》研究" (PhD diss., Fudan University, 2017).

57. For more on these encyclopedias, see Yuming He, *Home and the World: Editing the "Glorious Ming" in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 95–104, and Shang Wei, "The Making of the Everyday World: *Jin Pin Mei cihua* and Encyclopedias for Everyday Use," in *Dynastic*



掏米要防多狠藉　飯鋪店中小心
好米不可多磨粉　湯糰季糕少爲妄
餻食餅酥少用好　茶菜油鹽也値錢
刮布漿衣幷噴茶　黏鞋糊稍省爲先
細紙莫當艸紙用　艸紙有穀要細看
做紙人家多敲淨　賣紙店家揀一遍
鋪牀稻艸要敲過　塡牛稻艸細敲研
米穀上面少跨踏　菜蔬物類也一般
米粉神物最難壞　饅頭頂花紙擲鮮
襯錠好改拆錠做　佛米散飯改紙錢
翼士安隴鎭邪魔　少扎白米莫多踐
又見世上有一等　五穀做酒罪無邊
白米好穀養雞鴨　米拌秕穀想賺錢
餬坊磨坊造粹麪　不肯墮心當輕看
粥糊麪飯剩盆粒　麪湯入溝汚爲先
我勸此人快敬重　只怕罪孽難對天
不敬五穀天有報　又聽下卷惜字言

Fig.4. The dual-register format of *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, featuring assorted grain-cherishing tales and tips in the upper register. Ma'nao jingfang edition, 87a–b. Adapted by the author from a facsimile scan purchased from bookinlife.net.

As with many of the short, simple morality tales scattered throughout the upper register between clearly titled stand-alone texts, the ones on cherishing grain that I discuss below are only tangentially linked to the main sermon in the register below them, which is on grains and other food-related practices as part of chapter 53.[58] However, the tales also follow four folio pages of brief hagiographies of various *xian* (仙 immortals) that do not correspond to anything in the text below.[59] Following the hagi-

Crisis and Cultural Innovation: From the Late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond, ed. David Der-wei Wang and Shang Wei (Brill, 2005), 63–92.

58. *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, 2:85a–87b. The chapters flow into each other in the body of the text but are numbered and titled in the center of the page.

59. *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, 2:84a–87a.

ographies, the editor inserts a headnote explaining why *zongzi* prepared for the fifth day of the fifth month create ill karmic consequences instead of blessings when thrown into the water—not a subject addressed at all in the main sermon—followed by admonitions that glutinous rice water should not be used to glue paper or starch clothing, elaborating on one couplet in the text below.[60] After this, we find three tales on cherishing grains and a short section labeled *zashuo* (雜說 miscellaneous sayings) noting how to properly scour outhouses for undigested grains.

While the final two stories in the upper register and the "miscellaneous sayings" have the greatest relevance for *Xigu*, the tales are especially curious because it confirms that they did not arrive in the upper register through some sort of partial summary of *Xigu*. The first tale introduces a previously unknown exemplar named Sun Mao 孫茂, whose practices of cherishing grain echo Wang's in the first half of both the play and the *baojuan*, although he is also praised for using grains gleaned from kindling to feed fish, a detail Yu does not seem to endorse anywhere. In contrast, Yu seems focused on humans eating recovered grains instead of using them to feed animals. The second morality tale introduces Jiang Futian, who shares both his name and his habit of cherishing written paper with the virtuous bookkeeper in *Xigu*. One day, the tale notes, Jiang saw someone cleaning an outhouse and decided to also follow the practice. By cleaning over thirty cesspools, Jiang collects 1 *dou*, 4 *sheng* of grain and 1,305 copper cash. Later, two of his sons pass the civil service exam, and at age eighty he dies in seated meditation. In *Xigu*, Jiang also cleans over thirty privies, and obtains almost exactly the same amount of grain but 1,000 more cash.[61] At the end of the *baojuan*, his fate is also exactly the same.[62] All we are missing is his foil, Zhou Fengshan, but perhaps in time Zhou's tale may be found too, either in the encyclopedic upper register of *Zhongxi* or elsewhere.

Likewise, the third tale provides details significant to *Xigu*. Set in Dantu prefecture, it features Mrs. Wang, née Zhao, who works for Squire Chen, all specifics that are slightly different in both *Lao nian fu* and the parallel morality tale from *Deyi lu* but that are exactly the same in *Xigu*. There is, however, no mention of a conflict between Chen and Wang. Instead, the tale simply praises her as another exemplar of outhouse cleaning who reaped incredible rewards for a single instance of recovering rice. The story recounts how Mrs. Wang, who worked in Chen's kitchens, suf-

60. Both issues are covered, albeit not word for word, in *Xigu*, 15b.
61. *Xigu*, 17a.
62. *Xigu*, 31b.

fered from a long-term respiratory illness. One day, she sees someone cleaning an outhouse who finds 107 copper cash and 2.5 *sheng* of rice. In this case, these are exactly the same amounts recovered in *Xigu* by Wang when she had the family outhouse cleaned.[63] Mrs. Wang of the morality tale takes the recovered rice and makes it into a cake. After eating it, her respiratory illness was healed, just as Wang's illness was healed in *Xigu*. Later, when her family is repairing a broken wall in their home, they find 30,000 pieces of silver in it and become wealthy.[64] She has a son and five grandsons, one of whom passes the exams and becomes a county magistrate. At age 100, she sheds her body and ascends to Heaven on the back of a crane. Once again, several specific details of names, numbers, and fates mark a clear connection between this tale and *Xigu*. Following these three tales, the "miscellaneous sayings" include all the practical details of outhouse cleaning dramatized by Wang's privy-cleaner friends: garlic for one's nostrils, many drinks of strong liquor, fumigation with fragrant smoke, and scrubbing the pit out with ashes. It reminds readers that recovered rice can cure illness and recovered cash can bring wealth.

Xigu's most direct source of inspiration was clearly *Lao nian fu*, the drama that Yu wrote the year before publishing the *baojuan*, and both of these seem to have been inspired by the short tale about the unnamed kitchen woman in the Gu household that Yu included in *Deyi lu*. But even though *Xigu* and *Lao nian fu* share the same protagonist and some secondary characters such as Chunmei and the cruel squire (the distinction between Chen and Lu seems to make little difference), the above examples crucially show that Yu copied material directly from many other sources when writing *Xigu*. Wang's chronic illness, cured by eating rice recovered from the outhouse, and the exemplary household accountant Jiang Futian's experience with cherishing grains, both were copied almost exactly from a different, still-unknown collection. However, one significant element that is key to *Xigu* is missing from all the materials explored above, even Yu's own *Lao nian fu*: female infanticide.

Female Infanticide in Late-Qing Morality Literature

The additional element of infanticide in *Xigu* thoroughly changes the nature of Wang's devotional activities. No longer a decontextualized method of merit-making, in this reframed version of the tale, her grain-

63. *Xigu*, 13b.
64. See *Xigu*, 33b, where they find the same amount.

cherishing now is a means of seeking redemption for what was most often portrayed in contemporaneous morality literature as an unredeemable act. In *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China*, Michelle King examines late-Qing anti-infanticide literature to explore normative thinking around infanticide, particularly in identifying the individuals at fault for the murder. King rightly cautions that such sources cannot be read as records of actual behavior.[65] Rather, King pays close attention to what sorts of actors are portrayed as killing infant girls or saving them from death, the types of rewards or punishments meted out by Heaven, and the moral logic shared across the tales. Based on a survey of ninety-three morality tales, including some by Yu Zhi and many others concurrently in circulation, she concludes, "The one woman never rewarded as an individual for her behavior with regard to infanticide in morality tales was the birth mother herself."[66]

However, in marked contrast to King's normative findings, by the end of *Xigu*, everyone believes that the Wang family's wealth and status are due to Wang's grain-cherishing, the practice she adopted late in life to atone for the death of her infant daughter. Although the precise connection between infanticide and cherishing grains is not explicitly made clear until the very end, implicitly the relationship has a certain logic. *Xigu* and *Lao nian fu* both open by observing how grain is a source of life-giving sustenance without which no one would be able to live. Wang repays the debt created by denying her daughter the chance to live by collecting, grain by grain, the gifts that Heaven sends humanity to sustain life. With her expertise in cherishing grains, even though she faces derision from Squire Chen and Chunmei, she also earns respect, gratitude, and praise from her neighbors, the monks on Putuo, and her own family. Wang's acts of merit directly sustain life, making up for her single act of destroying it.

In my view, by beginning and ending with warnings about the consequences of infanticide and making infanticide the impetus for Wang's grain-cherishing, *Xigu* should be considered primarily a piece of anti-infanticide literature, albeit a distinct outlier even for a loose genre. Certainly, discussions of grain-collection practices, strategies, and benefits make up the most significant proportion of the text. Yu clearly attaches importance to teaching the intricate details of all the ways that members of a household might displease Heaven and to explaining how women should continually clean up after everyone around them, ever conscious

65. King, 27.
66. King, 38.

of invoking Heaven's wrath on their families. But if the ultimate purpose of this text was simply to spread the methods of cherishing grain to its listeners, it seems hard to believe that Yu would cast his exemplary protagonist as a murderer. Why not add a less central character like a wife for the bookkeepers Zhou or Jiang? Or we could well imagine that the vaguely described illness of Squire Chen's wife could have been more pointedly highlighted as a karmic punishment for killing daughters, not for the generalized selfishness and bad behavior of her whole family. By making the heroine also a woman who had killed a daughter, Yu put female infanticide at the center of *Xigu*, thereby creating something that did not exist in any other form: an anti-female-infanticide tale focused on a mother herself, instead of leaving her as a background character.[67] This also had the potential to profoundly shift the nature of anti-infanticide work from external intervention by male philanthropists like Yu and his friends to the internal influence in the power of women's networks.

Every one of Yu's texts for male audiences includes materials that reveal how passionately he cared about infanticide.[68] His anti-infanticide messages, whether found in cautionary morality tales or direct admonitions, assume that his audience would sympathize with the plight of powerless baby girls and ideally be moved to take action, ranging from protecting their own daughters to establishing infant-protection societies in their communities. Most morality tales that he cites either in brief or in full describe violent divine retribution for female infanticide, most often taking the life of the mother and often also her sons in return for the murder of her daughters, while also promising examination success to men who successfully saved baby girls through their advocacy. In a particularly evocative set of ten poems Yu included in *Xu qianjia shi*, a writer by the pen name Ronghu yuren (蓉湖愚人 "Fool of Ronghu") takes it on himself to give a drowned daughter her own voice, writing a passionate complaint as if the girl's spirit could lament her brief life and watery death. In the second to last poem, she begs local officials and gentry to establish infant-protection societies, promising official posts to generations of their descendants.[69]

67. King, 37–38.

68. For case studies focused on Yu's anti-infanticide efforts, see Fuma, 329–34, and Leung, 183–88.

69. *Xu qianjia shi*, 2:7a–8a. This may be another of Yu's pseudonyms, but this is impossible to prove. A poem on 1:13a credited to a Ronghu diaosou (蓉湖釣叟 Old fisherman of Ronghu) is also included among Yu's collected poetry in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 6: 10a, but as "Ronghu" refers to a location in Wuxi, it is a term used in many other

How much of a problem was female infanticide for Yu to make it the central issue of this text intended for female audiences? Qing demographic data is hard to come by and interpretations have led to contentious conclusions among historians and demographers, so we may never truly know.[70] Therefore, whether regular infanticide was a habitual practice or predominant in some regions more than others remains up for debate, but anecdotal evidence alongside some demographic data is sufficient to conclude that it did indeed occur.[71] To take morality literature at face value, one might think that it was pervasive and tied to the widespread devaluation of girls' lives in favor of male births due to social and familial pressure, or one might conclude there was something specifically cruel or heartless about Chinese parents, mothers in particular, at that time. In *Between Birth and Death*, King pointedly complicates this previously accepted history of female infanticide in early modern China, particularly as it was disseminated in the West, by drawing attention to the implications of such a history. "If we wish to move beyond an undifferentiated past of Chinese gender discrimination and barbarity, then we need to frame our central question in a radical, new way," she states, asking a new question of her sources instead: "Just when and how did female infanti-

studio and pen names and therefore not exclusively an identifier for Yu. Ronghu yuren is credited with five sets of poems in *Xu qianjia shi*.

70. For a survey of Ming-Qing sources related to government and private attempts to curb infanticide, see Bai Hua 栢樺 and Zhou Youbin 周囿彬, "Ming Qing nibi zinü xianxiang fenxi 明清溺斃子女現象分析," *Suzhou daxue xuebao* 2 (2014): 51–60.

71. One possible source of limited data on infanticide during the Qing is addressed in James Lee, Cameron Campbell, and Guofu Tan, "Infanticide and Family Planning in Late Imperial China: The Price and Population History of Rural Liaoning, 1774–1873," in *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*, ed. Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li (University of California Press, 1992), 145–76. However, care must be taken in applying their conclusions to the Jiangnan region in the late Qing, especially since Liaoning is in far northern China, whereas the anti-infanticide texts under consideration here are from roughly 1,600 kilometers away. Also, Arthur P. Wolf and Theo Engelen, in "Fertility and Fertility Control in Pre-Revolutionary China," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 345–75, raise serious problems with James Lee's later scholarship on Chinese demographics (coauthored with Wang Feng), *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Mythology and Chinese Realities, 1700–2000* (Harvard University Press, 1999), which draws on the same data from Liaoning for their conclusions. Further criticism of Lee and Wang's historical demography, particularly related to birth rates, can be found in Matthew Sommer, "Abortion in Late Imperial China: Routine Birth Control or Crisis Intervention?" *Late Imperial China* 31, no. 2 (December 2010): 97–165.

cide become so Chinese?"[72] Dealing with the aftermath of birthing an unwanted child was a *global* problem of the early modern era, not just a Chinese one.[73]

The selective distortion that made female infanticide a "Chinese" problem in early modern and contemporary minds can be traced back to Chinese anti-infanticide campaigners, chief among them Yu Zhi, and how their efforts were filtered through foreigners' perceptions and reported back to readers and listeners in their home countries. The frequency and intensity with which Yu and many other activists founded organizations and produced literature to oppose the practice demonstrates how much they *perceived* it as a common pressure faced by women throughout society. The problem was that Yu and other anti-infanticide campaigners railing against the practice produced texts that were taken as documentary evidence by Western missionaries. Perhaps the best example of this is in Gabriel Palatre's *L'Infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*, which anthologizes anti-infanticide materials from what at first glance appear to be many different contemporary authors.[74] However, of the fourteen Chinese sources used as proof, four were Yu Zhi's work, though cited by Palatre either without an author or under different style and studio names. Palatre probably did not realize that roughly a quarter of the materials in his survey all stemmed from the same brush.[75] King highlights the reverberations of Palatre's work in the West, where successive generations read *L'Infanticide* or subsequent sources informed by it as objective documentation of widespread infanticide practices in China, turning the early modern global problem of excess unwanted children (or the perception of such excess) into a specifically Chinese problem.[76]

In truth, female infanticide was only one of the many moral problems against which Yu Zhi campaigned.[77] The examples cited above in his texts for male audiences take up only small sections within the larger works in

72. King, 7.

73. King, 7.

74. Gabriel Palatre, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine* (Autographie de la Mission catholique à l'orphelinat de Tou-sè-wè, 1878), nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:2556305.

75. King, 102–5.

76. The most concerning of these uncritical readings of *L'infanticide* is perhaps David Mungello's monograph, *Drowning Girls in China: Female Infanticide Since 1650* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008). As such, it should be used only with great care and a healthy skepticism regarding Mungello's use of Chinese source materials. For more on the impact of Palatre's *L'infanticide*, see King, 105–10.

77. King, 66–69.

which they are found. With so many charitable causes in desperate need of funding, anti-infanticide advocacy was only one of many missions that male readers and listeners could support to earn merit for themselves and, ultimately, save the world. Yet given the social prescription that women's influence be limited ideally to the inner sphere and domestic space, the range of causes that adult women could take up narrowed significantly. Yu's instructions for the proper behavior of wives in his *jiaxun* (家訓 family precepts), included in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, illustrate how bounded women's duties ought to be. Writing for an imagined audience of his supposed male descendants, though he ultimately only fathered three daughters, Yu describes how a wife's household duties begin before dawn, as it is her responsibility to maintain the comfort and happiness of her husband and his family. The final third of his instructions dwells on a wife's responsibility to never drown any children, especially not her daughters, going into detail about the value of girls' lives and the harm that will come to the whole family should any be killed.[78] But when writing specifically about women's domestic lives and their moral responsibilities, as he was in *Xigu*, Yu turned to anti-infanticide advocacy no longer as simply one cause out of many, but instead one of the most moral acts a mother might perform to keep her family safe from disaster.

Saving Oneself, Saving One's Family

Xigu gives voice to an important female character in anti-infanticide tales whose silence was the norm: the mother herself. Granted, in this case, she is speaking as a mouthpiece for a male author, rather than authentically giving insight into the feelings of late-Qing women. Nonetheless, this should not diminish the importance of a new character who, defying the odds, committed infanticide but lived to tell the tale and save her family through her own actions. Rather than undermining her moral authority, this narrative creates a powerful testimonial to the saving power of cherishing grains, especially at the end when she promises to feed poor families who keep their daughters in spite of worrying over having another mouth to feed. Intended to speak *to* women, rather than simply *about* them to male audiences, *Xigu* addresses mothers' roles in infanticide with surprising sensitivity. More than simply encouraging the women in his imagined audience to keep their daughters or risk dooming their families,

78. *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 9:4a–5b.

Yu structured *Xigu* to dramatize that even if someone had already committed infanticide, their remaining lifetimes were still a ripe opportunity for repentance, rather than hopeless years waiting for divine retribution for an irredeemable mistake. This reframing may have served to create room for female-led advocacy within the prescribed range of women's limited influence.

This shift, moving mothers who drowned daughters from helpless victims toward active participants in earning their own redemption, is also related to difference in the social function between *baojuan* and other morality literature. Specifically, *baojuan* invite audience members to consider how they might imitate the exemplary protagonist, requiring their active engagement with the story and its moral implication for their lives. For a *baojuan* to fulfill its function as didactic literature that entertains audiences, it must be able to convince its listeners/readers of their errors while reassuring them that the karmic debts they have created are not insurmountable. They are, instead, accounts that can be repaid by performing the activities specifically described *and* by reproducing the text, either by republication or recitation. In addition to generating life-saving merit through performance, *baojuan* featured exemplary protagonists meant to inspire further meritorious actions among their audiences. The protagonist is responsible for modeling strategies that audiences can apply to their daily lives to create merit and avoid demerits.

Morality tales of women who die after drowning their daughters inspire only fear, or perhaps just convey a sense of moral superiority, leaving no room for imitation. By contrast, an infanticidal mother who survives Heaven's wrath is an integral part of the work that a narrative *baojuan* does *to* and *for* its audience. A staged drama like *Lao nian fu* might entertain audiences for an hour or two, but afterward, audience members will probably not restage the drama themselves. But a *baojuan* like *Xigu*? Drawing on the performative potential of *baojuan*, *Xigu* is a demonstrable effort to use the power of vernacular performance literature to reach into women's inner chambers and inspire socially stabilizing moral values, especially against infanticide.

It is because Wang is the main character of a *baojuan*, rather than any other genre, that, unlike many of the infanticidal mothers in morality tales, she does not die gruesomely either during or after giving birth. She is made aware of the karmic consequences of her actions by a cleric who comes along, allowing her to seek redemption with her devotion to grains. Her story then becomes a tale of heavenly mercy and redemption instead of punishment. Our ignorantly sinful protagonist and the wandering

cleric who enlightens her can be read as proxies for the *baojuan* audience and narrator. When such tales are performed, the narrator—even if she or he is a layperson—becomes the cleric, explaining morals to an audience that may include individuals who realize that they too have been living sinfully, amassing a karmic debt on which Heaven will collect sooner or later. Within the seemingly simple, black-and-white moral framework of morality tales and most *baojuan*, Heaven's delay in executing justice creates a period of probation, during which repentance is possible. The *baojuan* delivers second chances to its listeners, even if they are murderers.

Although it may seem radical to assert that the shift in genre and expected audience affected the very nature of heavenly justice for infanticide, *Xigu* is not the only example of this change. A second example of an anti-infanticide morality tale revised into an anonymously written narrative *baojuan* gives voice to previously silenced mothers and centers women who save themselves and each other; this pattern suggests that its author was also concerned with offering women in the audience hope for redemption. Why might Yu Zhi and the second author both have made these shifts in their narrative *baojuan* when covering infanticide? Although we learn little about actual late-Qing women from these works, this *baojuan* provides another example of rhetoric that a moralist thought would be effective with female audiences. Neither author knew the true proportion of women in the audiences who had killed daughters at birth. Whether these texts were actually performed for the audiences that they were written for also remains in question. But given that both *baojuan* for women addressed infanticide in similar terms, both Yu and the second author probably imagined that many women had personal knowledge of drowning daughters, either their own or someone else's. If such women imitated Wang or the outspoken, repentant infanticidal mother of the second text, how many more women could hear their stories and allow their daughters to live, even without direct knowledge of either text? Women's speech and actions carried this potential.

This second example of female-led anti-infanticide campaigning, led by a mother who earns merit after killing her daughters, comes in a lengthy episode within *Liu Xiang zhong juan* (The middle scroll of Liu Xiang, hereafter *Zhong juan*). This undated work was not written by Yu Zhi, but rather by an anonymous author who used morality tales largely taken from Yu's work as his source material. In 1873, Yu was credited with producing a heavily edited new version of *Zhong juan*, for which he made several significant emendations, including cutting entire episodes from the earlier version. The anti-infanticide episode, however, is left largely

untouched by Yu's heavy editorial brush, from which I infer that he approved of how it revised and adapted his original materials. I will focus on the rest of this *baojuan* in the next chapter, but I examine its anti-infanticide tale below to explore how a different author transformed extremely consistent source material from short morality tales to the genre of narrative *baojuan*.

Based on a particularly gruesome morality tale about a monstrous snake-baby who kills (or nearly kills) her mother for having previously drowned her every time she managed to be born, the *baojuan* version is told as if the mother instead survived and became a traveling anti-infanticide campaigner, preaching to crowds about her experience as part of her penance. I assume that the anonymous author of *Zhong juan* was, like Yu with *Xigu*, consciously writing for an audience of women and was aware that he was writing in a genre that foregrounded exemplary protagonists meant to inspire audience imitation. As such, *Zhong juan*'s anti-infanticide episode, when read in conversation with *Xigu*, emphasizes the vocal advocacy that women were imagined to be able to take up, given a specific context.

Both Wang, as the heroine of *Xigu*, and the anti-infanticide mother in *Zhong juan* are dramatic narrative departures from most Qing anti-infanticide tales. As already noted, these stories rarely allowed the mother to speak, but even more than that, they also led King to emphatically conclude that mothers were never given opportunities to redeem themselves.[79] Both *baojuan* considered in this chapter contradict King's conclusions. But rather than disproving King's points, they serve to highlight the degree to which *Xigu* and the anti-infanticide episode in *Zhong juan* were true outliers within this thematic category of morality literature. Perhaps these differences were a consequence of writing for an imagined audience of women rather than the male readers of morality tracts, but there was also something about the narrative style of *baojuan* that invited these major changes. When audiences expect to hear condemnation and see grisly punishments in stories about a mother who drowned a daughter, how shocking would it be to learn that instead there were really ways to avert divine punishment? If the women imagined to be listening to these *baojuan* could be inspired by the outspoken protagonists to launch their own personal anti-infanticide campaigns, not only might many more girls' lives be saved, but women might be able to join men in the crucial task of reweaving the bonds of human society.

79. King, 39.

Snake Retribution for Infanticide in Earlier Works

Part of what prompted the crucial change that allowed an infanticidal mother to become the agent who saved her whole family, I argue, is the process of revising preexisting morality tales to align with the narrative logic and generic requirements of a *baojuan*. We can test this by looking at how existing snake-baby tales were also adapted and changed into the version that appears in *Zhong juan*. References to a mother giving birth to a monster—half snake/half baby—in retribution for committing infanticide can be found throughout anti-infanticide literature, particularly in much of Yu Zhi's own work. The earliest anti-infanticide morality tale that links female infanticide with the birth of a snake that kills the mother as retribution may not be discoverable, nor is it critical for the argument here, but this trope was well-established before Yu's work. One story that can be found in mid-Qing texts such as *Taishang ganying pian tushuo* (太上感應篇圖說 Illustrated explanation of the Supreme Lord's tract on action and response) relates how the unnamed wife of a certain Chen Yiqing 陳一清 drowns a daughter for a third time, after which a snake emerges from the baby, latches onto the woman's thigh, and then bites her. Then they both die.[80] Minor variations of this story can be found in other eighteenth-century *shanshu*, including *Jingxin lu* and *Kunde baojian* (坤德寶鑑 Precious mirror of feminine virtue), and it seems to have become so widely known that a simple reference to "Chen Yiqing's wife" in an 1825 proclamation on infanticide collected in *Deyi lu* was sufficient to remind readers of her terrible fate.[81] The half-human, half-snake baby that Yu references in *Xu qianjia shi* and *Xuetang riji* perhaps developed out of this tale, but it may also have sprung entirely from Yu's imagination.[82]

In lieu of a summary, I translate the version in *Xuetang riji* below:

> "Drowning Daughters Harms a Son"
>
> (Current dynasty). North of Danyuan lived the country folk Wang Sanyuan and his wife, surnamed Xu. At first, [she] birthed a son. After, there were three successive daughters. Her mother-in-law, furious, cursed her saying, "What a complete failure, only birthing

80. *Taishang ganying pian tushuo* 太上感應篇圖說 (Yunjian xu shi, 1757), 8:29a–b.

81. *Jingxin lu* 敬信錄 (Juying tang, n.d. [1829]) (first edition, 1749), 91a–b. *Kunde baojian* 坤德寶鑑 (Yuxiu tang, 1777), 3:39a–b. *Deyi lu*, 2:1.16a.

82. *Xu qianjia shi*, 2:16b. *Xuetang riji*, 35b.

female goods." ([Commentary]: "Female goods" is a vulgar way of saying someone only had daughters.)[83] Xu had no choice but to drown two girls. Later, she was again about to give birth. Her intestines twisted with great pain. After three days, it had not come out. Sanyuan prayed to Heaven, "This time after it is born, we will not drown it." Suddenly, from within her belly, a voice spoke, "I have been drowned by you twice. Today I have come to take lives!" Sanyuan was shocked and continued to lament and plead. Finally, a monster was born. It had a human head and a snake body, half of which did not come out. The birthing woman fainted. The seven-year-old son immediately died of fear. The mother-in-law immediately died of anger. Sanyuan hurriedly faced the stove, kowtowed, and pledged a vow, "From now on, I vow to share my experience to advise others, telling anyone I meet to rescue [infants]." Suddenly, he saw a golden beam of light. An armored deity holding a whip drove the snake away. The birthing woman died and was revived. After this, [she] stridently exhorted all [she] encountered, and then was able to have a son. This happened in the Qianlong era.[84]

As in *Xigu*, the blame for the daughters' deaths rests heavily on the evil mother-in-law, rather than on the mother herself. Xu does live and even seems to take part in the redemption that grants them a son to replace the one who died of fear. Even so, aside from being allowed to live, this mother experiences retribution in line with the ends dealt to most women depicted in such tales. King points out that many infanticidal mothers faced "punishments [that] were often painfully inscribed on a hypergendered body, at the very site of sexual reproduction."[85] In the illustration that accompanies the story, the snake-baby is not shown with its body still partly inside its mother; instead, the illustrator has chosen to show its tiny face biting

83. In the *Xuetang riji*, this sentence is written in half-sized characters as a note explaining to Yu's schoolboy readers what "female merchandise" means. Yu frequently employs this strategy to maintain the pedagogical value of moralistic work.

84.「溺女傷子【國朝】丹陽北鄉民。王三元妻徐氏。初生一子。後連生三女。老婆怒罵曰。好一个十敗名。但養雌貨。雌貨俗指只養女者。徐氏不得已溺死二女。後又將產。絞腸大痛。三日不下。三元向天祝告。今次生下必不再溺。忽腹中說話。道我被你淹死兩次。今番特來索命。三元大驚。再四哀求。乃生下一怪。人頭蛇身。半身不出。產婦昏暈。一子七歲。登時嚇死。老婆婆亦立時氣死。三元急向竈前叩頭立誓從今自願現身說法。逢人勸救。忽見金光一道。有金甲神執鞭一掠。將蛇挑去。產婦死去還魂。後逢人苦勸。乃得生一子。此乾隆時事。」 *Xuetang riji*, 35b (original punctuation).

85. King, 39.

Fig.5. Illustration of a woman being bitten by a snake-baby monster in retribution for having drowned her daughters. *Xuetang riji*, 35b. Courtesy of Harvard University Library.

her on a breast. In another shorter version, taking up only one panel of a four-panel comic-like broadsheet tucked between the pages of Palatre's *L'infanticide*, the illustrator has chosen to show both, as well as the son and mother-in-law vomiting blood and dying at the sight of the snake-baby.[86] The focus of the snake-baby tale is clearly on the pain and suffering the monster causes her family in retribution for her murder. Whether or not the mother dies, her punishment has been enacted specifically though a difficult labor, an incomplete birth, and then the vengeful child biting her on the very breast that should have fed and nurtured her the previous times she was born.

86. Included in Palatre, between pages 111 and 112.

Fig.6. One panel of four from an undated anti-infanticide broadsheet printed by Suzhou Dejian zhai, illustrating a woman being bitten by a snake-baby monster while her son and mother-in-law die of fear and her husband cries. Inserted between pages 111 and 112 in Gabriel Palatre, *L'infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine*, Harvard College Library preservation digitization program. Autographie de la Mission catholique à l'orphelinat de Tou-sè-wè, 1878. nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:2556305. Courtesy of Harvard University Library.

The longest version of the snake-baby tale appears in another of Yu Zhi's morality plays, *Yuguai tu* 育怪圖.[87] Even given the narrative space to include a mother who plays an active role in the plot, the script does not vary much from the shorter versions. In the play, the mother still has little to say. The father, Zhu Sanlang 朱三郎, is played by a clown role type, just as Wang's son was in *Lao nian fu*.[88] When his wife first comes on stage, he jokingly compares the size of her pregnant belly with a chamber pot, a crude attempt at humor since their previous daughters were probably drowned in one.[89] His character is given all the lines detailing regret for

87. *Shuji tang jinyue*, 8 vols. (Dejian zhai, 1880).
88. *Yuguai tu*, 1b.
89. *Yuguai tu*, 2a.

drowning the girls, while the mother does little more than moan in pain during the birth of her third daughter and again during and after the snake-baby's birth. Blame for the infant girls' deaths is placed squarely on the clown's mother, whose anger at his refusal to drown his own daughters and his ineffective attempts to bribe the midwife into drowning the third girl for him leads her to kill the infant herself. Her character is purely evil, delivering lines in which she praises herself for her cleverness, and laughing while she drowns the baby.[90] The snake-baby kills their son and bites out the mother-in-law's tongue, rendering her mute in retribution for how her words caused the death of the first three daughters.[91] At the last minute, the clown father remembers that his wife venerates Guanyin, so he swears an oath to let all future babies live and promises to build a foundling home if he ever becomes wealthy, for which his wife's life is saved.[92] Though she does not die, given how few lines she has both before and after the narrative turning point, she does not represent a significant development from the short morality tales in Classical Chinese. Even though the snake-baby tale has been expanded from the limited space of a quarter- or half-page tale to a play that stretches out to twenty-two folio pages, no real role has been given to the mother at all. Were it simply a matter of narrative space, one would expect the drama to allow the mother to become more than a background character and to speak about her own experience. It took the adaptation from a play to a *baojuan* for her to be allowed to speak directly to audiences.

The Snake-Baby's Mother Speaks

The new version of the snake-baby tale related in *Zhong juan* reflects a significant amount of creative effort on the part of its writer to reorient the narrative to feature both the wife and the mother-in-law as heroines and sources of salvation for themselves and their family. Spanning only six and a half folio pages, this version of the snake-baby tale is much shorter than *Yuguai tu*, so the dramatic shifts in characterization and perspective are all the more stunning in contrast with the play. While keeping the basic details of the plot the same, the author significantly changed the main characters and how they confront the difficult birth and appearance of the

90. *Yuguai tu*, 4a–5a.
91. *Yuguai tu*, 12a–12b.
92. *Yuguai tu*, 12b–13a.

snake-baby. As in *Xigu*, the tale is related firsthand by the woman who is earning merit to atone for committing infanticide, saving herself and using her example as a source of instruction for others. This episode is distinctive within *Liu Xiang zhong juan* because it is the only one where its main character, Xiangnü 香女, is not the sole moral authority. Instead, after the narrator explains that Xiangnü comes upon a woman addressing a crowd of hundreds of men and women, the heroine quietly joins the audience so that the narrative can shift to the perspective of the lecturing woman. Her testimony about infanticide is so important that it seems as though nothing but first-person narration will suffice. This is already a marked difference from all earlier versions of the tale, where the focus is not on her perspective or actions, but on the snake-baby or bystanders, such as her husband or mother-in-law. In *Zhong juan*, intended to be recited out loud for a group of women, the mother now gets to speak for herself, just as Wang did at the beginning and end of *Xigu*.

The snake-baby's mother and her husband attract the large crowd by holding a banner above their heads that illustrates the horrific tale she is about to reveal. On this banner is an illustration of a woman giving birth to a human-faced, snake-bodied monster while an older woman stands nearby, apparently reciting a sutra. The banner reads, "Appearing in order to admonish" (現身勸化 *xianshen quanhua*), with smaller characters below that identify the couple and their mission: "Zhang Yuting and his wife Gu of Zhang family village voluntarily appear to give admonishments; by earning merit [they] expiate guilt."[93] Linking the story to an illustrated banner with an image resembling figs. 5 and 6 above is a clever way to tie this episode back to its source material while also immediately indicating that the story has changed.

Standing below the illustration of her own crime and suffering, Gu begins explaining to the crowd what happened. The differences between Gu's story and the version in *Xuetang riji* above are even more significant considering their shared origin material. Gu drowned many daughters in a row after another woman in the village made fun of her for having only girls, reasoning that at least if she drowned them, her neighbors would not gossip about her and she would save her family the cost of raising girls.[94] After two days of difficult labor at the end of her last pregnancy, the midwife and Zhang Yuting beg Heaven to help Gu. Suddenly a voice from

93.「張家村張雨亭同妻顧氏◦自願現身出勸◦將功贖罪◦」 *Zhong juan*, 20b–21a (original punctuation).

94. *Zhong juan*, 21a–b.

within speaks up: "You are all in the habit of drowning daughters. If I come out, I'm afraid you will kill me."[95] The midwife and Zhang fall silent in fear, leaving Gu to negotiate with the voice coming out of her own body. When, instead of a girl, a snake-baby monster is born, Gu faints, leaving only her devout Buddhist mother-in-law capable of handling the disaster. Zhang's mother scolds the snake-baby, pointing out that to kill such a filial daughter-in-law is wrong; it would be as if the Buddha has no power at all. She recites a "White Robe Incantation" (白衣咒 *baiyi zhou*) and a beam of golden light slices into the room, banishing the snake monster and restoring Gu to consciousness.[96]

Before exploring how Gu went from this experience to preaching about it to hundreds of people, I want to point out three important changes to this version of the tale. First, the voice of the critic has been moved from the mother-in-law to someone outside the home. The mother-in-law is now the savior rather than the antagonist, defusing some of the implicit critique of the earlier stories where a man's own mother is held responsible for his wife killing their infant girls. Nothing is wrong within this family, and only the malicious gossip of outsiders has harmed these girls, taking advantage of Gu's fear and ignorance. Second, the supposed infant's voice is sympathetic rather than threatening. Instead of telling her it plans to kill her, it simply expresses its fear that it will die too. No one yet knows that a monster inhabits Gu's body instead of a perfectly normal infant girl. Third, Gu handles the negotiations with the voice on her own because her husband is struck dumb from fear. In the earlier version, we are not told how Wang Sanyuan pleaded with the murderous voice. Here, we know specifically what Gu promised her unborn supposed daughter: "[I] promise that if you obediently come out, [I will] protect and keep you, raising you to adulthood."[97]

In this new version, both the mother-in-law and birthing mother are fundamentally good, and each wants to save their children. Gu commits to her new daughter's life, not her murder, and Wang's mother seems proud of her daughter-in-law's filiality, demanding that Heaven spare her from death in childbirth. The blame for infanticide is externalized onto society in general instead of the family. Perhaps to preserve Gu's perspective for the entire narrative, the author silences her husband completely, almost removing him from the tale. Gu survives thanks to her own powers and her caring mother-in-law, not to any other interventions.

95.「你們慣把女兒溺。出來怕你送殘生。」*Zhong juan*, 21b (punctuation added).
96. *Zhong juan*, 22b.
97.「願你好好來生下。保你留養長成人。」*Zhong juan*, 22a (punctuation added).

Like Wang, Gu does not understand that she has done wrong until a wandering Daoist enlightens her to the karmic costs of drowning daughters. Gu asks how to atone for her actions, and he tells her to take her story on the road for three to five months, after which she will have told it enough times. He also advises her to illustrate the experience and have it printed on flyers to be posted everywhere.[98] Gu ends her presentation by explaining why she instead of her husband has been speaking to the crowd: "My husband has a stupid nature and not even a tiny fragment of eloquence, so I have to come out and be disgraced in public." She wonders whether they have earned enough merit yet, complaining about the difficulty of this peripatetic style of preaching on her bound feet.[99] Xiangnü, the main character of *Zhong juan*, who has nonetheless been silent for four and a half folio pages, finally speaks up, asking what happened to the neighbor who bullied her into infanticide. Gu responds that she recently lost a son to illness and cried herself blind. Xiangnü advises Gu to tell her that if she repents and start admonishing people to do good, her sight will be restored.[100] Gu's story and Xiangnü's advice so move a woman in her thirties in the audience that she begins to weep profusely. With some gentle prompting from Xiangnü, she testifies about her heartbreaking experience of losing a beloved son to heavenly retribution after drowning two daughters. Xiangnü's subsequent advice seems targeted at women in the text's imagined audience who might be feeling similar sadness and regret: "I see you are a perceptive woman, capable of making arguments with a clever nature . . . Go often in your village to admonish people!"[101]

The Unique Power of Anti-infanticide *Baojuan*

One reason that King posits there were no anti-infanticide morality tales in her survey of infanticidal mothers' active role in their salvation is the difficulty of creating an infanticide scenario that also included a good mother. If pressured by her mother-in-law or husband, a filial wife could not very well oppose their authority, considering her position as the

98. *Zhong juan*, 23b–24a.

99.「但我丈夫迂拙性◦口才沒有半毫分◦自己出乖來露醜◦」 *Zhong juan*, 24b (punctuation added).

100. *Zhong juan*, 25a–b.

101.「看你是个伶俐女◦能言舌辨性聰明 . . . 常在鄉村勸化人◦」*Zhong juan*, 26b (punctuation added).

lowest-ranked member of the family.[102] This establishes a pattern in the stories where after a daughter dies, her mother probably does too, silently bearing the weight of Heaven's wrath whether she had a personal choice in the matter or not. Although it seems difficult to conceive of a narrative that might exonerate a woman who committed infanticide, I believe that the *baojuan* anti-infanticide tales explored in this chapter provide clear examples of how a moralist could reconcile infanticide with giving mothers a second chance, something they were never afforded in other stories.[103]

Wang introduces herself as a woman whose suffering was caused by giving in to her mother-in-law's pressure to drown her third daughter at birth. This testimony about drowning her daughter, like the experiences shared in *Zhong juan*, draws power from its first-person voice and its inclusion of the inner thoughts and feelings of the usually silent, infanticidal mother. She portrays her younger self as not really understanding the great wrong that she had committed in drowning her daughter. Wang says that she could not go against her mother-in-law's wishes, no matter what the virtuous midwife said to her or how upset she felt. Her lack of understanding and her reluctance to carry out the act, even though she had to give in to her mother-in-law's pressure, end up saving her from direct condemnation. This rare tale in which the mother's body is spared the brunt of Heaven's retribution allows for a discussion of infanticide in which women are, through their ignorance of Heaven's valuation of human life and their powerlessness to oppose the demands of their superiors, painted as morally innocent. The social hierarchy is unavoidable; Wang "dared not disobey and could only be compelled to drown her."[104] Confucian moralists could not aim their critique at the web of hierarchical relationships that they were seeking to strengthen with morality literature. Instead, ignorance had to become their target, and teaching their means of transformation.

By reaching out to women with *Xigu*, Yu expands the reach of his movement into a space from which he had so far been excluded by propriety: women's inner chambers, particularly the birthing chamber. Repeatedly imagined and depicted in his anti-infanticide literature, this space remained one from which he and all unrelated men were barred. Therefore, this was a place where he feared that ignorance held innocent lives

102. King, 38–39.
103. King, 39.
104.「不敢不依。只得淹死。」*Xigu*, 3a (original punctuation).

hostage. In effect, Yu Zhi deputizes the women in the *baojuan*'s audience as specialist anti-infanticide campaigners for the women's quarters. No more can they claim innocence through ignorance. Armed with the knowledge that infanticide contravenes Heaven's will and draws down its punishment on the family, particularly on any valuable sons, they must bear both moral responsibility and children. And, if they were coerced as Wang was, they are also given some measure of absolution in the form of a second chance. Inspired by Wang's example, *Xigu* presents a raft of options for earning back Heaven's favor.

But how much could socially powerless women actually do? What were *baojuan* authors trying to give their imagined listeners? In the two examples analyzed above, a guilty woman who, by the narrative logic of anti-infanticide tales, should have died, instead becomes a vocal campaigner against the very crime she was guilty of. For any woman exposed to *Xigu* or *Zhong juan*, the *baojuan* itself, as a recited text and an object in the hand, is an immediate and practical solution to the evangelical imperative of spreading anti-infanticide rhetoric. Given a second chance, the exemplary fictional figures became public activists, but less-extreme responses were also available. Inspired women, no matter how average, had a variety of opportunities to imitate these heroines, whether mimetically, by speaking about their experiences of infanticide, financially, by sponsoring the recitation or republication of the *baojuan*, or, if possible, given their own constrained lives, privately, by allowing their next infant daughter a chance to live.

As explored in the previous chapter, Yu promoted and expanded *Pan Gong* to valorize his philanthropic hero, Pan Zengyi, to qualify and memorialize the trauma of the fall of Nanjing, and to convey his hopes for a postwar restoration. In each volume, a virtuous male protagonist is introduced whose story shapes a loose narrative framework around the delivery of a variety of moral injunctions. This work seemed to attract an audience of men who, like Yu, wanted to make their mark in Jiangnan society during and after the war through the public display of philanthropy. *Xigu*, if we read it as *Pan Gong*'s companion text for the wives and daughters of such men, does not automatically suggest how women could take such an active role if so inspired. Rather, Wang's first words acknowledge the limitations of her sex, before reassuring the audience that she still knows a thing or two about right behavior.[105] Her ultimate redemption only comes at the end of the *baojuan*, where, despite all her efforts to cherish grains

105.「我雖女流◦却知一二分道理◦」*Xigu*, 2b–3a (original punctuation).

and to repay her karmic debt, the loss of her infant still causes her distress. By coming back to this guilt before rewarding her family, it implies that speaking up to other women about her daughter's death, not her years of gathering grains, is what finally brings her peace.

Buried behind the language of female ignorance that opens *Xigu* is the idea that, once properly enlightened, women serve as the ideal source of instruction to other women. Motivated by the loss of a single life that no amount of meticulous grain preservation can truly replace, Wang becomes a vocal activist at the village level, momentarily becoming a female stand-in for Yu Zhi. The snake-baby's mother in *Zhong juan* does likewise, on an even more public level and at a larger scale. Wang and Gu both call attention to the infanticide that they committed out of shame and ignorance, pleading with pregnant women to observe how the death of a seemingly worthless little girl can compound itself into family disaster. The death of Wang's daughter, who lived less than a day, rippled out into the loss of her first son, the loss of her husband, and the loss of her status as a woman with a household of her own. She says, "I am someone who has personally experienced retribution; everyone should take me as an example."[106] She urges them to come to her for help if poverty makes feeding another mouth onerous, promising that "even though I am powerless, I will still do my best to offer three or five *dou* of white rice."[107] Finally, the link between cherishing rice and babies comes into sharp focus. Wanting to avoid the cost of feeding another mouth is no longer considered a valid excuse for infanticide. Cherishing grains is a way to make up not only for discarding life but also for failing to cherish daughters. The infanticide episode in *Zhong juan* likewise turns the cause of Gu's daughter's death—the neighbor's snide commentary—into a way that more daughters might be saved and that the neighbor might regain her sight.

By starring in vernacular texts aimed at female audiences, Wang and Gu spoke directly to audiences that were unreachable to Yu and other late-Qing moralists. Though deeply concerned that the everyday domestic sphere, presided over by ignorant but well-intentioned women, was a site for countless moral failings, these moralists could not easily connect with such women. *Xigu*—and to an extent *Zhong juan* as well—turn childbearing, cooking, and chatting about life into essential acts of goodness that could transform society, one morally kept household at a time. This covert

106.「我是過來人親身受報。各位當把我做前車之鑒。」*Xigu*, 33a (original punctuation).

107.「我雖無力。尚能勉力應酬白米三斗五斗。」*Xigu*, 33a (original punctuation).

sort of empowerment inherent to *baojuan* is what Yu Zhi wanted to harness in *Xigu*, and in a sense, in all his popular didactic literature. Without challenging the centrality of domestic duties in women's lives, Yu nonetheless placed heavy responsibilities on women to participate in the moral reconstruction of society. However, in the next chapter, we will see that not everyone who agreed with Yu's efforts believed that women could bear such burdens and make such judgments for themselves.

5

Female Audiences, Popular Morality Literature, and the Pitfalls of Incomprehension[1]

In this chapter, I continue to explore the case of the obscure *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, the product of an anonymous writer's attempt to create a *baojuan* from episodes lifted from morality tale collections like *Xuetang riji* and the other texts discussed in chapter 2. Somehow, this literary mashup came to Yu Zhi's attention, and although nothing remains in his own words to describe his reaction, from the attention he put into editing it, he clearly saw in it both incredible potential and deep problems. Superficially, both versions of this title are little more than a mediocre sequel to a text that was highly popular in the late Qing, *Liu Xiang baojuan*.[2] But on closer examination and when read in conversation with each other, the two different editions of *Zhong juan* are nonetheless creative, calculated works meant to bridge a gap between *baojuan* audiences and the children directly targeted by Yu's (and others') morality textbooks. By comparing the original to the revised edition, we gain access to an implicit debate about proselytizing methods in postwar Jiangnan.

1. Acknowledgment: This chapter is derived in part from an article published in *CHINOPERL*: "Conservative Confucian Values and the Promotion of Oral Performance Literature in Late Qing Jiangnan: Yu Zhi's Influence on Two Appropriations of *Liu Xiang baojuan*," *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 36, no. 2 (2017): 89–115, https://doi.org/10.1353/cop.2017.0008. Copyright the Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature.

2. The publication history of *Liu Xiang* gives us concrete proof of the text's popularity. Che's catalog lists forty-four printed and manuscript editions of *Liu Xiang*. Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 153–56. Most of these were published in the final decades of the Qing or the early Republican era.

Though the original author took much of *Zhong juan*'s narrative content straight from previously circulating morality tales, he borrowed his protagonist directly from *Liu Xiang*. *Liu Xiang* is the most widely circulating version of a tale that in its earliest attested version was rooted in the late-Ming revival of lay Buddhism. It relates a fictional story of a pious young woman, Liu Xiangnü, who overcomes many obstacles to achieve religious enlightenment and be reborn in the Pure Land. After a steady but unremarkable rate of publication in Jiangnan from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, *Liu Xiang* experienced a remarkable surge of popular attention after the Taiping War, both within and beyond Jiangnan.[3] By appropriating Liu Xiangnü for his newly created, popular Confucian *baojuan*, the writer of *Zhong juan* demonstrated his desire to appeal to these enthusiastic fans. At the same time, by placing her in scenarios that were originally depicted in Yu's and others' didactic works, he turned her into a spokeswoman for the narrow, conservative moral framework of punishments and rewards so vividly illustrated in works like *Xuetang riji*.

In chapter 4, I focused on how Yu and the anonymous author of *Zhong juan* sought to make anti-infanticide campaigning an issue that women themselves could take up on behalf of their communities. Rather than depending on male philanthropists to establish infant-protection societies or their husbands and sons to read morality texts that connected allowing daughters to live with achieving success in the civil service exam, women could take merit-making into their own hands by talking with other women directly. Both Granny Wang and Gu, the woman who gave birth to the monstrous snake-baby, had drowned daughters because influential women in their lives—a mother-in-law and village gossip, respectively—criticized them for birthing worthless girls who would be nothing but burdens on the family. The new tales turned this critical voice on itself to spread encouragement instead. Furthermore, in both cases, the original morality tales offered mothers who killed their daughters nothing but painful divine retribution. However, once revised and expanded into the narrative framework of a *baojuan*, both tales featured instead protagonists who were permitted to save their families and their own lives, even after disaster struck. I suggested that this adaptation was a consequence of the expected impact of narrative *baojuan*: listeners were believed to look to exemplary protagonists for behaviors worth adopting in their own lives. If

3. For more on the textual development and history of *Liu Xiang baojuan*, see Che, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, 126–28, and Alexander, "Late Ming Roots and Late Qing Proliferation."

a mother who killed her daughter simply died, what could similarly guilty female listeners do but give up and await disaster? Both *Xigu* and the snake-baby episode in *Zhong juan* gave women an alternative, redemptive path to take—become advocates for female infants—in imitation of the flawed but triumphant women of both tales.

Yu's heroine, Wang, maintains a consistently authoritative voice throughout *Xigu* as its main character, but the snake-baby's mother is only one of many incidental characters we encounter in *Zhong juan*. When we examine the text as a whole, as I will below, we begin to see how the possibility of female audiences looking to *baojuan* for characters worthy of imitation was perceived as a powerful, potentially dangerous phenomena by men like the conservative moralist who wrote the first version. Though Yu was trying to convince such partners in socio-moral reform that vernacular literature was an effective tool for change, he had to counter ongoing skepticism about women's moral reasoning abilities. Could women be trusted to recognize the right behaviors to imitate after hearing an exciting story about an outspoken protagonist? As much as Yu seemed to think this was possible, it appears that once again he was an outlier among reformers.

Having two very different versions of *Zhong juan* enables us to closely examine the separate approaches the original author and Yu employed in crafting a *baojuan* that might reach an audience unlikely to encounter this material in other popular forms. Both writers, by engaging with *baojuan*, demonstrate their commitment to restoring moral order in Jiangnan with vernacular literature. Yet the first version demonstrates the anonymous author's incomplete understanding of the generic features of *baojuan* and condescension toward lay Buddhist religious practices. This attitude reflects the cultural elitism that typified and motivated many late-Qing intellectuals, as described in detail in William Rowe's study of the eighteenth-century reformer Chen Hongmou.[4] Some who were fundamentally skeptical of popular religious entertainment practices directly combated them out of the fear that they would destabilize society and spread anti-Confucian values.[5] The original author's discomfort with a popular performance text bleeds through in multiple places. By contrast, the second version features smoother vernacular prose, evenly balanced metrical sections, and a willingness to cooperate with Buddhist organiza-

4. Rowe, 436–37.

5. Vincent Goossaert, "Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples," *Nan Nü* 10 (2008): 212–41.

tions, as demonstrated by the involvement of a temple publishing house to print it and the cleric who wrote a complementary preface thanking Yu for his interventions. As such, Yu's version reflects a sincere hope that this new edition would appeal to its targeted audience: female *baojuan* listeners and readers.

However, given that *Zhong juan* exists in a general lacuna in contemporaneous records and subsequent catalogs of *baojuan*, it presumably did not attract this hoped-for attention among women who loved *Liu Xiang*. Instead, these two versions of *Zhong juan* stand out as anomalies in the literary tradition of *baojuan* circulation and performance. As a result, they present us with the opportunity to learn what two moralists in the 1870s thought would appeal to women looking for edifying and entertaining performance literature and what values they believed these women needed to learn. As a point of contrast, I close the chapter by looking at an illustrated collection of morality tales that Yu compiled around the same time specifically for women, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo* (女二十四孝圖說 *Illustrated tales of twenty-four female filial exemplars*), which continued to be reprinted even decades after his death. Written decades after his morality books for boys that I addressed in chapter 2, this collection, composed and published late in Yu's life, demonstrates his increasing concern that female audiences were being left out of traditional modes of *jiaohua* and that both women and girls must play an essential role in social reform, just as their male counterparts already did.

Liu Xiang zhong juan—Lost and Found

Entirely by chance, I happened across these two editions of *Zhong juan* during archival research at the Theater Institute (戲曲研究所 *Xiqu yanjiusuo*) of the Chinese National Academy of the Arts (中國藝術研究院 *Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan*) in Beijing. One edition lacked all obvious authorial credits and publication data, whereas the other included a preface crediting Yu Zhi as editor and identifying both the temple publishing house and the block-carving studio.[6] Through archival detective work and

6. Though Yu does not confirm his involvement with this text in any extant writing, given his participation in every aspect of morality literature and philanthropic activities in Jiangnan in the 1860s and 1870s, along with the certainty of his authorship of the morality tales discussed in chapter 2, collections that *Zhong juan* borrows heavily from, I accept this attribution as genuine. It seems unlikely that a faked editorial attribution would add significant value to this text, particularly since Yu Zhi had not attached his

TABLE 3: Details of the two *Liu Xiang zhong juan* editions

Version	Publisher	Publication Location	Date	Length
Unedited version	Yihua tang	Shanghai	1870	68 folio pages
Yu Zhi's edited version	Huikong jingfang	Hangzhou	1873	53 folio pages

comparisons among catalogs of *baojuan*, I am confident in attributing the undated edition to the morality book publisher Yihua tang, based in Shanghai. This unattributed edition was possibly printed in 1870, though the author remains unknown until new evidence comes to light.[7] The other, a heavily edited edition, includes an opening image of Xiangnü, a preface by a Buddhist monk named Daoxiu 道修, dated 1873, and a clear publishing attribution to Huikong jingfang 慧空經坊, which operated out of a Buddhist temple in Hangzhou.[8]

At the archive, neither edition was listed in the card catalog under the name *Zhong juan*, but rather under its parent text, *Liu Xiang*. Likewise, Che's *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* includes neither an entry for *Zhong juan* nor any errant, three-volume *Liu Xiang* editions within which a *Zhong juan* might be hidden. Given that it was created specifically to take advantage of the popularity of *Liu Xiang*, the accidental disappearance of both editions of *Zhong juan* has a certain irony to it. Instead of successfully capitalizing on *Liu Xiang*'s appeal, *Zhong juan* was so overwhelmed by *Liu Xiang*'s ubiquity that most later generations of catalogers did not even recognize it as a distinct work in its own right.

The last time *Zhong juan* was recognized as its own text before it resurfaced for me in 2012 may have been in 1951 in "*Baojuan zonglu*" (寶卷總錄 A comprehensive record of precious scrolls), in which Fu Xihua 傅惜

name to a *baojuan* before. It seems more likely that Yu got involved in editing this *baojuan* than that a Buddhist print house would falsely attribute their emendations to Yu within his own lifetime.

7. For a brief history of Yihua tang, see Chien-chuan Wang, "Morality Book Publishing and Popular Religion in Modern China: A Discussion Centered on Morality Book Publishers in Shanghai," trans. Gregory Adam Scott, in *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800–2012*, ed. Philip Clart and Gregory Adam Scott (De Gruyter, 2015), 241–42. For more see Xun Liu, *Daoist Modern: Innovation, Lay Practice, and the Community of Inner Alchemy in Republican Shanghai* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 234–37.

8. For more on Huikong jingfang, see Liu Zhengping, "Jingfang yu zongjiao wenxian de liukan."

華 followed his entry for *Liu Xiang*, which had eight editions that he found, with a short entry on a single volume of the *Zhong juan*. His bibliographic data matches that of the Huikong edition I saw at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts.[9] Fu noted: "Edited by Yu Zhi, Qing dynasty. This book has not been previously recorded."[10] It would not be recorded again for sixty years. Even only ten years after the publication of Fu's catalog, Li Shiyu's 李世瑜 *Baojuan zonglu* (寶卷總錄 A comprehensive record of precious scrolls) shows how *Zhong juan* was well on its way to becoming lost: Li listed two editions of *Liu Xiang* that contain three volumes rather than the standard two—a Yihua tang publication dated to 1870 and a Huikong jingfang edition dated to 1873. Though Li did not recognize the middle volume as a later addition to *Liu Xiang*, he did note, regarding the 1873 edition, "Edited by Yu Zhi. Proofread and augmented by Liezheng 烈正. Head of the volume has preface by Liezheng and preface by Daoxiu. At the end, includes the *Huaming baojuan* (花名寶卷 The precious scroll of flower names)."[11]

My archival searches for a specifically three-volume, Huikong edition of *Liu Xiang* with both prefaces revealed only further conflation of separate editions and misattributed dates to undated imprints.[12] Huikong jingfang appears to have published multiple editions of *Liu Xiang*, beginning at least as early as 1844, some of which have prefaces or postfaces and one of which has *Huaming baojuan* appended to the end. However, without examining the version that Li had access to over seventy years ago, we cannot be certain that all three volumes in his citation were printed at the same time or had been designed to be read together in the first place. Given that multivolume *baojuan* often included prefatory images and essays in only the first volume, the Huikong edition of *Zhong juan* was probably formatted to be distributed alone, not as a set within an 1873 edition of *Liu Xiang baojuan*.

Bibliographic obscurities aside, the Huikong edition is by far the easier

9. In an appendix to *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, Che notes that Fu's personal collection was stored at this library but had been separated and that the *baojuan* had been lost. Che, 467. Perhaps, instead of being lost, Fu's original collection was incorporated into the library's larger collection.

10. Fu Xihua 傅惜華, "Baojuan zonglu 寶卷總錄 [Catalogue Des Pao-Kiuan]," in *Mélanges Sinologiques* [in Chinese] (Bali daxue Beijing Hanxue yanjiusuo [Université de Paris, Centre d'études sinologiques de Pékin], 1951), 73–74.

11. Li Shiyu, *Baojuan zonglu* 寶卷總錄 (Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 27.

12. For more detailed descriptions of these archival dead ends, see Alexander, "Virtues of the Vernacular," 143–46.

of the two editions to link to an original publication context. Though the other edition was stored at the Theater Institute between the first and second volume of Yihua tang's 1870 imprint of *Liu Xiang baojuan*, this alone cannot prove that they belonged together from the start. However, the two texts do share similar print characteristics and the same dimensions, so a presumed association is not unreasonable. Even so, the 1870 Yihua tang edition of *Liu Xiang* exists in many other library archives and collections as a two-volume set—Che lists six of them, not including the one at the Chinese National Academy of the Arts.[13] I examined three at Shanghai Library, the Capital Library of China, and Fudan University Library, and each included only two volumes. While it remains remotely possible that each of these once included a middle volume, which in every case has since been lost, it is more probable that Yihua tang was the publisher of the earlier edition of *Zhong juan* but did not intend one to be included with every copy of its two-volume edition of *Liu Xiang*.

Corroborating evidence for this conclusion occurs only much later in history. An advertisement with price listings for some Shanghai Yihua tang books in the periodical *Xiandao yuebao* (仙道月報 Immortals' way monthly) from July 1, 1939, confirms that the middle volume was part of Yihua tang's print catalog.[14] The advertisement lists *Liu Xiangnü juan* (劉香女卷 A scroll of Liu Xiangnü) at thirty-eight cents. Following this, the list advertises *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, sold separately for twenty cents. Over fifty years separates this advertisement from the edition at the Theater Institute, but Yihua tang's history as an established Shanghai publisher with a long, uninterrupted publication record lends credence to the continuity of its catalog. Yihua tang seems to have printed both the original *baojuan* and the middle volume, and while they could be purchased separately, they could have been ordered or bought together as a set if a customer so wished. For these reasons, I will refer to this version of *Zhong juan* as the Yihua tang edition for the rest of the chapter.

Even if the publication dates of 1870 and 1873 for the different editions are not firmly established by this circumstantial evidence, the nature of Yu's meticulous emendations support the idea that the Huikong edition was a later revision of an earlier text. It has become a trim fifty-three folios long, whereas the undated edition is a much longer sixty-eight folios. This longer version includes many unbalanced lines in the prosimetric sec-

13. Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 153.

14. "Yihua tang shanshuju baojuan daoshu mulu 翼化堂善書局寶卷道書目錄," *Xiandao yuebao* 仙道月報, July 1, 1939.

tions. Someone reading it out loud would have been regularly tripped up by deviations from even couplets of seven-syllable lines each, when encountering couplets that suddenly paired an eight-syllable line with a seven-syllable line. At the metrical level, Yu took care balancing many of these couplets back to seven-seven and left alone any couplets that were already balanced in the other edition. This makes it unlikely that the longer edition was based on Yu's shorter edition, as it would mean that an inept writer chose to introduce multiple metrical infelicities for no substantive reason. Instead, the shorter edition, clearly attributed to a temple publication house and a famous morality-book author and editor, seems to be based on the longer version. Overall, Yu's edits show his concern for drawing this new work in line with the conventions of other *baojuan* as much as possible in form and style, thereby making it more appealing to those who enjoyed *Liu Xiang* and who might be interested in the further adventures of its inspiring heroine, Liu Xiangnü.

Who Is Liu Xiangnü?

In plot and religious perspective, *Liu Xiang baojuan* is an even better example than *Xigu* of Che's subgenre of "precious scrolls narrating women's religious cultivation."[15] *Liu Xiang* begins with a childless, middle-aged couple, Liu Guang 劉光 and Xushi 徐氏, who make their living slaughtering animals and running a nonvegetarian restaurant. Blessed late in life with a daughter, Xiangnü, so named because of the miraculous fragrance that appeared at her birth, they dote on her and support her turn to vegetarianism at age six or seven as her interest in religion grows. Allowed to attend a sermon at a local nun's residence that includes performance of a *baojuan* about pregnancy and filial debt, Xiangnü returns home and convinces her parents to give up killing and open a vegetarian noodle shop instead. Xiangnü's religious trials then begin after she is coerced into marriage by a bullying local landlord, who spots her waiting tables and pairs her with his youngest son, Ma Yu 馬玉. Her parents try to oppose the match, but Xiangnü accepts it as her karmic fate. Shortly after, her parents die in seated meditation and the Ma family helps with the funeral arrangements, taking Xiangnü into their home as the most junior wife upon completion.

Xiangnü now faces opposition to all her religious practices, especially

15. Che, *Xinyang, jiaohua, yule*, 4.

vegetarianism, asceticism, and sutra recitation. Though her husband loves her, his mother fears Xiangnü's influence over him, especially after she is overheard telling him that taking the civil service exam is pointless. After forcibly splitting them up (to Ma Yu's sorrow and Xiangnü's delight), Lady Ma rapidly loses patience with Xiangnü as she is repeatedly overheard criticizing the family for their selfishness, ostentation, and cruelty. Regularly beaten (and once killed but miraculously returned to life) for her stubbornness, the final confrontation between Lady Ma and Xiangnü comes after her sisters-in-law falsely accuse her of adultery, giving Lady Ma the excuse to expel her from the family without further delay. Xiangnü rejoices and becomes a roving lay Buddhist preacher, seeking audiences with wealthy women to convert them and sleeping in temples, until her reputation earns her a residence of her own set up by community members. Ma Yu passes the highest level of the civil service exam and attains a government post. He begs his parents to find his long-lost wife, whereupon she refuses to return to the constraints of marriage. Heavenly retribution comes for his parents, brothers, and sisters-in-law, killing the family after Lady Ma's birthday dinner. Ma Yu's soul descends to the underworld at the same time to observe their sufferings. When he awakens, he rushes home to beg Xiangnü to save them, only to find her already performing salvific rituals for her abusers' spirits. Once released from the underworld, they collectively appear in a dream to thank Xiangnü for her mercy, and the story ends happily when, after many more years of uncontested religious cultivation, Xiangnü, Ma Yu, his second wife, and a virtuous housemaid all ascend to the Western Heaven to be reborn as buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The narrative is light on concrete religious lessons besides emphasizing that non-killing and calling on the Amitâbha Buddha's name are important, that filial debt can be repaid with Buddhist merit, and that heavenly retribution will surely come for all who oppose a good lay Buddhist's practice. The sensationalized, dramatic details of Xiangnü's repeated suffering and total moral victory over her heinous in-laws probably grabbed audiences' attention more than any practical religious educational value.[16] In the final decades of the Qing, dozens of editions of this work were reprinted by religious presses, and in the Republican era, many more came from commercial lithographic presses.[17]

16. For a partial English translation of this *baojuan*, see Katherine Alexander, "An Excerpt from *The Precious Scroll of Liu Xiang*," *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 34 (July 2021): 27–62.

17. Che, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, 153–56.

It is understandable why the author of *Zhong juan* sought to appropriate the popular, outspoken protagonist of *Liu Xiang* to gain access to the original story's audiences. Even more brilliantly, he exploited a natural break in the story to create a plausible space for the "middle volume." Most editions of *Liu Xiang* break at around the halfway point—sometimes physically into separate volumes, sometimes simply as a result of formatting within a single volume—creating a narrative division between the first half, where Xiangnü chafes within the Confucian family system as a daughter and then wife, and the second half, which explores the untrammeled trajectory she takes once thrown out of her husband's home. *Zhong juan* was designed to fit snugly between these two halves, expanding on the time after Xiangnü was evicted but before she took on disciples and settled into her hermitage. Theoretically, if a reader did not know that *Liu Xiang* traditionally consisted of only two volumes and was presented with all three together, they might even assume that the *Zhong juan* was an integral part of the story—that is, provided they did not pay much attention to the rather abrupt change in style, tone, and content between the works.

By adapting morality tales written in simple Classical Chinese into a mix of vernacular prose and simple rhymed metrical verse, the author created a hybrid text in *Zhong juan*—neither a pure morality tale anthology nor a coherent narrative *baojuan*. *Zhong juan* consists of unrelated anecdotes about Xiangnü's travels around the countryside, during which she dispenses moral cures for social and physical ills, as if she were simply walking from page to page through the single-panel illustrations of *Xuetang riji* in which morality tales follow one after another in no particular order.[18] Conversations on the roadside and pleas for assistance repeatedly serve as teachable moments for Xiangnü, as she preaches about the moral framework in which specific good deeds are rewarded and bad ones are severely punished. In nearly every case, Xiangnü recommends that people repent, swear to behave morally in the future, and perform good deeds to offset their demerits, thereby curing their diseases, averting disasters, and ensuring a prosperous future for all within this life. Certain episodes, especially the snake-baby tale addressed in chapter 4, demonstrate creativity in storytelling, but most simply insert Xiangnü as a commentator on action that proceeds more or less as illustrated in the original morality tale, whether from *Xuetang riji* or elsewhere.

18. For a table with summaries of the episodes in both *Zhong juan* versions along with references to related tales in *Xuetang riji*, see Alexander, "Conservative Confucian Values," 99–102.

Fitting Xiangnü into the Narrow Framework of Morality Tales

Comparing *Zhong juan* with some of the morality tales that inspired its episodes illustrates how their author, a late-Qing man, understood the generic features of popular *baojuan* and made assumptions about his intended audience. How could he fit Xiangnü, pious Buddhist heroine, into tale after tale of violent divine retribution for transgressions ranging from disrespecting written paper to unfilial behavior? The first two episodes in both editions of *Zhong juan* provide good examples of the anonymous author's general approach to adaptation from short morality tales to vernacular *baojuan*—at least insofar as he understood the generic conventions. As Yu took a relatively light editorial approach to these episodes, they implicitly bear his seal of approval, in contrast to the five wholly excised episodes that I address below.

The first of these two episodes involves a conflict between a woman and her daughter-in-law. The pair, unable to determine who is at fault for the family's reversal of fortunes, take the advice of a neighbor to consult a temple oracle (抽籤 *chouqian*) associated with Guanyin that is said to be particularly powerful.[19] Xiangnü, hanging around the temple, laughs at their conflict and says that she will speak on behalf of the Bodhisattva to explain the situation. Xiangnü reveals to each actor how their relationships have been twisted by gossip. The woman's teenage daughter made up rumors about her sister-in-law after they had a misunderstanding, and a neighboring woman, Luo 羅, tried to turn the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law because the latter used to scold Luo for saying things she ought not to. The narrator points out that Xiangnü has special sensitivity to this conflict because of her previous problems with her mother- and sisters-in-law in the original story. Once this is all revealed, a tear-filled scene of forgiveness and repentance plays out before a statue of Guanyin at the temple.[20] At the conclusion of the episode, Luo, the gossiping neighbor responsible for fanning the flames, screams, "The City God wants to confine me in tongue-cutting hell!" She cuts out her own tongue and dies.[21] Everyone in the village sees how Heaven punishes slander, and the

19. For more on the use of such oracles within Buddhist practice, see Esther-Maria Guggenmos, "*Qian* Divination and Its Ritual Adaptations in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 46, no. 1 (May 2018): 43–70.

20. *Zhong juan*, 8b–9a. Page numbers for both editions are identical until 41b. Unless specifically noted as either the Yihua tang or Huikong edition, the cited text is the same in both editions.

21.「城隍菩薩要把我入拔舌地獄」*Zhong juan*, Yihua tang edition, 12a.

narrator remarks that it is only a matter of time before all merits and demerits receive an appropriate response from above.[22]

Xuetang riji includes a short story about a gossiping neighbor who dramatically cuts out their own tongue and dies, along with a graphic illustration of the climactic tongue-cutting moment. However, in this short Classical Chinese version, the gossiping character is a man who spreads tales of a private affair between a husband and wife, leading to marital strife.[23] Whereas Xiangnü could not have easily been inserted into this male-dominated narrative in *Xuetang riji*, in the recast, all-female version in *Zhong juan*, she becomes an appropriate intermediary for diagnosing the problems among the three women within a single family—mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law—and the malicious influence of another woman outside the family unit. Though no named deity was present in the earlier version, Guanyin is added now. In reframing this tale for an audience presumably interested in Xiangnü's role in it, the author probably assumed he was speaking to women uninterested in a tale about men's gossip and instead turned to rivalries among women, with a resolution that plays out in front of Guanyin.

Guanyin also features in the second episode, where Xiangnü encounters a girl given to her husband's family at a young age and raised by her abusive mother-in-law. The girl prays to Guanyin for relief, but after three years without change, she begins to doubt whether the Bodhisattva has any power at all. Versions of this story can be found in *Xuetang riji*, *Riji gushi xuji*, and *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*.[24] In *Zhong juan*, Xiangnü, speaking on behalf of the Bodhisattva again, explains that the girl suffers because she was an abusive mother-in-law in a previous life. In this life, she must suffer 10,000 blows before her debt will be repaid. If she can bear 100 more blows, her suffering will be over. However, because Xiangnü explains this all so loudly, the girl's mother-in-law overhears the judgment as well and immediately drops her staff, fearing that she will in turn suffer in her next life for the blows she dealt in this one.[25] In this case, the tale is vernacularized with little variation from its source materials. If the image from *Xuetang riji* simply featured a third woman (i.e., Xiangnü) transmitting Guanyin's insight while standing between Guanyin and the aggrieved girl, it would match the *baojuan* version perfectly.

22. *Zhong juan*, 12a.

23. *Xuetang riji*, 23b.

24. *Riji gushi xuji*, 44b–45a; *Xuetang riji*, 48a; and *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo* (Shuang baiyan tang chongkan, 1872), 20b–21a.

25. *Zhong juan*, 17b–18a.

Fig.7. A mother-in-law beats her young daughter-in-law while Guanyin looks on from the heavens. *Xuetang riji*, 48a. Courtesy of Harvard University Library.

No special pains have been taken to make this story more accessible for the *baojuan* audience. Given that it already featured women and Guanyin, the author probably did not see the need for additional adaptation.

The above two episodes, which appear at the start of *Zhong juan*, reveal some general principles that organize the majority of episodes that follow. Where an extant morality tale involving women already existed, Xiangnü could be inserted simply enough with little change, personifying the anonymous narratorial voice that passed judgment on its characters. The case of gender-swapping in the first tale, along with the addition of Guanyin discussed above, further emphasizes the woman-oriented nature of this anecdote and shows how the author aimed to appeal to specifically female audiences. Adding in Guanyin elsewhere in small ways might also

have further advanced this goal. In the third episode, the one about the snake baby, the monster is chased away after a woman recites the "White Robe Incantation," a reference to one of Guanyin's incarnations and a method not included in any other versions of the snake-baby tale. In the fourth episode, Xiangnü learns that Heaven is going to send a fire to punish a village for various evils and warns a woman that her family should repent to avoid this fate. While her family refuses, as flames engulf their home, the woman calls on Guanyin and is the only survivor from the conflagration. In the *Xuetang riji* version of the fire story, no one receives extraordinary mercy like this at the last minute, which makes it another addition from the *Zhong juan* author.[26]

Yet by including Guanyin in each of the first four episodes, the author creates an odd tone that immediately marks the *Zhong juan* as deviating significantly from its parent text. In the first thirty-three folio pages of *Zhong juan*, Guanyin receives far more attention than she ever does in over 100 folio pages of *Liu Xiang*. The author may have hoped that the opening episodes' repeated references to Guanyin would cue audiences that this text was designed with their perceived interests in mind. As the text continues, it becomes clear that the writer's interest in Guanyin does not extend beyond her utility as a marker of a gendered text. The more the author includes elements related to mainstays of lay female Buddhist practices, the more he reveals an antagonistic attitude toward their foundational texts, acts, and beliefs. We can get a better sense of this hostility by looking at some of the episodes that were cut when Yu produced his version.

Major Editorial Interventions: Cutting Antagonistic and Repetitive Episodes

Though in editing the first volume of *Pan Gong*, Yu removed many direct references to Buddhist practice and added elements that diminished the significance of Buddhist practices and beliefs in the final volume, Yu was not anti-Buddhist. He may even have become Buddhist late in life. Therefore, it is not surprising that of the five episodes that Yu cut completely when editing his Huikong edition, two feature Xiangnü vehemently arguing that Buddhist approaches to cultivating merit do not measure up to Heaven's true moral standards, leaving ignorant practitioners vulnerable to divine retribution even if they fully intend to be pious. Unlike the original author, Yu did

26. *Xuetang riji*, 25b.

not seem interested in pointing out the limitations of Buddhism. Grafted onto a popular lay Buddhist *baojuan*, *Zhong juan* depended on its ability to work alongside Buddhist practices to reach audiences. The original author apparently had forgotten this in his attempt to teach women a better way to avoid disaster for their families in *this* life, rather than the next. Though no defender of Buddhism either here or in any of his published works, Yu was working strategically to bring *Zhong juan* somewhat back in line with *baojuan* conventions by removing these episodes, or at the very least, he was avoiding directly insulting its audience.

In the first of the episodes Yu excised, Xiangnü lectures passersby at great length about how cherishing written paper and grain are more meritorious acts than burning incense or reciting Amitâbha's name.[27] This echoes some of Wang's rhetoric in *Xigu* on the relative value of merit-making, but there remains one glaring difference: Wang was not already a widely known heroine who originally championed popular lay Buddhist practices, as Xiangnü was. Xiangnü never took an interest in text or grain in her original story, so her sudden intense devotion, including gathering written paper and grain from all the outhouses and dog feces she passes along the road, is jarring, to say the least. As much as Yu advocated cherishing grains and written paper in his other publications, as it is, this episode could not work with Xiangnü as its main character and newest advocate for cherishing-grain societies. Yu also excised the episode following her grain-cherishing advocacy, in which Xiangnü finds a family about to cremate their parents and lectures them on how unfilial this would be. In *Liu Xiang*, by contrast, Xiangnü sings at length at her parents' funeral, at which their corpses were cremated, including celebrating herself as the torchbearer lighting their funeral pyres. How could a heroine who respectfully cremated her own parents in the first volume of *Liu Xiang* now go on a long tirade about its filial disrespect? If *Zhong juan* were really to take place between the first and second volumes of the original, such a contradiction could not remain.

There are no obvious reasons why Yu removed two other short episodes from the end of the text, however. One resembles a laundry list of sins committed by a young man who is now on his deathbed. Xiangnü explains to his mother, whom she encounters praying for healing at a temple, how she should cherish paper and grain and prevent her son from further desecrating them if she wants him to recover. The other is yet another grain-cherishing tale, wherein Xiangnü lectures a woman pounding grain outside her home about the desecration caused by spilling flour

27. *Zhong juan*, Yihua tang edition, 42a–44b.

everywhere. Since cherishing grain is briefly mentioned early on when a few households are spared from a fire that otherwise destroys a village, the reason for both stories' removal cannot be as simple as trying to avoid the topic of cherishing grains. Perhaps they were removed simply to avoid redundancy, since the moral failures they address are mostly covered earlier in the text. They are unobjectionable but narratively unnecessary.

The most extreme example of anti-popular Buddhist rhetoric in the Yihua tang edition, however, is found in the final episode, of which Yu clearly did not approve, though the original author expended significant effort adapting it from its source material: a common morality tale about suicide and regret. Closing the *baojuan* with this powerful, inventive adaptation, the author probably meant it to be a climactic finish. Although the first five stories in the Yihua tang edition range between six and ten folio pages in length, after that, most of the episodes before the finale are about two folio pages long, as if the author had lost some enthusiasm. Only one manages to extend to three and a half folios—the story with the extensive list of infractions committed by one very bad young man. The final story fills out six folio pages, ending the text on a burst of creative energy. Carrying with it all the liveliness of the collection's first few episodes, it puts words in Xiangnü's mouth that undermine the value of listening to *baojuan* for moral edification in the first place. Even though the author was trying to use a *baojuan* to reach what he perceived to be an otherwise unreachable audience, by ending on this note, his edition demonstrates only his prejudices against women's religious practices. Given his willingness to experiment with the genre, he was probably one of Yu's supporters, or at least indirectly influenced by his ideas about the importance of moral performance literature in the expanded understanding of *jiaohua*. But by choosing to end *Zhong juan* on this note, did he actually believe that women were capable of carrying out the urgent task of teaching and civilizing society alongside men? Could they be partners in rebuilding society, or would they always need men to step in and save them, especially those from the narrow segment of society traditionally responsible for enacting *jiaohua*?

Regretting Suicide or Regretting Taking Inspiration from a *Baojuan* Heroine?

The final story in the Yihua tang edition aligns with and diverges from what I am calling the "suicide-regret" tale that appears in many of Yu's

morality books. "Suicide regret" is a convenient category for stories featuring someone who committed suicide in a moment of anger and then returns from the dead to warn the living that they regret taking their own life. In *Zhong juan*, the suicide-regret episode consists of two halves. The first is mostly rooted in earlier materials, and the second adds new details to address the consequences of female audiences taking seriously the "wrong" sort of morality texts, as defined by a fundamentalist Confucian. Only after seeing the tropes chosen from the earlier source material can we see how the ghost's true regret should not have been her suicide act but the assumption that modeling her life on a *baojuan* would give her merit in the first place. The story culminates by undermining one of the most influential and revered *baojuan* of the Ming and Qing: *Xiangshan baojuan* (hereafter *Xiangshan*). This classic narrative about the Bodhisattva Guanyin's incarnation as Princess Miaoshan (妙善公主 *Miaoshan gongzhu*) is still performed by and for devotees in China to this day.[28] The anonymous critique ending *Zhong juan* casts into relief the disapproval that popular (especially communal) expressions of female piety attracted from fundamentalist Confucian literati.[29]

The tale begins with Xiangnü stopping to spend the night in a temple, where she is confronted by the ghost of a middle-aged woman, surnamed Wang 王, who had committed suicide and was sentenced by the underworld to reexperience her death nightly as punishment. The ghost believes that she might escape this punishment by taking Xiangnü as a substitute, a common motif in Chinese ghost lore, but Xiangnü's spiritual powers prevent this.[30] Instead, Xiangnü asks the ghost to explain her predicament. Wang begins by mentioning that she had made a vow of chastity when she was young and so remained at her parents' home. She then describes how one day, upset by a neighbor's insult, she argued with them and killed herself in anger. Though the earthly justice system awarded her father damages that the neighbors went bankrupt to pay, her soul was still punished by King Yama in the underworld's justice system. Within a few years, in the world of the living, the neighbors regained their fortune, but Wang could never regain her life, leading to her regret. Xiangnü then promises to deliver her spirit from the underworld.

28. *Zhong juan*, Yihua tang edition, 62a–68a. For work on contemporary performance, see Xiaosu Sun, "Performing the Bodhisattva Guanyin: Drama, Ritual and Narrative" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2017): 194–220.

29. Goossaert, "Beginning of the End," 324.

30. See Rania Huntington, "Ghosts Seeking Substitutes: Female Suicide and Repetition," *Late Imperial China* 26, no. 1 (June 2005): 1–40.

Versions of this first half of the story can be found in many of Yu's illustrated morality tales for children, including *Riji gushi xuji*, *Xuetang riji*, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, and in *Xu qianjia shi* with a poem (and narrative commentary). In *Riji gushi xuji*, the protagonist is male and speaks through an effigy portrait. Surnamed Chen 陳, he killed himself in a fit of anger and simply explains his regret now that he is punished with repeating his own death until he can find a substitute. Sad that he has lost his chance at human life, he warns listeners that even if they are angry, they should not take their lives so lightly.[31] *Xu qianjia shi* prefaces its poem about suicide regret with a short narrative about a man who poisoned himself after getting angry. Later, his ghost possesses his wife to complain that even though his moment of anger caused someone to forfeit their good farmland, because of their inherent good fortune, they were able to buy it all back within seven years. Meanwhile, his own life cannot be bought back, so he remains trapped in the underworld.[32] The poem reiterates how short life is and how long souls suffer in the underworld, warning the boys who Yu expected to study this work in the classroom that a rash decision in a heated moment will lead to endless regret.

Neither of the stories above offers a solution to the ghost's suffering. However, in *Xuetang riji* and *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, both stories end in the ghost's deliverance thanks to the merit cultivated by a living relative. In the former, a daughter appears in a dream to ask her mother to have the Diamond Sutra (金剛經 *Jin'gang jing*) recited on her behalf so that her soul might be freed from the eternal repetition of her suicide in the underworld. On waking, the mother goes to the home of her daughter's enemy to beg for sacrifices to help her spirit.[33] In *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, Yu reverses the relationship so that the daughter could demonstrate her filial piety by saving her mother's spirit. In that story, Zhang Suzhen's 張素貞 mother appears to her in a dream to beg for help. After her explanation goes through the standard formula related to anger, suicide, and regret, she also mentions that she had failed to cherish grains while alive. When Suzhen wakes, she establishes a grain-cherishing society for women and admonishes everyone she knows about the practice. These acts of filial piety and merit-making end up delivering her mother from the underworld within three years.[34]

31. *Riji gushi xuji*, 2:21a.
32. *Xu qianjia shi*, 2:17a–b.
33. *Xuetang riji*, 38a.
34. *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, 24b–25a.

Fig.8. A ghost appears to her mother in a dream to explain why she regrets her suicide. *Xuetang riji*, 38a. Courtesy of Harvard University Library.

As these four versions of the suicide-regret tale from Yu's works show, the *Zhong juan* adaptation follows the expected formula closely in its first half. In the second half of the episode, however, Xiangnü latches onto a single new detail absent from any other version—the ghost's childhood vow of chastity—and presses her on why she would make such a vow. Xiangnü explains that this vow to remain unmarried would only make sense if Wang had no brothers to care for her parents. Wang counters that she had made the vow because she heard the story of the chaste Princess Miaoshan in *Xiangshan* and wanted to imitate her devotion. Receiving punishment after death instead of reward, she now doubts whether the *Xiangshan* text is worth trusting at all.

Rather than reassuring her, Xiangnü takes this opportunity to explain

that the widely circulating version of *Xiangshan* has experienced extreme textual corruption and is not trustworthy anymore. However, before summarizing the new version that Xiangnü explains to the ghost, we should review what the real version is about. In fact, the major details of this story have been relatively consistent over the centuries as versions developed in different genres.[35] *Xiangshan* focuses on Princess Miaoshan, third daughter of a king in a far-off land, who decides in early childhood to practice Buddhist piety. When her sonless father demands that his daughters marry and produce grandsons as heirs, Miaoshan reveals her desire to become a nun, a request that leads to fierce arguments and brutal punishments before culminating in her execution for failing to be filial.[36] In the underworld, her goodness and mercy result in the salvation of so many souls that she is returned to life before the courts lose all their inhabitants. Revived, she possesses magical powers and lives as a pious hermit on a remote mountain. When she hears that her father is dying of a wasting disease brought on by his transgressions, she anonymously offers her eyes and hands to him as a divine remedy for his illness. Once healed, he and the queen visit this unknown hermit, whom the queen recognizes as their mutilated daughter. When her father repents of his evil, Miaoshan's eyeless and handless body is transformed into one with 10,000 eyes and hands, revealing her to be an incarnation of Guanyin. In this gesture, *Xiangshan* reconciles Miaoshan's unwavering Buddhist devotion with an extreme act of filial devotion, while also demonstrating the boundless mercy of the Bodhisattva in one of her earlier lives.

However, in the purportedly true (though newly invented) version of *Xiangshan* that ends *Zhong juan*, Xiangnü explains that Miaoshan was a paragon of filial piety who would never have disobeyed her father's command to marry because of personal religious devotion. A buddha had appeared to her in a dream, revealed that she was a descended immortal, and told her to maintain her bodily purity at all costs. With no choice but to resist marriage, Miaoshan fulfilled her filial devotion by helping save her parents' souls, but only after reascending to Heaven. Xiangnü then notes that many other significant episodes of Miaoshan's exemplary life were missing or misrepresented by the version of *Xiangshan* that had inspired Wang but cuts herself off before explaining them further. Suddenly turning to speak directly to the audience of *Zhong juan*, she explains that if listeners want the full version, someone must visit Mount Emei (峨

35. Dudbridge, 21–87.

36. For a full English translation, see Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*.

眉山 *Emei shan*) and use the complete version stored there to fill in all the gaps in the widely known one. On this note, the episode ends abruptly with Wang's spirit ascending to Heaven, and Xiangnü continuing on to find someone else to enlighten, leaving the conclusion open enough to segue back into the second volume of the original.

The two halves of the story do not fit together well—a tale of suicide regret followed by a warning of the unreliability of *baojuan* (and the lack of merit in forswearing marriage)—unless Wang's suicide links the two. By using her chastity vow as the pivot between an unremarkable adaptation of earlier tales warning against passion-driven suicide and a full-out assault on one of the most widely respected *baojuan* of the time for supposedly influencing marriage resistance, the author of the Yihua tang *Zhong juan* joins a chorus of Qing officials and moralists who raised concerns about women's abilities to make moral decisions, even as chapter 4 makes a case for Yu's arguments that women can be trusted with significant moral responsibility.

First, this relates to Wang's suicide. Though she does not directly link her chastity vow with her suicide, by introducing the vow in one line and then immediately explaining in the following that she killed herself after she was insulted by a neighbor, the narrative nonetheless implies an association between the two. During the Qing, officials tasked with prosecuting chastity-related suicide cases knew that legal code took female suicide extremely seriously but were still conflicted because of the widespread perception that women were too impulsive and easily insulted.[37] Were women capable of the moral reasoning required to understand what a chastity violation was and how to act appropriately in response? The state continued to insist this was the case with an ever-increasing list of legal statutes addressing female suicide, all of which came down to enforcing the view that a woman who died by suicide was justified in her complaints of anything *she* perceived as a chastity violation, ranging from an indecent joke to overt flirtation to sexual assault.[38] Repeatedly, however, accounts written by men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries call into question women's moral maturity, especially in moments of anger caused by perceived insults. One volume of household instructions from the late eighteenth century explains how men were capable of the sort of reasoning that allowed them to correctly apply principles learned through study to shape their correct behavior, and women could only follow orders or

37. Theiss, 12–13.
38. Theiss, 178.

learn to imitate their senior family members.[39] In the late nineteenth century, a subgenre of tales of the strange about female ghosts seeking substitutes grew in popularity, featuring male protagonists who were able to intervene and save a woman about to kill herself from the unseen, whispering influence of a female suicide-ghost, whom the men were somehow still able to see.[40] Such ghost stories are the fictional counterpart of the real-world assumption that women need men with common sense to protect them from their innate inability to resist impulses that would lead them to their deaths.[41]

Second, drawing on Yu's own well-documented worries about the influence of oral performances on susceptible audiences, this episode returns to the questions that I addressed in chapter 1 about the damage done by literature that contravenes Confucian social norms. As the anonymous writer of the Yihua tang *Zhong juan* reveals his skepticism about the very genre he has chosen as his vehicle and the audiences who take *baojuan* as a source of moral guidance, he expands the category of morally harmful literature to include even texts that were popularly perceived as good, moral works. Just how impressionable are female audiences, if listening to a *baojuan* might lead them to take vows of chastity that might then lead to suicide? In the Republican era, essayist Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967) presented a similar interpretation of *Liu Xiang*, based on the suicides of two women who had read it. Reading only up to the point at which Xiangnü listens to the nun's sermon about the difficulties of religious cultivation as a woman, Zhou concluded that this grim view of women's lives compelled the text's readers to end their own lives, overlooking the fact that generations of women had listened to *Liu Xiang* presumably without such harm.[42] It would be just as impossible to link the widespread popularity of *baojuan* such as *Xiangshan* and *Liu Xiang* to a significant number of women resisting marriage as it would be to connect performances of romantic dramas with nine-tenths of widows in the audience abandoning their chastity vows, as Yu hyperbolically claimed in "Jiaohua liang dadi lun."[43] This concern over women's interpretive abilities and the subtleties of mimetic responses to inspirational literature continued to haunt reformers.

39. Theiss, 185.

40. Huntington, "Ghosts Seeking Substitutes," 10.

41. Huntington, "Ghosts Seeking Substitutes," 14.

42. Zhou Zuoren, "Liu Xiangnü," in *Guadou ji* 瓜豆集 (Yuzhoufeng she, 1937), 42–51.

43. "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," 1:4a.

In light of all these considerations, the new orientation for the suicide-regret tale based on an imitation of the "wrong" version of *Xiangshan* appears to be firmly rooted in concerns that instead of drawing inspiration from Miaoshan's extreme perseverance or filial piety, women would gravitate toward her chastity vow. In addition to the risk presented by women trying to defend their chastity in ways that Qing intellectuals suspected indicated deficiencies in moral understanding, any woman who voluntarily chose to remove herself from the marriage system sent ripples through the social structure in which she was embedded.[44] This did happen, but not often: more than 95 percent of women would marry by age thirty. In terms of evidence for lay women resisting marriage, Marjorie Topley's mid-twentieth-century fieldwork in "girls' houses" in Guangdong and women's "vegetarian houses" in Singapore, where unmarried women dedicated themselves to practicing piety without marrying, has indeed shown that women associated with these specific spaces of religious piety were readers of texts such as *Xiangshan* and *Liu Xiang*, and some did credit these texts as their inspiration.[45] The implications of this evidence, however, should be considered carefully. Specifically linking a minority practice documented in Guangdong and in Cantonese-speaking diaspora communities in Southeast Asia to the influence of popular texts runs directly against the evidence of the broad diffusion of such texts in late-Qing popular culture. Even so, the new version of *Xiangshan*, depicting Miaoshan as a filial daughter and a descended immortal, seeks to remove that possible interpretation completely, no matter how rare instances of marriage resistance in imitation of Princess Miaoshan were at the time. When it comes to didactic literature, whether female audiences possessed the necessary capacity for moral reasoning and the ability to interpret the correct lessons from complex narratives was a serious problem for *Zhong juan*'s author. In this final episode, he demonstrated how concerned he was that women were frequently misled by the *baojuan* stories they loved, and he wanted to step between these women and those misleading whispers to save them from harm.

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44. Shuang Chen, "Demography of Qing China," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Apr. 20, 2022. https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-445

45. See Marjorie Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung," in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford University Press, 1975), 67–88, and Topley, "Chinese Women's Vegetarian Houses in Singapore," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27 (1954): 51–67.

Restoring Xiangnü's Relationship with Buddhism: The Huikong Edition

Yu's careful work bringing the Huikong edition closer in line with the *baojuan* of his time reveals both his continued confidence in such literature (despite the first author's apparent doubts) and the potential he saw in the Yihua tang edition, flawed as it might have been. In addition to completely cutting episodes that addressed lay Buddhist audiences in ways both clumsy and insulting, Yu made meticulous changes to the rest of the *baojuan*. Yu's emendations—involving both additions and subtractions—mark a shift away from the Yihua tang edition's tone of explicit opposition to popular Buddhism. But his changes did not affect the fundamental message that Xiangnü preaches about the primacy of values such as non-killing, filial piety, and the cherishing of paper and grain, lessons that run through all of Yu's morality works. Even so, the Huikong edition does not emphasize the superiority of these values over traditionally Buddhist practices.

Instead, the revising and repackaging process also involved the inclusion of a new preface written by a Buddhist monk and an opening image of Xiangnü to mimic the visual format of traditional *Liu Xiang* editions. The publishing house suggests further Buddhist cooperation: in 1773, Zhaoqing dazi jingfang 昭慶大字經房, a potential predecessor to Huikong jingfang located at the same temple, produced the earliest extant edition of *Xiangshan* printed in China and stored the blocks.[46]

Attempts to bring the Huikong edition of *Zhong juan* into closer alignment with the printed form that most *baojuan* took in the late Qing entailed adding the opening image depicting Liu Xiangnü, followed by an image of a dragon stele with an inscription, and then a preface. These additions appear to be intended to raise the status of the text in the eyes of readers, particularly those already familiar with the genre. The zeal of the Yihua tang edition's moral superiority is dulled, replaced with a record of pleasant cooperation between a monk and Yu. In a preface, a monk named Daoxiu from the Gufahua Chanyuan (古法華禪院 Ancient Dharma Flower Meditation Hall) in Hangzhou praises *Zhong juan* for its ability to enlighten ignorant women via performance.[47] This accepting and encour-

46. For a full facsimile of this edition, see Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, "Kenryūban Kōzan hōkan kaisetsu" 乾隆版香山寶卷解說, *Dōkyō kenkyū* 4 (1971): 115–95.

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

aging attitude toward lay Buddhist practices like *baojuan* recitation stood wholly at odds with the skeptical note on which the Yihua tang edition ended. Daoxiu does not mention the ideological differences between the edited and original versions of *Zhong juan*. Instead, he presents Yu's interest and work on the text as primarily aesthetic: "For a long while, this edition was not literary. Therefore, the moralist Yu Liancun [Yu Zhi] newly revised the collection."[48]

When we consider the substantial alterations to the content, it becomes clear why Daoxiu considered these changes an elevation of quality and tone, not simply an erasure of objectionable rhetoric. The Huikong edition not only looks like, but also reads like other narrative *baojuan* more than the original edition. It no longer questions its audience's confidence in the reliability of the genre. It ends with a quatrain appropriately signifying the ritual value of its performance. Its poetry flows, giving it new performance potential. Small yet substantive changes also mark a more refined religious tone. On page 1b, a line in the Yihua tang edition reads, "Singing a song about former Heaven" 唱出先天一曲歌; the term "former Heaven" (*xiantian* 先天) is changed to "profound" (*weimiao* 微妙), perhaps to distance Xiangnü from the heterodox sect of the same name, who believed in the Unborn Mother (無生老母 *Wusheng laomu*) and who were officially suppressed in the Ming and Qing.[49] In another case, on page 20a, "Grandpa Buddha" (佛爺爺 *Fo yeye*) becomes "Buddha's vast compassion" (佛宏慈 *Fo hongci*), expressing the same sentiment in a more literary manner.

Instead of a ghost story, the Huikong edition concludes with a summary emphasizing Xiangnü's compassion for the endless misery that unenlightened beings endure. It then closes with a two-couplet poem dedicating the merit earned from the text's performance to all beings so that they might gain enlightenment.[50] This type of invocation, called a *huixiang wen* (迴向文 merit-dedication text), is a common means of closing both Buddhist religious services and *baojuan* recitations. Significantly, the one used here is the exact same version of this invocation as at the end of *Liu Xiang*. Though also used in a Tongzhi-era edition of *Xiangshan*, the

48.「昔版久不成文義爰有居善識等余蓮村初翻新集」*Zhong juan*, Huikong edition, 1a.

49. For more on Xiantian dao 先天道, see Marjorie Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 26, no. 2 (1963): 362–92, and Lin Wanchuan 林萬傳, *Xiantian dao yanjiu* 先天道研究 (Tianju shuju, 1986).

50. *Zhong juan*, Huikong edition, 52b–53a.

invocation is not widely used elsewhere.[51] Further strengthening the bond between *Xiangshan*, *Liu Xiang*, and *Zhong juan*, this invocation is followed by a line of instructions that always close the final volume of the *Liu Xiang* parent text (and occasionally also *Xiangshan*), though it is also not repeated in any other *baojuan* that I have read to date: "Now you can also lead them communally to kneel and recite various Buddhist verses of penitence. After that, lead them in reciting the Buddha's name, then end."[52] In adopting the concluding section from *Liu Xiang* to close out *Zhong juan*, the new text no longer fits seamlessly between its parent text's two volumes. Rather, it marks itself as a stand-alone work, sufficient to create merit all on its own, and allows its performer to release the audience from the ritual space.

With all of these changes, it becomes clear that those involved in the Huikong edition—Yu, the monk Daoxiu, and the experienced printers at Huikong who produced other *baojuan*—consciously sought to create a closer alignment with contemporary editions of *Xiangshan* and/or *Liu Xiang*, rather than denigrating such works. The Huikong edition wraps up the *Zhong juan* in a new package, adorned with illustrations and a preface, tied together with a Buddhist monk's seal of approval and a proper, respectful conclusion. These additions work together in a way that honors the practice of *baojuan* recitation, while emphasizing the need for greater attention to another set of moral injunctions.

Conclusions on *Liu Xiang zhong juan*

It is unclear whether any other extant copies of editions of *Zhong juan* remain, apart from these two preserved in Beijing. Those elsewhere may

51. Though the 1773 edition of *Xiangshan*, published by Huikong dazi jingfang, does not end with this invocation or set of instructions, the 1844 edition of *Liu Xiang* by the same publisher does, and all subsequent *Liu Xiang* editions do as well. An 1871 edition of the shorter version of *Xiangshan* ends with the same pair of couplets and instructions to the reader. Since it is unclear whether the 1844 *Liu Xiang* copied an earlier edition of *Xiangshan* or the other way around, though the line of influence is not provable, the association between the two is clear.

52. The final character is half the size of the others in many editions of the text, although some omit it entirely. See *Liu Xiang baojuan* (Huikong jingfang, Tongzhi era [1861–1874]), in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang suwenxue congkan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏俗文學叢刊, ed. Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo suwenxue congkan bianji xiaozu 中央研究院語言研究所俗文學叢刊編輯小組, photographic reprint, (Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), 355:310.

also be mistaken for copies of *Liu Xiang* and incorrectly cataloged, but whether they are scattered awaiting discovery or never existed in the first place, this gap in the current textual record still indicates that *Zhong juan* was not widely distributed either before or after Yu's version.[53] Ultimately, given this absence of surviving reprints from its own time and its absence in later scholarship, this *baojuan* failed to become a work that found sustained acceptance among audiences or performers. The gamble to bank on Xiangnü's fame did not enable either author or editor to reach new audiences for long, if at all. This failure to gain widespread popularity, even with a carefully edited, nonconfrontational, cleric-approved Huikong edition, is very different from the exceptional attention and investment that *Liu Xiang* was receiving at the time. Though *Zhong juan* shares its protagonist and title with a *baojuan* that Jiangnan publishers could not produce enough of during the late Qing, the chance to encounter additional episodes in her story does not seem to have engaged her fans. Neither the use of a popular genre (*baojuan*) nor the appropriation of a famous protagonist (Liu Xiang) was enough to guarantee popularity.

As the comparisons between probable source materials and their prosimetric adaptations above demonstrate, the unconnected episodes in *Zhong juan* vary in quality, length, and narrative approach to inserting Xiangnü into the midst of administrations of heavenly justice. Rather than creating a unified work, these episodes more easily offer up interpretations when read as individual units, reproducing the effect of paging through their originals in texts like *Xuetang riji*. Expanded into multipage narratives, the printed border framing each illustration still exercises strong restraint on all but a few anecdotes in *Zhong juan*. As simplistic as popular performance literature probably seemed to the original author steeped in elite culture, his failure to break free of the source materials' constraints in most cases testifies to the difficulty of writing popular vernacular performance texts for imagined female audiences, especially when the author was more comfortable directly admonishing them.

One commonality between the narratives of the original *Liu Xiang* and

53. A lack of surviving editions does not mean there were none, but by contrasting the number of surviving editions of *Liu Xiang*, which has minimally hundreds of extant copies in over forty different editions, with the number of *Zhong juan*, which has two editions with one copy each, it is clear enough that *Zhong juan* had significantly less impact. There is possibly a second copy of the Huikong edition at the library of Hebei University, which I tentatively confirmed over the phone but not in person. While Yihua tang continued to list a *Zhong juan* in print ads into the 1930s, I have found no evidence of other copies besides the one discussed in this chapter.

Xigu, Yu's moderately successful narrative *baojuan* for women, is how moral advice is integrated into and through the story. Though it is not always seamless, particularly in Yu's work, both texts seem intended to influence their audiences with protagonists who model good behavior and live out their convictions in the face of skepticism and opposition. Both Liu Xiangnü and Wang regularly admonish people in their households about proper behavior, be it vegetarianism or cherishing grain, but these lectures are integrated into the story and into the social networks within which both women are enmeshed. Xiangnü, for example, has already negotiated respect for her religious practices into her own marriage terms with her fiancé and knows how dearly her new husband wishes to pass the civil service exam before she launches into a speech about the pointlessness of an official career. Wang initiates the entire outhouse-cleaning process to rescue grains after the maid nearly dies from thoughtlessly discarding a stolen bun down the hole, which makes her think about what else must be down there, creating demerits for her employer's household. Her act inspires a wave of outhouse cleaning in her neighborhood. Texts of the "precious scrolls narrating women's religious cultivation" subgenre follow this formula in many creative ways, always nesting their heroines in the complex world of human relationships where actions have consequences and where the implications for real-world applications are never as simple as direct imitation. Audiences live within their own social realities and negotiate their religious devotion and community obligations in their own ways. If they are to do anything in imitation of a *baojuan* protagonist, they will have to judge for themselves what that means individually, or they can simply enjoy each tale for how entertaining it is to see a woman triumph over all those who ever opposed her and reap karmic rewards in the end.

Xiangnü of the *Zhong juan* is an entirely different sort of protagonist. As she moves from panel to panel of a collection of illustrated morality tales, she embodies the voice of an omniscient narrator and depends on newly acquired spiritual powers that she did not possess in the original story to divine the causes and conditions of the suffering she observes in each episode. As a morality campaigner, Xiangnü has no direct connection to any of the people she lectures to, and the fractured narrative structure gives audiences little to imitate if they are inspired by Xiangnü's example. Instead, in both the original and revised editions, this *baojuan* displays how its author and editor both targeted a specific female audience—fans of *Liu Xiang*—whom they hoped would enthusiastically adopt new material featuring their beloved character. Yet such audiences proved to be more complicated than these writers had perhaps imagined;

their affection could not be so easily attracted simply by plucking tales about "women's issues" from the morality tale corpus, changing male figures to female ones, or adding Guanyin here and there.

Epilogue: *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*

At roughly the same time, shortly before his involvement with the Huikong edition, Yu seems to have realized a profound oversight in his attempts to reach all audiences with morality literature. For 1870, his *nianpu* records that Yu began to worry about moral education for girls. Fearing that they were no longer following Ban Zhao's *Nüjie*, he compiled an illustrated primer of stories sourced from earlier literature on female exemplars alongside new tales that he probably wrote himself, calling it *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*.[54] Taken together, the tales cover many different stages/identities in a young woman's life—including daughters, adopted-in daughters-in-law, young wives, young widows, and sisters-in-law—and feature individuals from ancient history to the Qing. Even as each girl was reminded that her proper influence remained within the domestic sphere, she was also taught how essential her voice was for the sake of her whole family.

In direct contrast with *Zhong juan*, this work found immediate and long-lasting support, at least when measured by reprint editions. Included in his posthumously published essays, Yu's preface for the collection is undated, but it was reproduced in a later edition of the tales with the date 1871.[55] Curious twenty-first-century readers can easily find a full scan of another edition online, dated 1872, with a slightly shorter preface, still credited to Yu, and charming full-page illustrations of the heroines throwing themselves into danger to save family members.[56] An undated Repub-

54. Wu, "Yu xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:15b.

55. *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 2:7a–b. This preface is reproduced in an undated Republican edition printed by Shanghai hongda shanshuju 上海宏大善書局. Though in his MA thesis on Qing morality-book publishers, Zhang Yichen 张祎琛 lists an 1871 edition printed by Dejian zhai, I have found no direct proof to corroborate this; only circumstantial evidence exists that most first editions of Yu Zhi's works were printed there both during his lifetime and posthumously. See Zhang, "Qingdai shanshu de kanke yu chuanbo" 清代善书的刊刻与传播 (MA thesis, Fudan University, 2010), 64.

56. With this 1872 edition, it is unclear if Yu wrote another preface, or if the later preface was simply a shorter version of the earlier one, produced by an anonymous, if heavy-handed, editor, as its wording differs rather significantly from the preface in his collected works.

lican edition includes a preface dated 1894, which mentions how a lithographic edition was created by a pair of Shanghai men who also invited the daughter of a local literatus to write *jueju* (絕句) poems for each of the tales.[57] While sadly none of these poems are included in this edition, the title page does claim that its illustrations were drawn by none other than the famed Shanghai illustrator Wu Youru 吳友如 (1841 or 1845–ca. 1893), most well-known for his work on the Dianshizhai Pictorial (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報), and the illustrations bear his signature as well.[58] In 1895, a prolific Nanjing publisher of many educational texts printed its own version.[59] A Republican edition with a preface dated 1936 was printed by a large producer of towels and soft goods, Sanyou shiyeshe (三友實業社), along with many advertisements for their modern home goods.[60] David Jordan also notes that the text continued to be reprinted in late-twentieth-century Taiwan for free distribution at temples.[61]

From his preface we can isolate two significant details about Yu's vision for his work and the people who supported it. First, Yu begins, "Though men's and women's correct places are divided between *nei* and *wai*, the principles of Heaven and laws of Earth do not distinguish between men and women."[62] While he emphasizes the gendered division of spheres of

57. *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo* (Hongda shanshuju, n.d.).

58. See Rudolf G. Wagner, "Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhai huabao*," in *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*, ed. Rudolf G. Wagner (State University of New York Press, 2007), 126–31.

59. A 2018 doctoral dissertation on the late Qing Nanjing publisher Li Guangming shuzhuang 李光明書莊 includes a description of an 1895 edition of *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, with a longer title that identifies it as a *Riji gushi* 日記故事, which places it among the genre of pedagogical texts that otherwise were intended for use in boys' primary schools. See Kuo Ming-fang 郭明芳, "Qingdai Nanjing Li Guangming shuzhuang yanjiu 清代南京李光明書莊研究" (PhD diss., Soochow University, 2018), 393. The publishing house was founded by Li Yunyin 李允銀, a former Xiang army soldier from Anhui who settled in Nanjing after the Taiping War. Kuo, 55–67. The publisher also listed Yu's "Xu shentong shi" in an extensive advertisement of its catalog. See Kuo, 345.

60. *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo bing shi* 女二十四孝圖說並詩 (Sanyou shiyeshe, [1936]), 1. Zheng Qijun 鄭麒駿, doctoral candidate at École Pratique des Hautes Études, has conducted as-yet-unpublished research on the religious publishing activities of Chen Wanyun 陳萬運 (1885–1950), one of the owners of Sanyou shiyeshe. My thanks to him for sharing it with me in conference talks and personal correspondence.

61. David K. Jordan, "Folk Filial Piety in Taiwan: *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars*," in *The Psycho-Cultural Dynamics of the Confucian Family, Past and Present*, ed. Walter H. Slote (International Cultural Society of Korea, 1986), 68.

62. *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 2:7a.

influence, Yu also highlights that moral behavior is not gendered. Works like *Lienü zhuan* or *Guifan*, a Ming-dynasty illustrated text for women, were good for the general education of female virtue, but they were not specifically about filial piety. Noting that men had their *Ershisi xiao*, Yu was concerned that women had nothing similar. While he never differentiates between adults and children in the preface, given the place of the *Ershisi xiao* stories in primary education, including in Yu's own childhood, it seems likely that another problem with the earlier texts for women was that they were meant for older girls and adults. Girls need texts too.

Second, in another example of Yu's willingness to cooperate with others to get morality texts before new audiences, he explains how the publication was funded by a generous benefactor from Guangdong named Xu Xianyuan 徐賢媛 (n.d.). Xu, who loved sponsoring morality texts and read his draft, thought it was good enough to print and distribute widely. Though Yu does not directly highlight Xu's gender, there is very little chance that the name belongs to a man. The first edition of *Nü ershisi xiao* was funded by a woman.

The first half of the text focuses on earlier source materials, including legendary heroines like Mulan 木蘭 and Xie Xiao'e 謝小娥.[63] Many of the stories in the second half are rewritten versions of Yu's own earlier morality tales, such as the suicide-regret story mentioned above. He cleverly revises stories about divine retribution into filial piety tales, leaving out the gruesome details of retribution and instead allowing each of his new heroines to help her family avert disaster.

For example, the suicide-regret story in *Nü ershisi xiao* ends with a filial daughter founding a grain-cherishing society, campaigning like Wang did in *Xigu*, making her merit-making virtue public. In a tale about the dangers of immoral literature, a daughter burns her father's annotated copies of *Honglou meng* and *Xixiang ji*, and when he scolds her, she responds, "Do you want me to become Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 or Lin Daiyu 林黛玉?"[64] After seeing how he has failed to learn his lesson when he orders actors to perform scenes from salacious plays at a wedding celebration, she takes to her bed and threatens to starve herself to death unless he changes his ways.

63. Mulan is the heroine of a poem "Song of Mulan," presumed to date to the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), who takes her aged father's place in the army. Xie Xiao'e's story is from "Xie Xiao'e zhuan" 謝小娥傳, a Tang dynasty (618–907) *chuanqi* (傳奇 tale) by Li Gongzuo 李公佐 (fl. 797–818). For more on Xie Xiao'e, see Manling Luo, "Gender, Genre, and Discourse: The Woman Avenger in Medieval Chinese Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 4 (2014): 579–99.

64.「爺願兒輩學做崔鶯鶯林黛玉諸人耶」Yu, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, 19b.

Fig.9. A girl begs her mother not to drown her new baby sister while her grandmother argues that the baby should die. *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, 19a. Courtesy of Harvard University Library.

At this point, he has no choice but to accept her salvific moral influence.[65] In a filial twist on an anti-infanticide tale, a girl retrieves her new baby sister from the pot of water where their mother had started to drown her, begging to spare her life. Because of her skillful persuasion, her sister lives. Her mother gives birth to a boy two years later, and an ancestor visits her father in a dream to tell him that if his daughter had not saved the infant, he would never have had a son. Once our heroine grows up, she marries a worthy man, gives birth to a son who has a brilliant career, and becomes a lady of high rank, all because she defied her mother.[66]

If Xiangnü in *Zhong juan* was little more than a female avatar for an officious narrator lifted from a morality book, the girls and women in many of the *Nü ershisi xiao* stories are a return, albeit circumscribed, to the inspirational and imitation-worthy heroines of *baojuan* about women's religious journeys. Each story celebrates a woman who, because of her sound judgment in a variety of circumstances, single-handedly saves her family by her moral choices. In contrast with the *Zhong juan* author's worries that women might misunderstand how *baojuan* heroines like Princess Miaoshan asserted their morals, Yu hoped that the girls who read *Nü ershisi xiao* would do exactly as their on-page heroines did: speak up for what they knew was right against all opposition. Even more than that, he clearly hoped these tales would teach more than filial piety, and that girls would grasp from them all the other morals that suffuse his earlier works. If a girl can save her family from heavenly retribution with her voice, she might grow into a woman who could help save the empire one day too, with every grain picked off the ground and every infant girl allowed to live.

65. Yu, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, 19b–20a.
66. Yu, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*, 18b–19a.

Conclusion

Restoring and Remaking a Broken World

As the preceding chapters have shown, Yu repeatedly attempted to teach diverse audiences conservative moral principles in ways he hoped would appeal to their tastes, interests, and needs. Nothing less than the future of the empire depended on this. Whether these texts connected with their intended audiences will always remain unanswerable. Yet the prefaces and postfaces written by dozens of men who supported the spread of Yu's works in print represent a chorus of voices connecting us with a range of actors, some well-known, many quite obscure, who were deeply sympathetic to his mission. At the beginning of this book, I asserted that if Yu's attempts to create truly popular Confucian morality literature were to succeed, he would need to convince government officials and the gentry to join him in reforming worn-out practices and finding new partners to transform society. Again, whether these efforts directly convinced a single government official of the value of morality plays or Confucian-oriented *baojuan* remains a mystery. But *Pan Gong* spread throughout southern China because it tapped into a deep need among its supporters to do something tangible during the unending years of crisis in the late Qing, either for their own salvation or for the moral restoration of their communities.

The direct impact of Yu's literary works on popular audiences may have been minimal, but because of the sheer number of texts he wrote and edited and how widely they spread, we cannot discount his influence. Though I have analyzed many texts written by Yu and his supporters in this book, we have only engaged with a small fraction of his prodigious output. At various times provocative, damning, funny, and despondent, his words offer us radical visions of a world that could be restored through telling good stories in a way that would move both people and Heaven to action. In the end, for us, Yu's works are most tell-

ing regarding the shifting nature of power and social capital in the postwar era, shown through the diverse backgrounds of his supporters and the widening cracks in Qing society that no amount of moral instruction or charitable effort could repair.

To illustrate both points, we first return to *Deyi lu*, focusing on how its publication and spread introduce men unlike the Jiangnan officials and gentry whom we encountered through Yu's repeated appeals for their support and charitable contributions. Instead, we meet a cast of outsiders, united in their admiration for Yu and *Deyi lu* but divided in their backgrounds and the outcomes they desired from their involvement with the text. Wartime and postwar newcomers to Shanghai, like the four merchants from Guangdong who sponsored the first printing of *Deyi lu*, used philanthropy to provide real aid but also used it to develop their reputations among entrenched Jiangnan elites.[1] The American missionary who frequently reprinted selections from *Deyi lu* in his church periodical from 1869–1870 perhaps hoped that the excerpts might demonstrate his respect for and engagement with Chinese philanthropy, while also drawing readers in as part of offering Christianity as a better means to do good and save the world.[2] Further afield, in the mid-1880s, a new publishing endeavor founded in Hunan by an enthusiastic evangelical Confucian used *Deyi lu* to inaugurate its publications and announce its sponsors' commitment to reforming society. Nowhere does its lengthy preface mention that all 101 named sponsors of the new press were actively engaged in the Qing colonial enterprise of subjugating Xinjiang, transforming it by imposing Confucian social structures and values on its residents who believed a different *jiao*.[3] To these men, publishing *Deyi lu* was not just a practical contribution to postwar reconstruction; it also reaffirmed the values of the conservative socio-moral vision that Yu prioritized through all of his work.

In the postwar period, "practical" (實 *shi*) reforms were often directly tied to utopian thinking, in the sense that practical reconstruction efforts were justified by their contribution to the moral transformation of society.[4] Was that vision achievable? Yu was not looking to rebuild the world as it was before the Taiping War, of course, but he looked

1. Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (University of California Press, 1995), 123–24.

2. Adrian A. Bennet, *Missionary Journalist in China: Young John Allen and His Magazines, 1860–1883* (University of Georgia Press, 1983), 59–63.

3. Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 56.

4. Wooldridge, 123–27.

back to ancient Confucian models of social and gender relations in an imagined utopian past that predated even Confucius himself. What happens when theory is confronted by practical application? In chapters 4 and 5, I explored the theoretical role that Yu created for girls and women to become morality campaigners in their own spheres of influence, not just within their homes but also among other women in their communities. But when Yu wrote about actual women and supporting their roles within the home as caregivers, women's theoretical power to influence, change, and repair the world clashed with the real demands of making a home in a broken world.

In the second half of this conclusion, I home in on a single element of the ideal Confucian role for women in society, textile work, and how Yu cannot help but problematize this work in *Jiangnan tielei tu* and *Deyi lu*, even as he continues emphasizing its socio-moral importance. As we see how incompatible this vision was with the realities of the world in which Yu and his supporters lived, we are confronted with the impossibility of many of the elements of a Confucian socio-moral restoration. And yet Yu and others doggedly insisted that it must be achieved, nonetheless.

In the examples related to spinning and weaving that I analyze, Yu is at both his most practical and his most fanciful. Textile work, women's traditional preserve, is represented as essential labor for restoring the postwar economy, but it also presents a risk if families become too dependent on it. Yet perhaps this work would also be such a powerfully good act that it could be harnessed in the essential fight against immoral popular literature. Textile work was even more valued because returning women to their gender-appropriate sphere of labor was understood as a step toward restoring moral order. But because the world itself had yet to be restored, the imperfect present in which Yu lived complicated even the most basic moral choices. The examples show Yu wrestling with the reality of a world in which, though good words may be inexhaustible, resources were not, and the powerless and the powerful alike were pressed into making moral choices every day about the application of their money and their labor. The minute details, especially those collected in *Deyi lu*, of correctly conducting effective charitable work reveal deep anxieties about how everything might easily go wrong again if one stopped accounting for the impact of every single act, even for a single moment. However, the constant vigilance required from everyone would be worth it when, through countless acts of goodness, the old ways of living in harmony with each other and with Heaven would return.

Merchants, Missionaries, and Colonizers: *Deyi lu* in Postwar Society

But the old ways would never return, and the seeds of revolutionary social change were being sown through Chinese society even by those who, like Yu, would have found the thought of revolution anathema. In 1864, though the Qing was finally victorious over the Taipings, it was left in such a weakened state that much of the reconstruction work fell to local gentry and others who operated outside of the state bureaucracy by founding and maintaining privately run relief institutions, exactly what *Deyi lu* facilitated. In her analysis of the long-term impact of these institutions, Mary Rankin points out how, in their enthusiasm to take on responsibilities that the government could no longer shoulder, elite managers created alternate power bases in their local communities that laid the groundwork for undermining the very state power they had hoped to support.[5] Rankin's analysis of the shifting nature of elite power in the postwar reconstruction era remains essential reading to understand the deeper roots of political change in the final decades of the Qing; she deftly counters the impression that the revolutionary movements from the late 1890s to 1911 appeared suddenly and without precedents.[6] A diverse cast of historical figures populates her analysis, ranging from government officials to non-degree-holding gentry to merchants who took influential positions in late-nineteenth-century modernization efforts, especially railroad construction. All were linked through their shared participation in the public sphere that began in the interactions between activists and new Shanghai periodical presses.[7] Even so, her compelling descriptions of welfare institutions, founded on the conservative moral goals of restoring stability by eliminating destabilizing customs such as obscene dramas and female infanticide, miss one key element that fueled their growth: Yu Zhi.

Looking at the influences in the background of many major and minor voices active in the final decades of the Qing frequently reveals some sort of connection with Yu, either through direct cooperation, demonstrated by convincing evidence that both men moved in the same social circles, or simply clear appreciation of his work. Thanks to the publication of *Deyi lu*

5. Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China* (Stanford University Press, 1986), 92.

6. Rankin, 1–6.

7. See especially Rankin, ch. 2, "The Post Taiping Reconstruction: The Rise of the Public Sphere," and ch. 3, "Beyond Local Boundaries: The Extension of Public Activism," 92–169.

and Yu's personal relationships with men of influence, Yu inspired many to establish charitable societies and write about their efforts. In turn, these institutions and publications, intended to garner interest in these efforts, allowed their founders and supporters to assert their moral legitimacy in the devastated post-Taiping landscape. No less famous a figure than Kang Youwei wrote a response to *Deyi lu* in which he named Yu as a successor to Pan Zengyi and praised his sincerity.[8] Yet we need not look only to the biographies of the major reformers to chart Yu's influence. To borrow from Rankin's apt characterization of the effects of postwar reconstruction on integrating diverse groups radiating outward from Shanghai, the "interlocking personal networks" in which we discover Yu's influence "led in all directions [that] defy description except in restricted contexts."[9] In this section, I restrict my contexts to three examples that are linked in sometimes surprising ways through *Deyi lu*. First, I examine the sponsors who enabled it to first come to print, and then I examine a new context in which it was promoted and partially reprinted shortly afterward; I conclude by addressing its 1885 Hunan reprint.

The first edition of *Deyi lu*, published in 1869, is framed by paratextual materials that exhibit Yu's close ties to many involved in activist circles in Shanghai and beyond. The work has three prefaces, the first of which was by Feng Guifen. Feng's full biography defies simple summary, but in short, he was a scholar-official who, in addition to serving at the Hanlin Academy (翰林院 *Hanlinyuan*), was later recommended by Pan Zengyi's father for officialdom (but, to observe a mourning period, he had to decline). He contributed to and spearheaded many wartime efforts, first in Suzhou and then in Shanghai, and finally became a political reformer deeply involved in postwar reconstruction. He was also instrumental in advocating for the foundation of the Guang Fangyan Guan, the Shanghai foreign language school where Ying Baoshi, the Shanghai circuit intendant, appointed Yu as principal for a time beginning in 1866.[10] Such a preface writer bolsters the reputation that Yu developed late in life as a respected expert on charity work and as a Confucian advisor on practical statecraft.

Deyi lu opens with an endorsement that cements Yu's importance in

8. Lai Jinxing, 22.

9. Rankin, 137.

10. For a short biography of Feng, see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 1:241–43. Wu, "Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu," 10:13b–14. The *nianpu* does not record how long he served as principal, and extant records from the school do not record the names of Chinese staff. For more on this school, see Knight Biggerstaff, *The Earliest Modern Government Schools in China* (Cornell University Press, 1961), 154–99.

the political sphere but closes on a very different note. Its postface reveals the collection's financial ties to a less illustrious group of individuals whose social position was beginning to rapidly rise—merchants from Guangdong. True, the lead sponsor, Wu Zongying, was apparently a longtime friend of Yu's (as detailed in chapter 2) and onetime schoolteacher who had attained a low-ranked degree by the time he offered to help bring *Deyi lu* to print. He also was involved in cofounding and operating a major relief organization in Shanghai, Puyu tang (普育堂), with Yu and a large group of other men.[11] But the three men whom Wu invited to join as sponsors were all outsiders to scholar-official culture, instead working as merchants and compradors in commercial settings where they either interacted with or worked directly for Western trading firms. Wu's nephew, Wu Chichang 吳熾昌 (1828–1897), a well-established merchant by 1869, helped administer his uncle's charity efforts and eventually founded many of his own institutions in Guangdong.[12] The most famous sponsor, Tang Tingshu 唐廷樞 (1832–1892), was at that time chief comprador for the Shanghai office of Jardine, Matheson & Company, where he worked from 1863 to 1873.[13] He and Wu Chichang would work together again from the mid-1880s to early 1890s in the Kaiping Mining Company and the Kaiping Railway Corporation.[14] In addition to Tang's leadership in bringing modern industrial mining practices, steamships, and railways to China with the support of Li Hongzhang, Tang's reputation grew with his work in charitable relief organizations ranging from soup kitchens to orphanages and hospitals.[15] Unfortunately, little information remains on the last of the three donors, a certain Cai Chongguang 蔡崇光 (n.d.); someone by the

11. For more on this organization, see Fuma, 666–69, and Lian, 94–96, 145.

12. Chen Shaoping 陈晓平, "Qingmo de Guangdong cishanjia Wu Chichang 清末的广东慈善家吴炽昌," *Nanfang dushi bao*, February 21, 2019. See Leung, "Charity, Medicine, and Religion," 581–86, for more on one of the organizations Wu helped establish in Guangdong after his involvement with Shanghai Puyu tang.

13. For more on Tang's business ventures, see Kwang-ching Liu, "A Chinese Entrepreneur," in *The Thistle and the Jade: A Celebration of 150 Years of Jardine, Matheson & Co.*, ed. Maggie Keswick (Octopus Books, 1982), 103–27. See also Ellsworth C. Carlson, *The Kaiping Mines, 1877–1912* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1971), 5–11. Tang's son, Tang Guoan, would eventually become the first president of Tsinghua University, while his nephew Tang Shaoyi would become the first premier of the Republic of China (Carlson, 153).

14. Carlson, 30–34.

15. For more on Tang's charitable work see Zhao Xinliang 赵新良, "Tang Tingshu cishan huodong chu lun 唐廷枢慈善活动初论," *Tang Tingshu yanjiu* 2 (2022): 87–100.

same name appears in multiple records from Taiwan in 1881–1882 as a manager of petroleum extraction in the Hsinchu (新竹) area.[16] None of these three men had an official rank, hereditary social status, or a history of participation in the civil service exams. Rather, in donating to the costs of *Deyi lu*'s first edition, all of them chose to demonstrate their philanthropic credentials and establish their reputations not simply as merchants but as virtuous men deeply concerned about social issues and *jiaohua*, just as officials and gentry were. Their donations stand out as visible efforts to lend themselves social and moral legitimacy as newcomers to entrenched charitable networks.

The first edition of *Deyi lu* came to the attention of another influential outsider residing in Shanghai, this one from even further away than Guangdong. In September 1868, Young John Allen, an American missionary from Georgia, began *Jiaohui xinbao* as a venue for publishing domestic and international news, not necessarily all related to the church, along with items of interest on Western science and technology.[17] In the January 8, 1870, issue, Allen published an essay by Yu on anti-infanticide charity work, followed by an editorial paragraph introducing Yu's philanthropic credentials to his readers. Allen ended with a reminder that Protestants also engaged in efforts to care for abandoned infants. From the following issue until mid-February, Allen began including excerpts from *Deyi lu* Volume 6 related to anti-infanticide efforts during famines, including two essays we will turn to below about supporting women after childbirth so that they need not return to work too soon. Starting again in late May, Allen began selecting essays from *Deyi lu* related to charity schools, but he waited until June 11, 1870, to finally introduce the newly published compilation, providing details on its compiler, sponsors, and value as a work on morality.[18] Allen would continue to select education-related texts from *Deyi lu* Volume 10 over the summer, and then, from January to February 1871, republished a series of pieces in Volume 5 on soup kitchens and famine relief. In Allen, Yu found a supporter from the very *jiao* he had described in "Shang dangshi shu" as poised to topple the Qing, and a new audience of readers he perhaps would never have otherwise reached.

16. See Chen Shaoping 陈晓平, "Jiangnan diyi cishanren Yu Zhi jiqi Lingnan yousheng 江南第一善人余治及其岭南友生," *Pengpai xinwen*, November 16, 2022, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_20448064, and independently confirmed via a search of digitally accessible documents from the DanXi Archive in Taiwan.

17. For a history of this periodical, see Bennet, "The Church News, *Chiao-hui hsin-pao*, 1868–1874," 96–148.

18. *Jiaohui xinbao*, 2:865–66.

Indeed, in the postwar melting pot of Shanghai, where a new world was coming together despite the best efforts of Yu and other conservative reformers to restore the old one, the Christian evangelist and the evangelical Confucian may even have become friends. A little less than two months after Yu's death, the January 9, 1875, issue of *Wanguo gongbao* (萬國公報 The Chinese globe magazine), as Allen retitled his periodical in mid-1874, included a short memorial about Yu, in which Allen shared some of his memories of the man. Allen recalled that they connected at the Guang Fangyan Guan, which Yu was managing in 1864 when Allen began as the school's first English teacher.[19] They spoke every day, and Allen was impressed by Yu's tireless spirit and dedication to good works. Even after they were no longer colleagues, they remained in touch, albeit much less frequently. Grieving the loss of such a generous and dedicated advocate for the poor, especially infant girls, Allen ends by reprinting Yu's four deathbed poems and noting sadly that references to Amitâbha Buddha and accruing merit in one poem probably meant that Yu's soul still had not been saved.[20]

A committed Christian evangelist at heart, Allen experienced changes in his approach to evangelism that demonstrate a fascinating counterpoint to Yu's trajectory, making one wonder if, after class, the men compared notes over tea in a spirit of friendly competition, each recognizing in the other a kindred spirit even if neither would abandon their commitments to their *jiao*. In 1860, when Allen first arrived in China, he had planned to convert the Chinese through preaching, especially while traveling through the countryside, but quickly found this approach to be challenged by war, lack of popular interest, and the impracticality of communicating in a vernacular that he was only beginning to grasp.[21] With his funding from the

19. Though this timeline differs somewhat from Yu's *nianpu*, which only notes that he became principal of the institution in 1866, there is no reason to doubt that Yu may have been involved with the school earlier, especially because Allen was not employed by the school between late 1864 and early 1867. Bennet, 27, 31.

20. "Yu Liancun xiansheng zuogu 余連村先生作古," *Wanguo gongbao* (1875): 266. The Buddhist reference that Allen highlights is not included in the version of these poems in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*, 7:11b–12a, which focus on filial piety instead. However, Yu's friend Yan Chen 嚴辰 (1822–1893) published his own collected poetic works, including a set of poems that he wrote in 1875 to match the rhyme scheme and imagery of Yu's deathbed poems. Yan follows his work with Yu's poems, which match those in Allen's tribute, not the versions in *Zun xiaoxue zhai ji*. Yan Chen, *Mohua yinguan shichao* 墨花吟館詩鈔 (n.d. [ca. 1882]), 12:8a–b. For more on Yan Chen, see Rankin, 122–35.

21. Bennet, 19–26.

US cut off during the American Civil War, Allen turned to teaching English to teenage boys at the newly established Guang Fangyan Guan to support his family. In April 1864, after only a few weeks of working there, he wrote in his diary that his exposure to a different class of intellectual Chinese (perhaps Yu, though he is not named) had already proven to be a valuable experience, and this exposure to the scholarly world significantly shaped Allen's decision to proselytize via text rather than oral sermons.[22] In 1867, Allen began printing *Jiaohui xinbao* with articles written in unpunctuated Classical Chinese, meant for educated audiences, including, perhaps, his friend Yu Zhi.

The final example of support for *Deyi lu* stands in sharp contrast to Allen's decontextualized use of excerpts in an explicitly Christian publication. From its very first page, the 1885 Hunan edition differs dramatically from the paratextual framing of Yu's original edition, which opened with a serious preface by a powerful statesman. Instead, the reader first encounters an image of a thunder god, an agent of heavenly justice, followed by an image of Dingxiang Wang 定湘王, the Changsha City God. By 1885, Dingxiang Wang was no longer responsible for just a locality, having been uprooted from Hunan to travel with the Xiang army and defend them against the Taiping forces. Once demobilized, many of those former soldiers assumed positions in the newly formed Qing administration for the northwestern frontier area of Xinjiang, where they continued to venerate their former city god even after his cult had lost popularity in his original home.[23] An ambitious announcement follows these stunning images, beginning by noting that while Hunan escaped many of the disasters facing the rest of China in previous years—flood, drought, war, plague, and wild animals—this immunity cannot be taken for granted.[24] The 101 men named as the press's founding sponsors worried about the moral health of the province, which, if lost, would plunge Hunan into the same dire situations faced in other benighted locales they had been sent to over the years to impose order. Even if the Hunanese did not need *Deyi lu* yet, the implication was that spreading such texts to maintain heavenly favor and demonstrate commitment to the cause of socio-moral reform would not hurt either.

22. Bennet, 36–37.

23. Eric Schluessel, "Exiled Gods: Territory, History, Empire, and a Hunanese Deity in Xinjiang," *Late Imperial China* 41, no. 1 (2020): 127.

24. *Deyi lu* (Baoshan tang, 1885), 1a.

The announcement explains at length that *Deyi lu* is only the first product of a massive planned effort by the newly founded publisher Baoshan tang 寶善堂, led by Zhou Han 周漢 (1841–1911), to spread morality texts throughout Hunan. Fresh from a minor government position in Xinjiang, Zhou had yet to begin the virulent and violent anti-Catholic pamphleteering for which he would become infamous in later years.[25] At this early stage, he kept his sights on the reproduction of conventional texts related to statecraft, morality, and medicine from blocks that had been donated by members.[26] In comparison with his extreme positions on Catholicism, this announcement, its addendum, and Zhou's signed afterword indicate an earlier phase in his evangelical Confucianism—one focused on proselytization and politicized moral reform, rather than the outright assault on competing religious ideologies that would soon follow. Yet the 101 members in the announcement were all involved in the colonization and pacification of Xinjiang.[27] In this complicated web of religious dedication, Qing colonialism, and incipient anti-Christian violence, *Deyi lu* became less a guide for the moral and social reconstruction of a society broken by war and more a strategy guide for officials looking to establish Qing political power through *jiaohua* on the empire's margins and for Confucian revivalists in Hunan to fight the encroachment of Christianity.

These three examples of the spread of *Deyi lu* involve diverse actors who, though they held very different beliefs and motivations for engaging with the work, were united in their conviction that this text was valuable. Yu's work thus prismatically refracts complex visions of Qing society. In this case, influential segments of postwar society—merchants, foreign missionaries, and newly powerful cliques of officials from Hunan—used reprints of this text, universally agreed to be a good charity guide, to different reputational and religious ends. With this magnum opus, Yu had successfully found different audiences than local Jiangnan gentry and bureaucrats, but all these audiences would have been beyond his imagination before the war changed the shape of Chinese society.

25. See Stephen Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 64–65, for a brief introduction to Zhou, and Sooter, "The Production of the Concept of Religion in China, 1858–1898," 138–83, for analysis of Zhou's anti-Christian activism and its impact.

26. For the full list of these texts, see Baoshan tang *Deyi lu*, 4b–5a.

27. Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 56.

Potential for Women's Contributions to Social Reconstruction

In the previous two chapters, we explored works that Yu wrote or edited for specifically female audiences, both listeners and readers. Women who were educated by their exposure to these works, Yu believed, could benefit their families by properly attending to their domestic tasks, confident that their actions would increase their store of good fortune. Work that may have been sneered at, such as raising a daughter believed to be a waste of resources even by her own family, became a sacred act justly rewarded by Heaven. Just as the elementary schoolteachers who took up Yu's morality curriculum were no longer simply failed scholars with no chance of a higher career, having become essential workers in the *jiaohua* mission, so too was the daily labor of average women given newfound significance in rebuilding society for good.

Though Yu left behind nothing that defined new duties and recommendations for women's roles as he had for men, with prescriptions for *xiangyue* lecturers and schoolteachers in "Shang dangshi shu," *Jiangnan tielei tu*, and *Deyi lu*, we nonetheless catch glimpses of Yu's hopes for women and his understanding of the impact of their labor. To move from theory to practice, we must turn to scattered references in these sources, where Yu proposes how women could contribute to the endless task of China's moral and physical reconstruction. When we examine these examples, we are doing more than simply searching for women missing from narratives about this time; we see Yu's practical considerations when confronted with the enormity of the task of fixing society. These cases also highlight the disconnection between the nominal power of symbolic, morality-based solutions and the realities of the dire problems facing China in the final decades of the Qing, a gulf that Yu was all too aware of yet also unable to bridge.

Addressing the problems faced and caused by real women created far more complexities than the fictional women of morality tales and *baojuan* could handle. While only good behavior would keep disaster at bay, people also had to rebuild their homes, farms, and businesses in a landscape devastated by over a decade of war. How could a woman keep a moral home if she had no house to keep in the first place? Every moral choice was necessarily affected by economic constraints. Or, to state it more boldly, Yu reminds his readers—men whom he was hoping to convince to donate funds for postwar reconstruction, men he was hoping to guide in establishing their own organizations—that every economic decision is actually a moral one. The work that we do or pay others to

do—or expect others to do without fair pay—has an impact on our collective moral health and brings us ever closer to or helps us back away from an infinite host of potential disasters. But to avoid these abstractions, we need Yu's practical approach to ground us in the desolation that confronted all those who were fortunate enough to have survived the horrors of the Taiping War.

Patching an Antique, Shattering Social Fabric

In the late imperial period, conservatives who worried about the breakdown of traditional hierarchies saw returning women to their looms as a moral necessity. It has been argued that the disorder of the Ming-Qing transition created an elite obsession with reasserting gendered divisions of labor among commoners because the gentry were troubled by their changing social status and the increasing social mobility that the crisis had made possible.[28] Arguments in favor of weaving as an economically stabilizing form of work, in addition to its civilizing capacity, were also made in the reconstruction era after the White Lotus War.[29] Yet the idealized binary of gendered labor had become increasingly irrelevant since the late Ming, when weaving moved from household operations, dominated by female labor, to urban workshops, dominated by male weavers and merchants.[30] Nonetheless, elites continued to emphasize the importance of women's involvement with spinning and weaving, even if their wives and daughters had long since ceased making fabric to clothe their families.[31] Overall, elite ideas about propriety emphasized a utopian vision of Qing society based on commoner families farming and weaving only enough to subsist on. This illusion denied the realities of the market economy in order to perpetuate a hierarchical social structure that reflected the moral relationship between the paternal state and its

28. Francesca Bray, "Towards a Critical History of non-Western Technology," in *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*, ed. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 194.

29. Christopher C. Heselton, "Reconstructing Order: Post-war Reconstruction after the Taiping Civil War, 1864–1874," (PhD diss., University of California–Irvine, 2017), 64.

30. Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (University of California Press, 1997), 241–43.

31. Bray, *Technology and Power*, 243.

dependent subjects.[32] At the upper levels of society, working with fiber held such important moral value for defenders of traditional culture that even the general Zeng Guofan insisted that his daughters spend hours every day embroidering, sewing, and spinning.[33] It was within this web of moral fears of a social breakdown, as articulated by whether common women were occupied by gender-appropriate labor, that Yu and the anonymous illustrator(s), whose art forms a powerful counterpoint with the language throughout *Jiangnan tielei tu*, describe a less simplistic vision for the role of weaving in postwar society.

As the Taiping War ground to an end in 1864, Yu composed *Jiangnan tielei tu* to inspire donors to contribute to reconstruction efforts across the war-torn region.[34] In the body of the text, he pairs forty-two poems (with explanatory prose) about wartime violence and idealized postwar restoration alongside detailed half-folio illustrations. Wartime devastation, represented most often by weeping or dying refugees attempting to flee Taiping forces, is also shown by people mourning the physical destruction of the tools of their traditional livelihoods—women grieving the loss of their looms and spinning wheels, and men despairing over destroyed farming implements.[35] Because the disorder of the war was described in moral terms, the depiction of disorder in *Jiangnan tielei tu* also reveals Yu's visions of the ideal moral order that he hoped could be rebuilt with donor support for practical reconstruction.[36]

The book closes with a series of ten images of the world as if already restored. Farming and weaving each receive their own text and image pair, illustrating a world where common folk return to their proper roles. Yu describes concrete efforts that donors can take to make fallow fields lush again, with loans of capital for tools, the establishment of bureaus to encourage farmers, and distribution of seeds for planting.[37] The text-image pair immediately after addresses spinning and weaving. As important as it was for postwar investments in infrastructure and tools to give commoners the ability to support themselves and rebuild the economy, it was perhaps even more important, in a symbolic sense, to restore ideal boundaries between genders and social classes.

As we have seen in many earlier examples, while Yu rarely, if ever,

32. Bray, *Technology and Power*, 246.
33. Bray, *Technology and Power*, 244.
34. For a summary and analysis of this work, see Meyer-Fong, 51–62.
35. *Jiangnan tielei tu*, 17b–18a.
36. Meyer-Fong, 58.
37. *Jiangnan tielei tu*, 37b–38a.

questions the value of long-standing institutions, e.g., the *xiangyue* lectures, he nonetheless reveals the impracticality of traditional methods that do not consider the lived realities of commoners. Yu does not ignore the gendered component of weaving entirely, calling attention to women with the entry's title and in one line of the poem. However, the expository prose makes no mention of weaving as women's work at all. Instead, Yu emphasizes how, of the two traditional realms of labor, spinning and weaving are better financial investments than farming. He compares farming, which requires significant investments of capital, time, and labor before a harvest can be gathered and sold, with spinning and weaving, which create a return on investment almost immediately. He quotes a folksy saying that acknowledges how the commodity markets affect common preferences for working with fiber instead of farming: "Don't be afraid if a *sheng* of rice reaches sixty cash; just worry if cotton becomes expensive or cloth values plummet!"[38] The explanation closes with a call to fund replacement wheels and looms and establish bureaus to promote weaving because "from this, [whether] old, young, man, or women, all will be able feed themselves by their efforts."[39]

In creating its paired image, the brilliant artist(s) at Dejian zhai took the implications of the text a step further. Most obviously, instead of a simple domestic space where a woman might spin or weave primarily to clothe her family, a full-scale workshop is depicted, handling every stage of processing fiber with a crew of both male and female laborers. We see a range in ages from girls to elderly women. No men are depicted at looms, as would have been the case at urban workshops, but neither are we looking at a gender-segregated operation where women are isolated in their domestic quarters. Taking the text and illustration together, Yu is asking his readers to see the labor of textile production from the perspective of its market value rather than just its moral value. In light of heightened anxieties in the early Qing about the steadily declining interest in grain farming, which Bray describes as partly due to men opting in to the more profitable textile industry, Yu's text clearly and notably takes a more practical approach to agricultural life. Perhaps reflecting his childhood experiences with farming, he avoids defaulting to idealized images irrelevant to lived experience.[40]

Yu calls attention to how charitable investors and the community both

38.「不怕升米六十錢。只怕棉貴布價賤。」*Jiangnan tielei tu*, 38b (original punctuation).
39.「從此老幼男婦。皆可自食其力。」*Jiangnan tielei tu*, 38b (original punctuation).
40. Bray, *Technology and Power*, 247.

Fig.10. A textile workshop showing girls and women at work processing cotton, spinning, and weaving and men receiving deliveries of more raw cotton. *Jiangnan tielei tu*, 39a. Courtesy of the Asian Library, Claremont Colleges Library.

begin to profit almost immediately when fiber-working tools are made available. In this sensible vision, spinning and weaving are part of interconnected economies that operate on financial and moral capital—market networks that grew ever more complicated as rural life continued to develop further away from its theoretical Confucian ideals. Yu's words demonstrate a sense of the difficult economic realities of agricultural life, in contrast to early Qing attempts to decouple rural livelihoods from the demands of complex market networks and return to a division of labor based on the gender binary. As the economy shifted production bases to regional specializations, certain areas saw a decline in women needing to weave their own cloth. Since their families focused on processing cash crops, they had the resources to buy premade thread and cloth instead. Still, silk and cotton production remained essential parts of the economy in Zhejiang and Jiangsu.[41] After the war, the industries expanded significantly, both the rural production of raw material and the urban production of thread, yarn, and cloth.[42] Before and after the war, textile labor, which engaged both women and men, was the economic cornerstone of many households in Jiangnan.

Because textile production (at various stages) was an important source of income for families among whom Yu was most active, textile work created problems for any attentive moralist. Two essays in a section of *Deyi lu* about infant protection specifically in times of famine reveal anxieties about how familial dependence on women's textile work might interfere with the one task that no man could take over: producing children. These anti-infanticide pieces highlight the connection between a woman's earning power as a textile worker and the impact that pregnancy would have on her family's income.[43] The first piece, "Jiangsu xunfu Lu Tongchi gao" (江蘇巡撫陸通飭稿 Jiangsu Governor Lu Tongchi's draft) is dated the tenth month of 1849. Lu's essay introduces itself as a response to a petition made by Yu asking for assistance during a famine because people had begun drowning their newborns, and not only their daughters but even their sons. Lu endorses Yu's relief efforts, acknowledging that when parents could barely feed themselves, they could hardly be expected to handle the extra burden of raising an infant. Lu further points out that famished women are more likely to have difficulty giving birth and should be assisted beforehand. If both mother and child survive the birth, they are

41. Bray, *Technology and Power*, 247.
42. Rankin, 62–67.
43. *Deyi lu*, 6:1.3b–4a.

still both at risk: the child, no matter what gender, from infanticide, and the mother from illness brought on by going back to work at her spinning wheel or loom too soon postpartum.[44] Ideally, anti-infanticide efforts should not just focus on the baby but also consider the mother's health and the impact of her pregnancy on her entire family.

The second essay, "Zaiqu xuchan baoying shanyuan yin" (災區恤產保嬰善願引 Introduction to making a good vow to support childbirth and protect infants in disaster areas), by Yu, expands on the overdependence of rural families on profit-making female labor.[45] For a woman living in a disaster area, there are three extra risks to childbirth. First, weakened by starvation, she may not have the strength to give birth at all and might collapse from exhaustion. Second, should the birth be difficult, there will be little access to medication to help her, and she will simply have to wait helplessly for death. Third, should she survive giving birth, in her depleted state, she will immediately need to return to her wheel or loom to earn a living for her family. This example brings to the forefront what Yu considers a sad but understandable dependence on a woman's economically profitable labor over her bodily reproductive labor: "In a poor family that depends on women's work for its livelihood, if she stops her machine for a single day, the whole family sits idle, and soon they will starve."[46] The solution is to collect donations for distribution as a form of what we might now describe as paid maternity leave. Yu explains that even giving every mother a new set of clothing, a ration of rice, and a monthly stipend for the first four months of her infant's life will only cost donors 1400 *wen*, a bargain price for saving a life.[47] With this plan, a woman who had just

44. *Deyi lu*, 6:1.3b.

45. *Deyi lu*, 6:1.4a–5a. Though uncredited in *Deyi lu*, when reprinted in *Jiaohui xinbao*, 2:695 (Feb. 12, 1870, folio page 112b), Allen credits Yu as the author of the piece. Another version of this proposal, less explicitly referencing the dependence on female labor, can be found in *Deyi lu*, 2:1.4a–b. See Fuma, 329–34, and Leung, 183–88, for a further discussion of the efforts by Yu to establish and organize infant-protection societies and foundling homes.

46.「而且貧家藉女工為活計一日停機。合家坐困。倘急於餬口。」*Deyi lu*, 6:1.4a–4b (original punctuation).

47. *Deyi lu*, 6:1.4b. On the general assumption of 1,000 *wen* of copper per *liang* of silver, 300 *wen* could have purchased roughly 28 pounds of rice. This amount of money would not have been enough to feed an entirely family for a month, but it was much better than nothing. This is based on late 1840s rice prices in the region, as given by Yeh-chien Wang, "Secular Trends of Rice Prices in the Yangzi Delta, 1638–1935," in *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*, ed. Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li (University of California Press, 1992), 35–69.

given birth receives a steady income so that she can take time off from work, bond with her infant, rest, and keep her family from starving.

As controversial as paid maternity leave still is in certain parts of the world even in the twenty-first century, we should not take this effort out of context and paint Yu as a social progressive. While dependence on women's textile work for survival was a reality that had to be addressed if the mobilization against infanticide were to be effective, it was far from ideal. In fact, Yu saw this dependency as part of larger problems related to widespread poverty, a condition that meant even attempts to provide abandoned infants at their most vulnerable with nourishment and care could contribute to further social breakdown. Elsewhere in *Deyi lu*, Yu reveals deeper concerns about the implications of paying women for labor that ideally should have been unpaid and directed toward the subsistence of their own families.

Two such scenarios that Yu hoped to avoid, through the creation of additional rules for foundling homes, illustrate the risks when well-intentioned philanthropists established organizations without accounting for the poverty of the communities they intended to benefit. First, families hoping to earn extra income might surrender a child to the home through an intermediary and then appear shortly after, volunteering to adopt their own infant. If their scam was successful, enterprising parents could be paid to raise their own children. To combat this, Yu proposed distributing infants to families by drawing lots instead of allowing wet nurses to choose their own charges.[48] In the second and more concerning case, Yu details protocols that allow women hired as residential wet nurses to bring their own infants to be raised alongside the orphans. Though they would have to take a pay cut since they could feed fewer orphans, Yu hoped this arrangement would prevent them from drowning their own infants to take paid labor caring for abandoned infants.[49]

In an ideal world, which Yu's heavily detailed rules for charity organizations make clear was far from the reality of the late Qing, families would be self-sufficient in the model so fetishized by early Qing officials and moralists.[50] Men would farm so their wives and children could eat, and women would weave fabric to clothe their families and nurse their own children for free. As much as Yu and his supporters hoped for a return to the social stability and relations of an idealized past, their efforts could do

48. *Deyi lu*, 3:1.3b.
49. *Deyi lu*, 3:1.7b.
50. Bray, "Towards a Critical History," 202–3.

more harm if they did not account for the actual needs of those they intended to help. Just as soporific *xiangyue* lectures might turn people toward the dangerous, exciting ideas shared by other *jiao*, whether *xiaoshuo* or Christianity, and fracture the empire further (chapter 1), and education could harm students if it taught them to read without teaching them moral values (chapter 2), promoting weaving and saving abandoned infants were not unambiguously positive moral acts in practice, though they remained so in theory.

Acknowledging that new, even revolutionary approaches to moral and social restoration were needed in the crisis years of the late Qing, as I have shown Yu to be doing throughout this book, does not mean that Yu was trying to fundamentally revolutionize Chinese society. Every one of his efforts was intended to achieve the opposite effect. His attempts, which also had to address how his world fell short of the ideal, reveal to us the many ways that the old symbols and their perceived impact on society were disconnected from the realities of the nineteenth century. But what other models were there for a conservative social reformer if he hoped to remold society not into something new, but back into an ancient structure? Though the world had changed around him, the old values and symbols still served as powerful references because abandoning them would mean abandoning all hope for socio-moral restoration. As much as the examples above address weaving as a profit-driven pursuit for women that engendered many problems, Yu still felt that weaving had lost none of its power as work that could morally transform its female practitioners, and by extension restore social good by putting women back where they belonged. With that, we turn to one final scenario from *Deyi lu*, in which Yu explains how teaching certain women to spin and weave might defeat one of the greatest enemies of *jiaohua*: obscene performance literature.

In "Jinzhi huagu chuanke xi yi" (禁止花鼓串客戲議 Discussion on banning flower drum and *chuanke* operas), which follows immediately after "Jiaohua liang dadi lun," Yu echoes what he acknowledged earlier in noting how book bans cannot work when amoral people will simply continue to write more.[51] Pivoting to popular performance literature, Yu describes how important it is to mitigate their harmful effect on society by

51. For more on flower drum opera, see Li, *Opera, Society, and Politics*, 42–43. *Chuanke xi* may refer to a type of *kunqu* (崑曲) drama, as the term is often used to refer to aficionados of the genre. For more on bans of *chuanke xi*, see Wu Di 武迪 and Wu Jiaru 吴佳儒, "Lun wan Qing Ningbo chuanke xi de jinhui jiqi yingxiang 论晚清宁波串客戏的禁毁及其影响," *Wenhua yishu yanjiu* 12, no. 2 (2019): 95–103.

arresting and imprisoning their performers.[52] This is not purely punitive, as Yu goes on to outline a plan to rehabilitate female storytellers and actresses (who, he points out, are also probably sex workers) into productive members of society rather than agents of its destruction. If, as discussed in chapter 4, mothers who killed their own daughters could be trusted to redeem themselves as anti-infanticide advocates once they heard the powerful testimony of other women, so too could actresses, who despoiled the morals of thousands with the seductive power of their voices, find redemption through textile work and their newfound silence.

According to Yu, bans on obscene performances and prison sentences for the performers who violate them are a temporary measure at best. Because performers depend on entertainment to survive, a ban in one locality would do nothing to prevent a troupe from simply taking the show elsewhere. Locking them up also achieves little, since knowing no other profession, they would go back to it after release. With a blend of sensitivity and practicality, Yu suggests that female performers, having no other means of support, should not be blamed for recidivism.[53] Instead, the responsibility falls to local government officials and gentry to establish vocational reform schools that teach these women how to spin and weave. Supervised by experienced older women, former actresses might learn gender-appropriate skills within just a year or two. During their reform-school sentences, under the transformative power of morally uplifting work, their hearts would be subdued, and they would probably retain their good behavior once released.[54]

In these schoolrooms for women from the lowest strata of society, Yu binds women's textile work with morality in both individual and collective terms. The moral reformation of former actresses and singers reverberates through society, leaving peace and stability in its wake. To counter the dire picture of the effects of obscene oral and performance literature painted at the beginning of the essay, Yu closes by celebrating the far-reaching effects of these schools: "Those who have committed crimes can change their behavior, and those who have not committed such crimes will all hear of the ban. Maybe as a result, vulgar customs will return to purity. People's hearts can return to the old ways."[55] Yu further explains his reasoning with a commentarial remark:

52. *Deyi lu*, 11:2.15a–17b.

53. This essay makes no mention of male performers or their ability to support themselves in other professions.

54. *Deyi lu*, 11:2.16b–17a.

55.「如是則己犯者自可改圖。未犯者皆聞風知戒。庶幾風俗可以還醇。人心可以復古。」*Deyi lu*, 11:2.17a (original punctuation).

> Imprisoning one female storyteller can avert harm to a hundred thousand people. Like this, in a single stroke, no one will dare to learn or practice storytelling any longer, thereupon averting harm for hundreds of thousands of years. There is no greater act of merit than this. If you take in and care for one person, all you do is save one person's life. But if you confine one female storyteller, you can save a hundred thousand people's lives. Since one person is all it takes to harm a hundred thousand people, now fewer will be harmed, and many will be rescued.[56]

Whether these schools were ever established or any unemployed female performers changed their lives for the better through textile work, with this essay, Yu entwines the collective morality of society with the fates of a handful of socially denigrated women learning how to spin thread instead of tales.

New Patches for Old Cloth

Yu tried to empathize with the people he hoped to transform through texts, lectures, theatrical performances, and hard work. At least, he believed he was reaching them on their own terms. In the above examples, he addresses why immoral actions like infanticide or obscene performances may seem like rational choices when the alternative is starvation. Every crisis during his lifetime—and there were many—pushed him all the harder to look for what he saw as practical solutions to China's problems, often becoming highly critical of the those he considered his peers for their inaction and indifference to the real needs in front of them. But as Yu so clearly stated above, the goal of all of these efforts was to "return to the old ways" (*fugu* 復古). Like generations of Confucians before him had advocated, this moral project included the return of women to stringing their looms and nursing their babies, even though the world inhabited by both aid-givers and recipients had changed enough that the old ways would never return. These real and irreversible changes did not stop him from trying, or stop others from finding great value in his work.

Confucian reformers of the postwar era, like Yu, poured incredible

56.「收禁一灘簧婦。可免數千百人之害。若此事一舉。使人人不敢習學灘簧。并可免數千百年之害。功德之大未有過於此者。又收養一人。止可活一人之命。若收禁一灘簧婦。則可活千百人之命。蓋以其一人足以害千百人。今受害者少自全活者多也。」*Deyi lu*, 11:2.17a (original punctuation).

energy into their dreams of saving China out of the belief that it was still possible to do so by returning to the old ways they imagined.[57] In *Deyi lu*, Yu created a work about crafting oases of control amid chaos, offering his readers concrete, practical ways to bring relief to those suffering and to restore broken families and communities. Its carefully curated documents suggest solutions to all the issues worrying the gentry, if only enough donors were willing to dedicate money and time. Yet the detailed rules presented for charity organizations, which attempt to account for every possible factor that could go wrong, undermine the certainty they promise. Taken in aggregate, these rules make it impossible to ignore how many other variables had perhaps been overlooked in pursuit of societal reform. In the face overwhelming need, could anyone ever really do enough to save baby girls, feed the hungry, or restore the Qing to power?

Readers like us know how few decades were left of the Qing and how the Restorationists' conservative vision of Confucian society would be violently rejected by early-twentieth-century reformers. We have always known that Yu's efforts would fail, but the point of this book is not to describe a famous reformer who successfully saved China. Instead, I have been interested in Yu's uniquely revolutionary spirit harnessed in support of antirevolutionary values and what this tells us about the diversity and complexity of responses to the many mid-nineteenth-century crises.[58] Like hundreds of thousands of other men of his time, he struggled with repeated career disappointment in the civil service exams, but his faith in the Qing's civilizing mission was undiminished. He was no sober Confucian statesman, but neither was he a fringe figure, especially once he demonstrated his practical solutions to the many ongoing disasters that were amplified by the Taiping War. Even so, Yu was also not a bureaucrat with practical government experience. Rather, he vacillated between specificity and vagueness in the same recommendations for those who he believed had the resources to act. For example, if establishing schools that taught ex-actresses to weave gave them a marketable skill to live on besides performing obscene literature, where exactly were they supposed to apply it after "graduation?" Yu never says.

Yu's works grant us an opportunity to engage with other visions for sav-

57. The tension between the desire for reform and the preservation of traditional culture in this period is explored further in Theodore Huters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

58. Huters makes a similar point in *Bringing the World Home*, 5–6, about the importance of studying the reformist spirit of this era despite their overall failures.

ing China besides those we know best, such as the Tongzhi Restoration, Kang Youwei's ill-fated 1898 reforms, or the May Fourth Movement. Many of Yu's efforts can look absurd in retrospect, and scholarship that praises his charity efforts and creative output also criticizes him for his feudal mindset or advocacy of outdated modes of living and study.[59] It is understandable that a sad sort of irony exists in Yu's *nianpu* when his work at the Guang Fangyan Guan is mentioned only in relation to his insistence that the boys study Zhu Xi's *Xiaoxue* as their first priority, before foreign languages, advanced mathematics, or the other modern fields the school was supposed to teach these future members of the diplomatic service. But if he had not done so, he would have been no better than the instructors he repeatedly condemned for forgetting the importance of moral instruction, leaving students unable to tell right from wrong. Such texts and values were still fundamental to his and *many* others' visions of the core of a functioning, moral society. To wish that he had been more prescient or more willing to discard the past as a model for the present is to ask him to have been a different person. For all of Yu's support for new methods and ways of teaching, he could not abandon his deep-seated belief that Confucianism was fundamental to being Chinese in a changing world. Confucianism remained his primary motivation for all of the actions we may admire. How could we ever expect him to abandon his *jiao*?

This book began with a moment of world-shattering crisis, with Yu's emotional response to the arrival of Taiping forces in Jiangnan, and his cry for a moral revival. Heaven would not relent in punishing Chinese society for its many transgressions against decency and morality until everyone had learned to behave in harmony with one another. As censorious as Yu was about moral failures that led to this disaster, chapters 1 and 2 showed him especially focused on the failures of those who were supposed to have properly taught the lower classes through moral example, proper governance, attention to popular literature, and classroom instruction. Their failures left impressionable audiences vulnerable to other *jiao*, first *xiaoshuo* from the Ming onward and eventually Christianity within Yu's own time. Nothing short of adopting the destructive tactics of the enemy could work to defeat them. *Xiangyue* lecturers would need to take inspiration from Christian missionary preaching and popular oral performance genres. Literati must learn to partner with storytellers and actors so that they might share moral tales instead of those that inspired political or sexual disorder. Schoolteachers

59. Lian, 125, and King, 74–76.

invested with the sacred duty of teaching the classics would need to rethink their classroom approach, especially with students who would never get more than the first few years of elementary education. This may even mean abandoning the classics entirely and focusing only on texts that would enact the same moral transformation but without the complexity of archaic language and ancient concepts.

Such efforts to consider the needs of uneducated or barely educated audiences laid the groundwork for Yu's engagement with dozens of play scripts and a small collection of *baojuan*. In chapter 3, Yu's work with *Pan Gong*, begun by heavily editing its original first volume and then adding two volumes of his own composition, created a complicated text that, while deeply rooted in the trauma of the Taiping War, continued to attract support from sponsors for decades after peace had been restored. Whether this performance text reached the popular audiences Yu hoped it would transform, it spread rapidly and extensively in dozens of printed editions. Many of its sponsors' endorsed Yu's vision that popular Confucian morality texts could be powerful tools to save society by addressing audiences beyond the reach of traditional *jiaohua*. In chapter 4, we saw how Yu created *Xigu* as a companion text to *Pan Gong*, drawing inspiration and materials from his earlier works related to domestic and household morality to create a *baojuan* specifically for female audiences.

In addressing these audiences, however, two major points of tension emerge from texts that vary between revolutionary and regressive tones without resolving on either approach. First, as chapter 4 explored in relation to female infanticide as a theme within *Xigu* and a second *baojuan* inspired by Yu's works, if women were forced into some transgressions because of larger societal pressures and their place within a family hierarchy, then what would the consequence be if they were taught to resist their social superiors and advocate for morality? This tension is never fully resolved but does suggest that Yu imagined women should be just as vocal as he was in speaking up for morality in their gender-appropriate spheres of influence. Second, as addressed in chapter 5, *Liu Xiang zhong juan*, written for women by an anonymous author using many of the morality tales from Yu's collections, revealed a deep-seated skepticism of women's moral reasoning abilities, especially on the question of whether *baojuan* were a good vehicle for moral transformation at all. Yu diffused this tension by removing the references and episodes that would have most alienated its intended audience, creating a new version that took for granted that its female listeners would be able to interpret its messages and apply them appropriately to their own lives. Yu's work for girls, *Nü ershisi xiao tushuo*,

likewise endorses women's moral reasoning even in their childhood years, with many of its stories instructing girls that the most filial act of all may involve talking back to their parents when they are in the wrong.

The importance of teaching ties all of Yu's work together, from his earliest textbooks to the plays he kept revising for publication up until his death—not the teachers, whether government officials, gentry elites, or actual schoolteachers, but "teaching" itself. Because it tapped into the infinite human potential to be morally transformed, teaching was the solution to the moral crisis that had led to apocalyptic war and the brink of dynastic collapse. Yu's works sought to make teachers out of their readers and listeners, investing even children and the illiterate with the significant responsibility of passing on what they had learned. "Alas! What times are these? What circumstances are these? The whole earth shakes. The people are suffering!" cried Yu after Nanjing fell. And then he got to work trying to teach everyone how to rebuild the world, one grain, one baby, and one good word at a time.

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