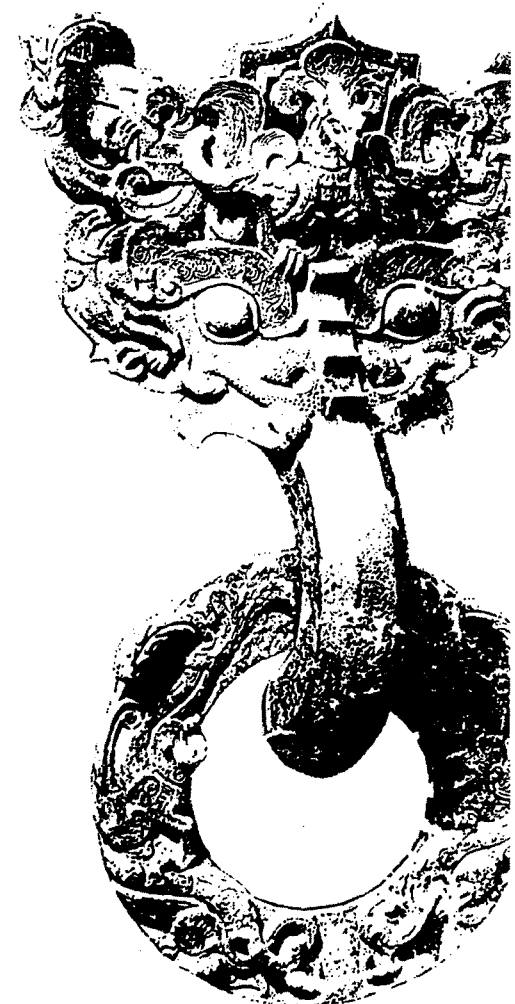


Perceptions of Lay Healers in Late Imperial China

Daria Berg



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Department of East Asian Studies University of Durham

**PERCEPTIONS OF
LAY HEALERS
IN
LATE IMPERIAL CHINA**

by
DARIA BERG
University of Durham

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*For Shafi
with love*

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DARIA BERG

Introduction

When doctors and religious specialists failed to cure a patient, men and women whose social roles did not normally include medical practice took on the part of healers, as vernacular sources from late imperial China reveal. Referring to these non-professionals in the medical field as lay healers, this study attempts to reconstruct perceptions of their practices in the traditional Chinese world. Portrayal of them provides insight into the popular and unofficial culture of China, highlighting aspects of Chinese medicine that have rarely received attention in official documents and conventional historical sources.

Medical professionals in China's imperial past would traditionally include: the medical establishment, represented by the grand physicians (*taiyi* 太醫) who would have graduated from the Imperial Academy of Medicine (*taiyi yuan* 太醫院),¹ medical officials (*yiguan* 醫官),

¹ We identify physicians by evidence in the text that they practised medicine as an occupation and that their society recognised them as such; see Robert P. Hymes, 'Not Quite Gentlemen? Doctors in Sung and Yuan', *Chinese Science* 8, 1987, 9-76, 13-14. The term *taiyi* referred to palace physicians from the Former Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC-8 AD) onwards; in the Yuan 元 dynasty (1280-1368) the *taiyi* distinguished themselves

practitioners of folk medicine, medical pedlars or 'bell doctors' (*lingyi* 鈴醫),² Muslim physicians, and Buddhist and Daoist religious specialists. The term *yiguan*, medical official, normally denoted a professional, often hereditary, and a specialist rather than a member of the civil service, but it may also refer to members of the Imperial Medical Service (*taiyi ju* 太醫局) of the Imperial Academy of Medicine.³ Common practitioners of folk medicine (*yongyi* 庸醫) would work alongside the scholar physicians (*ruyi* 儒醫).⁴ The common practitioners of folk medicine were often half-educated men from a farming background whose medical skills would traditionally pass down within the family from father to son but

from other medical practitioners through graduation from the Imperial Academy of Medicine, *Taiyi yuan* 太醫院. From the mid-Ming, the term was widely applied to specialists we would generally call 'doctor'. On the historical background of the *taiyi*, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, 478; Jutta Rall, *Die Vier Grossen Medizinschulen der Mongolenzeit: Stand und Entwicklung der chinesischen Medizin in der Chin- und Yuan-Zeit*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970, 25; Angela Ki Che Leung, 'Organized Medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and Private Medical Institutions in the Lower Yangzi Region', *Late Imperial China* 8.1, 1987, 134-66, 150.

² On bell doctors see Paul U. Unschuld, 'Der chinesische Wanderarzt und seine Klientel im 19. Jahrhundert: Rekonstruktion eines Dialogs', in Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, ed., *Das andere China: Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995, 129-57.

³ From the Song onwards it was awarded as a prestige title that gave doctors honorific status comparable to the various ranks of civil officials; see Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, 267.

⁴ Joseph Needham, *Clerks and Craftsmen in China and the West: Lectures and Addresses on the History of Science and Technology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 265 and 391.

who lacked the training to compete in the official examinations.⁵

In contrast to professional medical specialists, lay healers mainly engaged in unorthodox forms of healing such as demonic or demonological healing (dealing with demons or lore about demons) and sympathetic magic. Demonological healing was always the more influential system of healing in traditional China, rather than orthodox medicine based on theories of *yinyang* 陰陽 and the Five Phases of Change, as Paul Unschuld has noted in his study of the history of Chinese medicine.⁶ Portrayals of lay healers provide insight into the less orthodox, but not necessarily less popular, practices in traditional China.

Gender issues also play an important part in the study of lay healers and their practices, for here we also see women at work. Historians of Chinese medicine have described amateur attempts at healing through ritual as typically female activities:

Old grandmother will drug her grandchild with every kind of obnoxious preparation that she can think of. If unsuccessful she will try her magic arts, her superstitious practices, reviling or invoking the spirits according to her belief as to the cause of the sickness.⁷

In exploring perceptions of lay healing, the modern historian faces the problem of finding source material. Less orthodox forms of healing

⁵ The distinction between them and the *ruyi* dates from the twelfth century AD when an imperial decree ruled that unqualified medical practitioners must pass provincial examinations in classical studies and medical subjects. The successful candidate would then qualify as a *ruyi*; see Needham, *Clerks and Craftsmen*, 265 and 391; Wolfram Eberhard, *Social Mobility in Traditional China*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962, 230.

⁶ See Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985, 216.

⁷ Chimin K. Wong and Lien-teh Wu, *History of Chinese Medicine: Being a Chronicle of Medical Happenings in China from Ancient Times to the Present Period*, Shanghai: National Quarantine Service, 1936, 188.

are not often described in conventional historical sources. Paul Unschuld has drawn attention to the difficulty of finding descriptions of the daily medical practices of both traditional and popular healers, stressing the need for the examination of alternative sources.⁸ In 1977 the Dutch sinologist Wilt Idema drew attention to the large number of traditional novels and plays from late imperial China that contain passages of medical interest but he offered his study as a 'very preliminary list'.⁹ Several more recent studies have used fictional narratives, in particular the late sixteenth-century novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase), as source material for the study of patients and healers in late imperial China,¹⁰ while one scholar has focused on female healers of the Ming 明 (1368-1644) dynasty.¹¹

Perceptions of healing and lay healing in traditional China can also be gleaned from the novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (A Tale of Marriage Destinies that will Bring Society to its Senses; hereafter:

⁸ Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 129-30.

⁹ Wilt Idema, 'Diseases, Doctors, Drugs and Cures: A Very Preliminary List of Passages of Medical Interest in a Number of Traditional Chinese Novels and Related Plays', *Chinese Science* 2, 1977, 37-63.

¹⁰ Laurence G. Thompson, 'Medicine and Religion in Late Ming China', *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18, 1990, 45-59; Yoshimoto Shôji 吉元諸昭治, 'Kimpeibai to Dôkyô igaku' 金瓶梅と道教医学, *Nihon ishigaku zasshi* 日本医史学雑誌, 1992, 36-52; *idem*, 'Kimpeibai ni miru Chûgoku igaku' 金瓶梅にみる中国医学, *Nihon ishigaku zasshi*, 1992, 133-63; Christopher Cullen, 'Patients and Healers in late Imperial China: Evidence from the *Jinpingmei*', *History of Science* 31, 1993, 99-150. Thompson, Yoshimoto and Cullen focus on the *Jin Ping Mei*. Idema has mentioned the *Yinyuan zhuan* but no detailed study of this aspect is known so far.

¹¹ Victoria Cass, 'Female Healers in the Ming and the Lodge of Ritual and Ceremony', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.1, 1986, 233-40.

Yinyuan zhuan) from seventeenth-century China.¹² No previous study is known so far to have examined these aspects in detail.

The Novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*

In the *Yinyuan zhuan*, one of the longest Chinese prose narratives ever written, the anonymous author charts, across one hundred chapters, the rise and fall of two families in provincial China. So far the author's true identity has remained obscure and he is only known by his pseudonym, Xi Zhou sheng 西周生, scholar of the Western Zhou.¹³ The *Yinyuan zhuan* ranks among the lesser known traditional Chinese narratives and has not

¹² The present study refers to the following edition: *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, by Xi Zhou sheng 西周生, 3 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1981, repr. 1985 (hereafter: YYZ). All translations are my own except where otherwise indicated.

¹³ Various writers such as Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (ca. 1599-1670) and some lesser known literati, as for example Jia Fuxi 賈夔西 (1589-1675), have been credited with the authorship, but modern scholars have in turn discarded all such claims. For recent contributions to the debate, see Zhang Qingji 張清吉, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan xinkao* 醒世姻緣傳新考, Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1991, 1-32; Xu Fuling 徐復嶺, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun* 醒世姻緣傳作者和語言考論, Jinan: Qilu, 1993, 56-76, Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩, "Xu" 序, in Xu Fuling, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun*, 1-5; Yenna Wu, *Ameliorative Satire*, 73-9. The author's pseudonym has been interpreted as an allusion to the Western Zhou 西周 dynasty (ca. 1050-770 BC), see YYZ, 26.378; Yenna Wu, "Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World: A Literary Study of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*", Ph.D. diss., Harvard University 1986, 40.

yet been translated in its entirety into any other language.¹⁴ Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881-1936) unfortunate omission of the novel in his influential work of Chinese literary history *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, first published in 1923-24), has certainly played a role in its relative neglect.¹⁵ During recent decades, however, the novel has increasingly been attracting scholarly attention.¹⁶

The narrative depicts in great detail the dark sides of life and the

¹⁴ For partial translations, see Chi-chen Wang, trans., 'Marriage as Retribution', *Renditions* 17/18, 1982, 46-94; Glen Dudbridge, 'Women Pilgrims to T'ai Shan: Some Pages from a Seventeenth-Century Novel', in Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992, 39-64; Eve Alison Nyren, trans., *The Bonds Of Matrimony/Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* (Vol. One), *A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

¹⁵ Different theories exist as to Lu Xun's motives; see Huang Suqiu 黃肅秋, 'Zaiban qianyan' 再版前言, in *YYZ*, 1:1-2; Monika Motsch, 'Ehegeschichten zur Erleuchtung der Welt: Ein Roman aus der Qing-Dynastie', *Orientierungen* 1, 1991, 79-98, 96. Lu Xun did nonetheless mention the novel in his correspondence Letter to Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (dated 26 November 1924), repr. in *Lu Xun shuxin ji* 魯迅書信集, by Lu Xun 魯迅, vol. 2, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1976, 63.

¹⁶ For recent studies, see e.g. Glen Dudbridge, 'A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-Century Fiction: T'ai-shan and the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*', *T'oung Pao* 77.4/5, 1991, 226-52; Andrew H. Plaks, 'After the Fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2, 1985, 543-80; Daria Berg, 'Reformer, Saint, and Savior: Visions of the Great Mother in the Novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* and its Seventeenth-Century Chinese Context', *NAN NÜ: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 1.2, 1999, 237-67; Yenna Wu, *Ameliorative Satire and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel Xingshi yinyuan zhuan — Marriage as Retribution, Awakening the World*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999.

moral fall of mankind. The novel sets its action mainly in Shandong 山東 province in the mid-fifteenth century but the fictional world contains many references to the late Ming era. The author appears to have been most familiar with China in the 1630s and 1640s. The text must have been composed sometime between 1628 and 1681, spanning the transition period from the Ming to the Qing 清 (1644-1911) dynasty.¹⁷ The text conveys a millenarian atmosphere as doom befalls the last native Chinese dynasty and the Ming era draws to a close, but it does not contain any references that would allow it to be classified as either a late Ming or an early Qing product.

The *Yinyuan zhuan* is a satirical novel that dramatises human folly, vanities and vices. The plot focuses on the fates of the two major protagonists, Chao Yuan 晁源 from Wucheng 武城 county in north-western Shandong and Di Xichen 狄希陳 from Mingshui 明水 Town in central Shandong, and their families. Chao Yuan and Di Xichen are structurally linked through the theme of reincarnation and karmic retribution. Chao Yuan, a profligate philistine, rises in society to become a member of the local elite when his father gets promoted to scholar-official position by virtue of bribery and nepotism. Chao Yuan neglects his wife and takes the vulgar singing girl Zhen'ge 珍哥, a former prostitute, as his concubine, flagrantly breaching all rules of social decorum. Out on a hunt, he takes pleasure in shooting a fox which turns out to be a fox demon that will return to torment him in his next life. An adulterous affair leads to Chao Yuan's early and violent death as he is caught in the act and beheaded by his lover's jealous husband. After his

¹⁷ An internal reference to a historical personage suggests the early limit; see Sun Kaidi 孫楷弟, 'Yifeng kaozheng *Xingshi yinyuan* de xin' 一封考證醒世姻緣的信 repr. in *YYZ*, 3:1521-22. A reference to two copies of the novel circulating among literati in the Yangzi delta suggests 1681 as the late limit; see *Yanshi jiacang chidu* 顏氏家藏尺牘, by Yan Guangmin 顏光敏, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1935, 3.128-29.

premature demise, Chao Yuan is reincarnated as Di Xichen and the fox demon reappears in the shape of Di's shrewish wife. This domestic drama is linked to the national problem of a corrupt and incompetent pseudo-literati elite taking power and playing their part in the mismanagement of the Ming empire that spells out its final doom.

The transition from the story of Chao Yuan to that of Di Xichen happens across Chapters 23 and 24, sketching a utopian world of ideal morals and manners. This utopia lacks the vices and illnesses that plague the protagonists in the remaining 98 chapters and there is no need for any healers.¹⁸ The narrative contrasts this brief glimpse of utopia with the fallen world of the narrative present time, a world ravaged by natural and man-made disasters, social degeneration and political disintegration. In this satirical dystopia the theme of illness and healing is metaphorically linked with the imagery of the body politic and the implementation of good government.

More than two dozen healers appear in the dystopian world of Chao Yuan and Di Xichen, trying to treat the many illnesses and afflictions of the major and minor protagonists.¹⁹ The ailing world of the novel suffers from the consequences of its moral flaws. The world of Chao Yuan thrives on scenes of crime and violence showing marital breakdown, murder and the familiar face of vice as Chinese tradition defined it: over-indulgence in wine, women, wealth and wrath (*jiu se cai qi* 酒色財氣), or

¹⁸ YYZ, 24.354. This concept of utopia derives from ancient Chinese thought, see *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985, 2.41-43. On *Liezi*, see A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, repr. New York: Mandala, 1990, iv-viii. On the concept of utopia in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, see Daria Berg, 'The *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*: A Study of Utopia and the Perception of the World in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Discourse', D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University 1994; Yenna Wu, *Ameliorative Satire*, 89-130.

¹⁹ For a short outline, see Daria Berg, 'Die Heilkunde Chinas im Spiegel des Romans *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* aus dem 17. Jahrhundert', *ChinaMed* 6, 1995, 59-61.

the 'four vices of excess' (*sitan* 四貪).²⁰

The healers in the novel — who include grand physicians and other medical practitioners, such as a Muslim surgeon, an obstetrician, two bell doctors who work as a gynaecologist and an expert in venereal disease, spirit immortals and other Daoist and Buddhist religious specialists and lay healers — offer glimpses of orthodox and less orthodox ways of healing, providing the modern historian and literary critic with information that the conventional sources seldom yield. In portraying these healers, the *Yinyuan zhuan* paradoxically inverts social hierarchies: the grand physicians and other medical doctors often appear as dangerous quacks, while the less orthodox practitioners prove efficient and behave properly.²¹ This, however, confirms common perceptions of medical practice in traditional China, as Paul Unschuld has noted in his study of the history of Chinese medicine.²² Careful analysis of the rhetoric and imagery in the novel gives rare access to perceptions of lay healers and

²⁰ Confucius already warned the superior man to beware of lechery (*se*), quarrelsomeness (*dou* 鬥) and covetousness (*de* 得); see *Lunyu yinde* 論語引得, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 16, ed. William Hung *et al.*, Beijing: Hafu-Yanjing xueshe, 1940, 16/7. The *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 quotes Yang Bing 楊秉 listing wine, women and wealth (*jiu, se, cai*) as three matters of delusion; see *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, by Fan Ye 范曄 *et al.*, ed. Beijing: Zhonghua, repr. 1973, 54.1775. By the time of the Yuan dynasty the vices featured in a combination of four (*jiu se cai qi*) as a common topos in popular literature; see *Huangliang meng ju* 黃梁夢劇, by Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠, in *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選, ed. Zang Jinshu 臧晉叔, 4 vols., repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979, 2:793. On vices in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, see also Yenna Wu, *Ameliorative Satire*, 203-19.

²¹ On medical ethics, see Paul U. Unschuld, *Medical Ethics in Imperial China: A Study in Historical Anthropology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1979.

²² Paul U. Unschuld, *Huichun: Rückkehr in den Frühling: chinesische Heilkunde in historischen Objekten und Bildern*, München: Prestel, 1995, 137-39.

their practices in the late imperial Chinese context. The identification of the narrative voice and its tone plays an important part in the analysis of the text and its comparison with the literary and non-literary context.

The Maid and her Book of Exorcism

The first Grand Physician (*taiyi*) to appear at the outset of the novel, Dr Yang 楊太醫, turns out to be a notorious charlatan. The main protagonist Chao Yuan, however, relies on him whenever he needs a doctor, unaware of Dr Yang's shortcomings. When Chao Yuan and his new concubine Zhen'ge both fall ill after celebrating New Year's Eve, they summon Dr Yang.²³ Zhen'ge suffers from a bad headache but Dr Yang's medicine fails to cure her. At this point the wife of Chao Yuan's servant, Mrs Chao Fengshan 晁奉山, resorts to exorcism. She sends for a book of exorcism from a Daoist at the temple of Zhenwu 真武.²⁴

The modern Shanghai edition of the *Yinyuan zhuan* identifies the book as *Yuxiaji* 玉匣記 (Record of the Jade Casket), a calendar that records on which days which gods, ghosts or demons exert evil influences on people and cause illnesses.²⁵ Each entry prescribes certain methods of exorcism:

Chao Fengshan's wife ... looked up the entry for the thirtieth day. It ran: "The god of the stove is angry. If you offer five notes of yellow paper money, as well as tea, wine, and cakes to the stove, it will bring good luck."

Master Chao remarked: "It is not the thirtieth. She had a headache when she woke up, which was already the fourth stroke of the fifth night-watch, which means that it is

²³ YYZ, 3.34.

²⁴ See YYZ, 3.35.

²⁵ See YYZ, 3.43, note 4.

already the first. Look up what is written for the first."

[She] looked up the entry for the first that ran: "You have offended the ghost of a relative. You should sit facing the ancestral shrine, sincerely repent your transgressions and pray. If you do, it will bring good luck."²⁶

Here social inversion implies satirical comment at the expense of Chao Yuan, the parvenu and would-be member of the elite: the literacy of the servant's wife contrasts with the illiteracy of Chao Yuan, son of a scholar-official, and himself an aspiring member of the literati elite.²⁷

As Chao Fengshan's wife tries to cure Zhen'ge by exorcism, she plays the role of the medium and prays at the ancestral shrine as the book prescribes. Her ritual is successful, yet the narrative voice undermines its value. It sarcastically remarks beforehand that 'she was a woman with a glib tongue'.²⁸ Afterwards, it reports with irony: 'It was really very odd, but Zhen'ge's headache gradually receded.'²⁹

The narrative voice synchronises Mrs Chao Fengshan's cure of Zhen'ge with Dr Yang's medical treatment of Chao Yuan. Chao Yuan and Zhen'ge both interpret their condition with the help of dreams. Their double dreams reveal that their illnesses have demonological and karmic causes, i.e. Chao Yuan's wilful murder of a fox demon and his ancestor's wrath. Therefore, Mrs Chao Fengshan's ritual makes sense to them. The narrative voice offers two alternative explanations for Chao Yuan's and Zhen'ge's illnesses: on the one hand, the illnesses seem to have demonological and karmic causes and on the other, they seem to have purely physical causes. Dr Yang diagnoses nothing but lack of sleep, exhaustion and excessive indulgence in alcohol and sex. The narrative voice presents both lay healing and the grand physician's treatment as

²⁶ YYZ, 3.35.

²⁷ On Chao Yuan's illiteracy see YYZ, 2.24, 13.198, 14.212.

²⁸ YYZ, 3.35.

²⁹ YYZ, 3.35.

ambiguous and comical. This ultimately returns the readers' attention to the preceding events in the plot before Chao Yuan's and Zhen'ge's illnesses, dramatising their overindulgence in the traditional vices.³⁰

Demonological healing also appears in other episodes in the *Yinyuan zhuan* as ambiguous and inconsistent in efficacy. The narrative voice frequently demonstrates that holy books neither heal nor protect against supernatural forces. Other sutras all occur in a comical context, exposing demonological healing as a materialistically motivated fraud. For example, when Chao Yuan falls into a delirious fever, a doctor (*yiguan*) is called but no sooner than he enters the Chao household, he becomes possessed himself. A monk suggests fetching a copy of the *Jingangjing* 金剛經 (Diamond Sutra), which Chao Yuan already possesses, but to no avail. The monk then suggests obtaining a copy of the *Lianjing* 蓮經 (Lotus Sutra). Both sutras are placed beside his bed but they have no effect whatsoever.³¹

The Chan Buddhist sutra *Fahuaqing* 法華經 (Sutra of Buddhist Glory) is mentioned in an ironic narratorial aside describing how unscrupulous Magistrate Chao 晁 connives in his son Chao Yuan's vicious slandering of his former friends, the actors-turned-monks Hu Dan 胡旦 and Liang Sheng 梁生, after he has exploited them and profited from their help.³²

The sutras *Sanguanjing* 三官經 (Three Officials' Sutra) and *Zaojing* 灶經 (Stove Sutra) occur in the context of an aspiring scholar without shame or conscience who lives as a parasite in a Daoist temple. When the Daoists are forced to flee, he wants to steal their belongings but when he finds nothing to steal, he in turn falsely accuses *them* of having stolen his belongings. As the sutras and other Daoist items feature in his list of lost

³⁰ See YYZ, 3.31.

³¹ See YYZ, 17.245.

³² See YYZ, 15.219.

property, the magistrate sees through his fraud.³³ These episodes mainly contain satirical glosses on the vice of covetousness.

The *Yinyuan zhuan* furthermore weaves a story about the *Xinjing* 心經 (Heart Sutra) and a red-dyed cat into its plot.³⁴ A very similar story also appears in Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) collection *Zhinangbu* 智囊補 (Additions to the Wisdom Sack, 1634) in the early seventeenth century, which in turn stems from the twelfth-century anthology *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志 (Accounts of Yijian) by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202).³⁵ Chao Yuan buys a red-dyed cat with a copy of the *Heart Sutra* for an exorbitant price. He believes that both cat and sutra have magical powers to subdue fox demons, yet both turn out to be useless, nothing but sales' gimmicks. The joke plays on the theme of Chao Yuan's overspending and his gullibility, exposing his excesses and upstart mentality. The narrative voice shows that the ex-singing girl Zhen'ge possesses more common sense than Chao Yuan, a would-be member of the gentry elite.³⁶

Satire and irony enhance the entertainment value of lay healing. Ambiguity in the outcome makes the reader insecure. The reader therefore gropes for further hints from the narrative voice at how to

³³ See YYZ, 26.384.

³⁴ See YYZ, 6.84-90.

³⁵ 'Ganhongmao' 乾紅貓, in *Zhinang quanji* 智囊全集, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed. Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji, 1986, 27.554. 'Ganhongmao' 乾紅貓, in *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志 (comp. 1161-ca. 1198), by Hong Mai 洪邁, ed. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981, 3:1372. Cf. Sun Kaidi, in YYZ, 3:1525. On the influence of the *Yijianzhi* on Feng Menglong, see Fu-jui Chang, 'L'influence du Yi-kien Tche sur les oeuvres littéraires' in *Etudes d'histoire et de littérature chinoises offertes au Professeur Jaroslav Prusek*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1976, 51-61, 53. It is not possible to say whether Feng Menglong influenced Xizhou Sheng or whether both drew inspiration from the same sources.

³⁶ See YYZ, 7.93-94.

decipher the story. In other passages, the narrative voice systematically undermines the characters' visions of the supernatural world, exposing human follies and vanities. The remarks of the narrative voice create inconsistencies between showing and telling in the narrative. For example, after Mrs Chao Fengshan's exorcism, Zhen'ge thanks the ancestor's spirit for her cure and has a vision of the spirit grabbing her skirts. As she flees in panic, the narrative voice reveals that nothing happened except for her dress being caught in the threshold.³⁷

In sum, the episode on Mrs Chao Fengshan's exorcism corresponds to other cases of demonological healing in the novel by satirising human folly in terms of the traditional four vices of excess and illustrating a foolish and vainglorious world. Chao Fengshan's wife represents a female lay healer who ranks low on the social scale. Other examples of lay healers in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, however, correspond to Paul Unschuld's observation that belief in the existence of evil spirits applies not only to the lower or uneducated segments of society in Ming and Qing times.³⁸

The Lady's Demonic Healing

Mme Chao 晁夫人, wife of District Magistrate Chao and mother of the major protagonist Chao Yuan, attempts demonic healing when Chao Yuan suffers from delirious fever attacks and has visions of ghosts.³⁹ The

³⁷ See YYZ, 3.36-37. Another example is the narrator's ironical remark on Chao Yuan's illness: 'After all Chao Yuan did not have any illness. He had simply slipped, so when he had taken the medicine, he felt relatively at ease.' YYZ, 3.34.

³⁸ See Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 216; for a discussion of demonology, 'psychiatry' and 'psychoanalysis' in medical thought during the Ming and Qing epochs see *ibid.*, 215-23.

³⁹ See YYZ, 17.244.

narration ironically comments on her eclectic approach: 'Mme Chao invoked Heaven and prayed to the Polar Star. She promised to sacrifice pigs and sheep and made vows to the Buddha. She stopped at nothing.'⁴⁰ Her methods have no effect and she later summons medical and religious specialists to heal Chao Yuan.

The episode does not imply comment on the moral character of the healer, Mme Chao. The reason for the failure in healing lies in Chao Yuan's moral character and social conduct. Demonic healing must fail in this case, for the narrative voice points out that illness and visions of ghosts derive from the violation of one's conscience, *liangxin* 良心.⁴¹ The introductory poem states: 'The sickness demons attack the son [Chao Yuan] ... I am sure this happened because he violated his conscience.'⁴² The narrative voice explicitly tells the reader why all kinds of healing fail:

Chao Yuan continued to have visions of ghosts and spirits as before and nothing was effective. Do you know the reason? If there really had been any evil spirits and wild ghosts, they would naturally have retreated the moment they saw the holy sutras. The guardian spirits would naturally not have let them enter. The many ghosts Chao Yuan saw were products of his guilty conscience. It was not really true that any ghosts came to beat him [as he believed].⁴³

Chao Yuan's illness results from a crime: he has driven the two actors Hu and Liang, his former friends who had been relying on his help and goodwill, into poverty, leaving them no alternative but to become

⁴⁰ YYZ, 17.244; these activities also occur in YYZ, 4.53, and *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, 4 vols., ed. Hong Kong: Xinghai wenhua, 1987 (hereafter: *JPMCH*), ch. 12, 21.219, ch. 39.

⁴¹ See YYZ, 17.244.

⁴² YYZ, 17.244.

⁴³ YYZ, 17.245.

Buddhist monks.⁴⁴ The narrative voice explains:

It was rather because the spirit of his own conscience was not at ease. This took the opportunity to create mischief when his debility resulted in an excess of fire. So what good could those sutras do?⁴⁵

The introductory poem to Chapter 11 (dealing with Zhen'ge's possession by ghosts) argues in a similar way without denying the existence of ghosts:

Don't say that ghosts and spirits do not exist,
they have existed since ancient times,
but they don't hover in space,
they just sit within yourself.

Conscience (*liangxin*) and ghosts alternately prosper and decline ...⁴⁶

Disaster and illness therefore result from the decline of conscience, from depraved morality: 'Since you know that ghosts are in your conscience, you also understand that disaster is not a punishment sent down by Heaven.'⁴⁷ The narrative voice assumes the tone of a Confucian moralist, seeing the root of evil and illness in the loss of morality and conscience. Here the narrative voice interprets the world true to the ancient Confucian spirit as exemplified by the book of Mencius (*Mengzi* 孟子).⁴⁸

The implied attitude towards the supernatural world and demonological healing in the *Yinyuan zhuan* reflects late Ming views.

⁴⁴ See YYZ, 15.216-28.

⁴⁵ YYZ, 17.245.

⁴⁶ YYZ, 11.155.

⁴⁷ YYZ, 11.155.

⁴⁸ On *liangxin* see *Mengzi yinde* 孟子引得, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 17, ed. William Hung *et al.*, Beijing: Hafu-Yanjing xueshe, 1941, 6A.8.

Most renowned medical writers such as Yu Bo 虞搏 (fl. 1515), Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518-93), Li Ting 李梴 (fl. 1570), Xu Chunfu 徐春甫 (fl. 1570), Gong Tingxian 龔廷賢 (fl. 1615), and Xu Dachun 徐大春 (1693-1771) included suggestions for demonological methods of healing in their writings. They all acknowledged the pathogenic influence of demons as a self-evident fact.⁴⁹

In the early sixteenth century, Yu Bo admitted that demons may exist, but he considered the activities of shamans and sorcerers as merely materialistically motivated fraud.⁵⁰ This aspect anticipates the description of the Daoist specialists in the *Yinyuan zhuan* whose activities as healers expose them as covetous, greedy and corrupt.⁵¹

Xu Chunfu integrated demonology in his writings, yet he maintained that all demons and supernatural apparitions were figments of the human imagination. He concludes: 'If you do not take medicine but instead engage a shaman (*wushi* 巫師) for exorcism, you will get no effect at all.'⁵² By contrast the *Yinyuan zhuan* primarily focuses on the question of morality and the human conscience.

In 1624, Zhang Jiebin 張介賓 (fl. late Ming) advocated healing by exorcism in his medical book *Leijing* 類經 (Classic of Classifications), but he considered demons to be creations of the human mind and

⁴⁹ Cf. Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 216.

⁵⁰ See 'Guitai' 鬼胎, in *Yixue zhengzhuan* 醫學正傳 (publ. 1515), by Yu Bo 虞搏; cf. J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China: its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected therewith*, Leiden, 1892-1910, 6 vols., repr. Taipei: Literature House, 1972, 5:789-90.

⁵¹ For example, the Wicked Daoist (*yao dao* 妖道), see YYZ, 93.1331; and the depraved Daoist Zhang Shuiyun 張水雲, see YYZ, 28.414-29.421.

⁵² *Gujin yitong daquan* 古今醫統大全, by Xu Chunfu 徐春甫, Gesongli edn., 1570, 49.15b-16b.

therefore not phenomena of the real world.⁵³ In the *Yinyuan zhuan*, the incidents of illness and lay healing expose the corrupt morals of the sufferer, Chao Yuan. The ambiguity about demonological healing and the efficacy of the lay healers reflect back on situations of moral depravity in the patients. People suffer from illnesses, see ghosts and get possessed because they violate their conscience. Their sins and crimes disturb the balance of the physical body, the social and the cosmic harmony.

The acts of Mme Chao and Chao Fengshan's wife typically show female characters of different classes engaging in lay healing. These episodes do not imply comment on the moral characteristics of either character. The significance of these episodes rather lies in the acts of lay healing and the explicit and implied comments on society, opening a window on the perception of the world and the moral universe in seventeenth-century Chinese minds.

Medical Cannibalism and the Magistrate's Son

The most detailed account of lay healing by rituals depicts Chao Yuan, the major male protagonist in the Chao plot, a newly arrived member of the local elite. He tries to heal his concubine Zhen'ge, when she is in a critical condition after a miscarriage that Dr Yang proved unable to treat.⁵⁴ This example of lay healing inverts the typical gender role:

Chao Yuan flew into a panic. He fetched fortune telling spills from the Yue Temple; he had performing birds produce divination hexagrams before the royal palace; he asked the

⁵³ See *Zhangshi leijing* 張氏類經, by Zhang Jiebin 張介賓, repr. Taipei: Xin wenfeng, 1977, 246-48.

⁵⁴ See *YYZ*, 4.53.

blind man to produce a horoscope; he asked shamanesses to perform exorcism dances (*tiaoshen* 跳神).⁵⁵ He had divination practised by clapping bamboo chips. He had a child tell the fortune from a mirror made magical by incantations. He had the *Baoan jing* 保安經 (Sutra of Ensuring Safety) read at the temple of the City God. He made vows.⁵⁶ He vowed to pray to the Buddha. He vowed to pray to the Polar Star for three years. He vowed to wear [nothing but] thin clothes for five years. Moreover, he wanted to cut flesh from his thigh to decoct into medicine.⁵⁷

Chao Yuan's activities as a lay healer imply satire at his own expense on several levels. First, the hyperbolic enumeration of various devices suggests excess. Second, Chao Yuan paradoxically inverts gender roles as he engages in rituals for demonic healing — which we have noted as typically female activities. Third, the catalogue of twelve different kinds of ritual practices climaxes in the most horrific one, the idea of committing the act of *gegu* 割股, or cutting flesh from one's thigh and

⁵⁵ *Tiaoshen*, a spirit possession ritual. A woman acts as shaman and performs a dance until possessed by spirits; also in *JPMCH*, ch. 48, 59, 79, and in *Liaozhai zhiyi: huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋志異會校會注會評本, by Pu Songling 蒲松齡, ed. Zhang Youhe 張友鶴, Shanghai: Guji, 1962, rev. edn. 1978, 6.755-56. In his analysis of healers in the *Jin Ping Mei*, the historian of science Christopher Cullen has pointed out that the *tiaoshen* 跳神 spirit possession ritual was a 'strongly gender-specific procedure' during which the presence of men was generally discouraged; see Cullen, 'Patients and Healers', 123 and 128.

⁵⁶ *Xuyuan* 許愿 ritual also in *JPMCH*, 39; see Henri Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, vol. 5, 1913, repr. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966, 493-94; J. Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese: with some Account of their Religious, Governmental, Educational, and Business Customs and Opinions*, 2 vols. in 1, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876, 1:163.

⁵⁷ *YYZ*, 4.53.

using it for a medicinal broth.⁵⁸ Several turns of satire by paradoxical inversion operate on this level.

The earliest reference to *gegu* as an act of supreme sacrifice occurs in the book of *Zhuangzi* 莊子.⁵⁹ In 739 Chen Cangqi 陳藏器 in his *Bencao shiyi* 本草拾遺 (Rectifying Omissions in the Materia Medica) listed human flesh as an effective medicine for senile decay, both physical and mental, and also for consumption.⁶⁰ This seems to have promoted medical cannibalism as a filial act for the sake of ailing parents. Historical and literary sources frequently mention the practice of *gegu* from the Tang dynasty onwards.⁶¹

Gegu appears as the most notorious rite of filial piety in Chinese history. This cannibalistic and masochistic practice proves a perversion rather than a proof of filial piety. The controversy about *gegu* derives from the conflict between Confucian norms. Filial piety demands that one cures one's parents with the best medicine, but filial piety also means preserving one's body as a form of respect towards one's parents. In the Tang, the Confucian scholar and reformer Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) wrote

⁵⁸ For modern research on *gegu* see e.g. Ju-k'ang T'ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988, 149-61; Erhard Rosner, *Die Heilkunst des Pien Lu: Arzt und Krankheit in bildhaften Ausdrücken der chinesischen Sprache*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991, 166; de Groot, *The Religious System*, 4:386-87.

⁵⁹ 'Jie Zitui 介之推 was extremely loyal. He cut flesh from his thigh to feed Duke Wen 文公.' *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961, 29.998.

⁶⁰ According to the late Ming physician and pharmacologist Li Shizhen (quoting from *Yishuo* 醫說 by Zhang Gao 張杲), see *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, by Li Shizhen 李時珍, ed. Beijing: Renmin weisheng, 1982, 52.2967.

⁶¹ Cf. de Groot, *The Religious System*, 4:386.

a polemic against *gegu* from the moral point of view.⁶² In the sixteenth century, the physician and pharmaceutical historian Li Shizhen denied its medical value.⁶³ Yet such repudiations of *gegu* seem not to have affected its status. A 'national virtue' thus degenerated into an 'accomplished social evil'.⁶⁴

The motif of *gegu* frequently occurs in the popular fiction of the Ming/Qing era.⁶⁵ One character in the *Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳 (The Tale of Quelling the Demons' Revolt) claims that the filial act of *gegu* had once healed her.⁶⁶ In the *Xihu erji* 西湖二集 (Second Collection of the West Lake), a maidservant commits the act for her mistress.⁶⁷ In the *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and the Tang, ca. 1675), Emperor Yang's 煬 concubine Zhu Gui'er 朱貴兒 cures the Emperor's illness by feeding him her flesh.⁶⁸ Feng Menglong's *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Lasting Words to Bring Society to its Senses, 1627) mentions the act, but *gegu* does not take place: the bride 'would have cut off her flesh to make broth, could that have contributed to the bridegroom's recovery'.⁶⁹ In the eighteenth-century novel *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言 (A Country Codger's Revelations), grandchildren provide the hero's mother

⁶² See *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注, by Han Yu 韓愈, ed. Shanghai: Guji, 1986, A.680-81.

⁶³ See *Bencao gangmu*, 52.2967-68.

⁶⁴ Cf. de Groot, *The Religious System*, 4:386.

⁶⁵ Cf. Idema, 'Diseases, Doctors, Drugs and Cures', 37-63.

⁶⁶ See *Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳, ed. Taipei: Shijie, 1968, 11.74.

⁶⁷ See *Xihu erji* 西湖二集, by Zhou Qingyuan 周清源, ed. Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1989, 19. 321.

⁶⁸ See *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義, by Chu Renhuo 褚人獲, ed. Shanghai: Guji, 1987, 34.259.

⁶⁹ *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed. Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1984, 9.186-205.

with a soup made of their flesh.⁷⁰

These examples illustrate *gegu* conforming to the proper hierarchical order, that is to say, a socially inferior person (e.g. a child or wife) commits the act for the benefit of a socially superior person (e.g. a parent or husband). In Chao Yuan's case, however, *gegu* functions to shock: the husband and master of a household, a member of an elite family, considers committing *gegu* for the sake of his concubine, a vulgar prostitute and an adulteress. Satire by inversion attacks Chao Yuan as he displays the kind of behaviour befitting neither a man nor a member of the gentry elite.

The Martyrdom of the Filial Scholar

Another instance of *gegu* contrasts with the Chao Yuan episode. Chao Liang 晁梁, Chao Yuan's half-brother and his antithesis as a model of filial piety, contemplates committing the act for his ailing mother, Mme Chao.⁷¹ Chao Liang's proposed act maintains the proper hierarchical order as in the contextual examples, but in contrast to that of Chao Yuan.

One further aspect shows irony in both Chao Liang's and Chao Yuan's roles as lay healers. Irony derives from the implied comment on their social positions. Both characters are men from the local elite. Chao Yuan has gentry status and Chao Liang counts as a scholar.⁷² According to records of the Tang and Song dynasties, commoners and lower level

⁷⁰ See *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言, by Xia Jingqu 夏敬渠, ed. Shanghai: Shijie, 1936, 131.417.

⁷¹ See YYZ, 36.537-38. Mme Chao is his adopted mother; he is the posthumous son of Mme Chao's husband Mr Chao by his concubine Chunying 春英.

⁷² See YYZ, 46.667-69. Chao Liang passes the civil service examination by virtue of his sympathetic character rather than learning.

servants carried out *gegu*. No literati or gentry were among them.⁷³ We do not know if this evidence merely reflects the bias of the recorders, and whether people really committed *gegu* or not, but we can conclude that the *Yinyuan zhuan* reverses the picture these documents sketch.

In the late Ming Li Shizhen commented on *gegu*: 'The gentleman (*junzi* 君子) does not do it.'⁷⁴ His statement suggests how we have to judge Chao Yuan, a member of the gentry elite, when he considers committing *gegu*. Although the act received official sanction up to the end of the Ming, it counted as an expression of filial piety by the uneducated masses. It had not much relevance to academic scholars — even if they occasionally admired or pitied it. This trend was reversed in the Qing: illiterate peasants laughed at *gegu*, while many first-degree scholars committed the act.⁷⁵ It is possible that the *Yinyuan zhuan*, apart from inverting values, actually reflects a historical trend in this respect.

The episodes concerning Chao Yuan and Chao Liang as lay healers mainly illustrate their moral characteristics as vices and virtues. Social inversion functions as a didactic paradox and includes comic relief. In both cases, *gegu* does not take place after all. Divine intervention at a temple prevents Chao Liang from committing *gegu* at the last moment — a turn of events corresponding to descriptions in many contextual sources.⁷⁶ Here the perversion of norms and the inversion of roles already suffice to shock. The *Yinyuan zhuan*, however, depicts another incident in which *gegu* does take place.

⁷³ See T'ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 157.

⁷⁴ *Bencao gangmu*, 52.2967.

⁷⁵ Cf. T'ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 160-61.

⁷⁶ Cf. de Groot, *The Religious System*, 4:387-88.

One Family's Filial Piety

The Zhang 張 family episode sketches a model image of lay healers who also represent a utopian ideal in moral and social conduct.⁷⁷ The aged scholar Zhang Yangchong 張養沖 of Mingshui Town has two sons Zhang Qiyu 張其猷 and Zhang Qimei 張其美 and two obedient daughters-in-law, Yang Sigu 楊四姑 and Wang Sanjie 王三姐. The narrative describes how the Zhang brothers, and in particular their wives, become paragons of filial piety by nursing old Zhang Yangchong and his wife when they are old and sick. The narrative voice tells how they nurse old Zhang until his death. It advertises their behaviour as an ideal:

When Zhang Yangchong fell ill and took to his bed, his two sons went out to call doctors and inquire by divination, make vows and implore the spirits. The two daughters-in-law stayed at home brewing tea and decocting medicines, serving food and boiling soup. They attended to him for two or three months without ever complaining. When Zhang Yangchong died, they spent everything they had in their poor household to arrange the funeral and bury him.⁷⁸

The tone of the narrative voice sounds as serious here as in the description of the ideal inhabitants of utopia.⁷⁹ Scholar Zhang's two daughters-in-law make concerted efforts to wait upon their widowed mother-in-law. Their conduct climaxes in physical self-sacrifice by committing *gegu* when the old lady falls ill:

Later, when their mother-in-law fell ill because of old age and was no more able to move,

⁷⁷ A brief sub-plot within the story of Di Xichen recounts their story, see YYZ, 52.758-61.

⁷⁸ YYZ, 52.758.

⁷⁹ See YYZ, ch. 23-24.

they dressed her and fed her, bound her feet and washed her face, combed her hair and helped her on the toilet. The two daughters-in-law looked after her like a baby. When the mother-in-law's geriatric disease gradually worsened and she ate less and less, the two sisters-in-law discussed the matter and decided to cut their flesh (*gegu*) to treat their mother-in-law so she might be restored to life. Both sisters-in-law fasted and prayed to Heaven and Earth. They vowed to wear thin clothes in the cold months of winter, to live on a vegetarian diet ever after and to pray to the Buddha. Each of them cut a slice of flesh from her left thigh and mixed it into a bowl of soup. They did not tell their mother-in-law the truth, but simply said it was pork. The mother-in-law consumed it and found it fresh and delicious. It turned on her appetite and gradually she again started to eat. Although she was not able to leave her bed, she revived to live another year and eight months before her death at the age of 78 *sui*.⁸⁰

The act here has strongly positive connotations. It corresponds to the influential Song dynasty philosopher and Confucianist Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) attitude towards *gegu*. Zhu Xi endorsed *gegu* favourably but with reserve. Zhu Xi stated: 'It is certainly not right to commit *gegu*, but if one does it with sincerity without intending to show off, then it may be all right.'⁸¹ The *Yinyuan zhuan* affirms this attitude. Here the act is 'all right' because the devotees do it with sincerity without any intention to show off and in accordance with the proper order of social hierarchy.

The model characters Yang Sigu and Wang Sanjie commit *gegu* to the letter, literally cutting a piece of flesh from the thigh. The collection *Yijianzhi* from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) describes in detail how a devotee cut his thigh. His seated, contorted posture served as a gesture to let his family know about his act.⁸² After the Song era, *gegu*

⁸⁰ YYZ, 52.759-60.

⁸¹ *Qing huidian shili* 清會典事例, 1899 edn., repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991, 403.506aa.

⁸² See *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典, MS copy (1562-7), partially repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960, 10813.2b.

exclusively meant cutting the flesh of either arm.⁸³ The idealised glorification of this ritual adds a grotesque dimension to the *Yinyuan zhuan*. Its description transcends its controversial nature and glosses over the often recorded negative or fatal results.⁸⁴ Selective narration and hyperbole turn the ideal case into a super-ideal. The serious tone of voice increases its didactic effect. Rhetoric and imagery here highlight the utopian quality of this scene.

Nursing, medical healing and rituals such as *gegu* function as a remedy for the fallen world. In the course of a campaign for a Confucian moral revival, the local mandarin selects the Zhang brothers and their wives for public distinction. He bestows honorary titles on them and builds a virtue arch in their honour. The reaction of the spectators in Mingshui Town illustrates the didactic nature and effect of the story on its audience:

It really had the effect of moving all those men and women who were usually not filial, rebelled against their parents and offended their parents-in-law, to have good intentions, to set their minds on learning from them and to reform. Among the mischievous people who did not listen to the advice of their parents, who favoured their wives and were partial towards their children, and among the shrewish wives who disregarded the position of their parents-in-law, who beat their fathers-in-law and cursed their mothers-in-law, there was no one who did not take pains to correct their former misbehaviour and set their minds on learning how to become good. Thus the mandarin wanted to reform the customs and habits of the common people, to make them discard evil and revert to goodness, to incite them to change.⁸⁵

The tone of the narrative voice and the ideas about moral reform expressed in this episode resemble the advice given by the scholar-official Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (ca. 1633-after 1705) in his handbook for

⁸³ See *Yongle dadian*, 10813.2a-2b.

⁸⁴ Cf. T'ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 154.

⁸⁵ *YYZ*, 52.761.

magistrates *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 (A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence).⁸⁶ Huang served as a magistrate in Tancheng 鄒城 county in southern Shandong in the early 1670s. His handbook is based on his experiences and observation of local society during that time and outlines the principles of good government. Huang urged:

The magistrate has the duty to confer distinctions on virtuous women and filial sons. However, many of them live in obscurity and poverty and lack power or influence. They cultivate their conduct by themselves and do not seek to exhibit themselves. How should the magistrate confer distinctions on such people? Yet those receiving honours in our days all come from the cities and suburbs, are from the gentry or influential families, and have connections to get public nominations or powerful backing. Every year the magistrate ought to order the village elders to search for virtuous wives, exemplary women, filial sons and obedient grandchildren, people of admirable conduct and exceptional character among those from poor and humble backgrounds and those living in hidden or remote places.⁸⁷

The description of the Zhang family illustrates Huang Liuhong's utopia, translating his programme of social reform into action. Moreover, the idyll of poverty has yet another dimension. In sharp contrast to the bulk of the novel that dramatises the theme of money and revolves around financial matters, the ideal society lacks money and consequently corruption and vice. This aspect reminds of the utopia depicted in Chapter 24 of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, a world free from the troubles of the money economy. The story of the Zhang family provides

⁸⁶ On Huang, see *Tancheng xianzhi* 鄒城縣志, 1763 edn., 7.26-27; *Wuxianzhi* 吳縣志, 1924 edn., 76B.4-6; see also Djang Chu, trans. and ed., *A Complete Book concerning Happiness and Benevolence: a Manual for Local Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China*, Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1984.

⁸⁷ *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, by Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, author's preface 1694, ed. Obata Yukihiko 小畑行蘭, repr. Yamane Yukio 山根幸夫, Tokyo: Kyûko, 1973, 24.27a-27b.

a brief glimpse of this ideal society in microcosm.

The instances of ideal healing form part of the utopian concept and the idea of moral reform in the novel. The life that Yang Sigu and Wang Sanjie provide for their parents-in-law appears as a bucolic, self-sufficient utopia. Filial devotion and subservience create an archaic idyll. The narrative voice compares the scene to the ancient ideal of King Wen's 文王 good government: 'Although old [Zhang Yangchong and his wife] were poor, they were just like the aged people in the care of King Wen who had meat to eat.'⁸⁸ The image of King Wen recurs to stress the point. The narrative voice describes how the two sisters-in-law spin silk to dress their parents-in-law and concludes: 'Although they did not wear gauze or satins, yet they resembled the elderly in the care of King Wen who had silk to wear.'⁸⁹ The image of old people who have meat to eat and silk to wear stems from the book of *Mengzi* and illustrates ideal government.⁹⁰ Thus the narrative affirms a utopian ideal true to the ancient Confucian spirit.

The theme of the ideal lay healers thus dramatises utopia. The episode is short and corresponds to the general pattern of the narrative interspersing brief glimpses of a perfect world within long accounts of dystopia. Cases of extreme filial defiance and domestic discord frame the utopia of the Zhang family.⁹¹ The contrast enhances the didactic effect as the narrative equates fictional reality with a world in dire need of reform.

⁸⁸ YYZ, 52.759.

⁸⁹ YYZ, 52.759.

⁹⁰ *Mengzi*, 1A.3, 1A.7, 7A.22. Mencius points out that King Wen took good care of the aged, see *Mengzi* 4A.13; 7A.22.

⁹¹ See YYZ, 52.756, 53.764-77.

Concluding Remarks

The lay healers in the *Yinyuan zhuan* demonstrate how the imagery of illness and its cure links to the theme of decadence and moral reform. In advertising a revival of Confucian norms and values, the narrative voice reveals itself as a Confucian conservative and a moralist but it also paints a carnivalesque, and therefore ironic, picture of society, delving with great delight into the obscene and the grotesque.

Belief in the powers of demonological healing does not appear restricted to any particular social group. The lay healers hail from a wide social spectrum: the maid, an uneducated character of lower social status appears alongside a lady and wife of a scholar-official and her two sons, both would-be members of the literati elite. Scholar Zhang's daughters-in-law, paragons of virtue and utopian examples of filial piety, also belong to an elite family.

Both men and women appear as lay healers in the *Yinyuan zhuan*. This adds another dimension to their dramatisation, for their gender roles also convey social comment. The maid, the lady and the scholar's daughters-in-law typically show women resorting to lay healing. The portrayal of two men in the role of lay healers, however, inverts expectations, turning social hierarchies topsy-turvy. In exposing Chao Yuan's foolishness, the narrative voice insinuates that lay healing is not appropriate for a male character and, what is more, the master of an elite household. Chao Liang's intended act in the name of filial piety expresses his single-mindedness and as such also contains irony and comic entertainment. The Zhang family daughters-in-law by contrast maintain proper social hierarchies. The narrative voice depicts their act in hyperbolic enlargement, projecting a utopian ideal and ideas for moral reform that anticipate and resonate with political writings in the

seventeenth century.

The depiction of the lay healers, moreover, reveals an implied ethical attitude. The narrative voice remains ambiguous about the existence and value of supernatural phenomena and the efficacy of lay healing. It ultimately defines the world in Confucian terms. Chao Yuan's illness exposes his violation of the conscience (*liangxin*), one of the primary moral values in the *Mengzi*. Both Chao Yuan and Chao Liang as lay healers invert gender roles and social hierarchies. Their attempts at healing pervert Confucian moral values. Satire and comedy convey social criticism, targeting in particular the *nouveaux riches* and pseudo-members of the literati elite. The perversion and ironic inversion of Confucian values provoke laughter at the carnival of vices. In regarding demons as creations of the human mind, as some of the author's contemporaries did in seventeenth-century China, the narrative voice firmly places the emphasis on issues of morality and individual responsibility for the integrity of the human body and the well-being of the state and society.

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