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BELL DOCTORS IN THE LATE IMPERIAL CHINESE NOVEL *XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN*

DARIA BERG

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Abbreviations

- FHQ* *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: Kyūko, 1973).
- HJAS* *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*
- JPMCH* *Jin ping mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話. 4 vols. (ed. Hong Kong: Xinghai wen-hua, 1987).
- T-YYZ* *Xingshi yinyuan* 醒世姻緣. By Xi Zhou sheng 西周生. 2 vols. (ed. Taipei: Lianjing, 1986).
- TDT* *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳. By Xi Zhou sheng 西周生. Tong-detang ed., 20 vols. (repr. Beijing: Wenxue guji, 1988).
- YYZ* *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳. By Xi Zhou sheng 西周生. 3 vols. (ed. Shanghai: Guji, 1981, repr. 1985).

Introduction

Healers, illnesses and cures play a curious role in the novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 ("A Tale of Marriage Destinies that will Bring Society to its Senses"; hereafter: *Yinyuan zhuan*), one of the most fascinating, yet most underrated works of traditional Chinese fiction.¹ A novel of manners from 17th c. China making heavy use of irony and satire, the *Yinyuan zhuan* represents a milestone in the history of traditional Chinese fiction between the famous novels *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 from the late 16th c. and *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 from the 18th

¹ It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to Professors Glen Dudbridge, Paul Unschuld and Don Starr for their valuable comments on various stages of the manuscript. This essay is dedicated to the memory of my father, Gert Theodor Berg.

c.² The novel has not yet been translated in its entirety into any other language,³ but it has increasingly attracted critical attention.⁴

Like the *Jin ping mei*, the action of the *Yinyuan zhuan* is mainly set in Shandong 山東 province in the fifteenth century, in the mid-Ming dynasty (1368–1644), but details and rhetoric rather refer to the social and political conditions at the time of writing during the years around the end of the Ming reign – an era of dynastic breakdown, internal rebellion, and foreign invasion which also witnessed a burst of creative energy and activity in literature and the arts.

Containing about one million Chinese characters and written in an idiom approaching the vernacular which also includes much local dialect, the *Yinyuan zhuan* ranks among the longest pieces of Chinese prose fiction ever written. Its one hundred chapters focus on the domestic dramas unfolding in two provincial households and follow the main protagonists over two incarnations. As its title suggests, the novel deals with marriages, destinies, reincarnation, and retribution but it also describes much more. Its depiction of provincial life and local society presents one of the most panoramic explorations of the world in fiction. The inhabitants of the fictional world hail from all walks of life and appear in a wide spectrum of social roles: there are rulers and subjects, teachers and students, scholars and merchants, ladies and prostitutes, and also a variety of healers and their patients.

So far modern scholars only know the author of the *Yinyuan zhuan* by his pen-name – Xi Zhou sheng 西周生, scholar of the Western Zhou, which has been interpreted as an allusion to the Western Zhou 西周 dynasty (ca. 1050–770 B.C.). His true identity has remained obscure. 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

² The present study refers to the following editions: a) *YYZ*; b) *T-YYZ*; c) *TDT*. All translations are my own except where otherwise indicated.

³ For partial translations, see P'u Sung-ling, "Marriage as Retribution," in: *Renditions* 17/18 (1982), pp. 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 1992), pp. 39–64; Pu Songling, *The Bonds of Matrimony/Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*. Vol. One: *A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel*. Trans. by Eve Alison Nyren (Lewiston – Queenston – Lampeter 1995).

⁴ For recent studies, see e.g., Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-Century Fiction: T'ai-shan and the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*," in: *T'oung Pao* 77.4/5 (1991), pp. 226–252; Andrew H. Plaks, "After the Fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel," in: *HJAS* 45.2 (1985), pp. 543–580; Yenna Wu, "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature," in: *HJAS* 48.2 (1988), pp. 363–382; *id.*, "Repetition in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*," in: *HJAS* 51.1 (1991), pp. 55–87; *id.*, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass. – London 1995); *id.*, *Ameliorative Satire and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel*, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan – Marriage as Retribution, Awakening the World* (Lewiston – Queenston – Lampeter 2000).

credited with the authorship, but modern scholars have in turn discarded all such claims.⁵

Historical analysis suggests that the author was familiar with life in Shandong province and the capital Beijing in the 1630s and 1640s. Internal and external evidence suggests that the novel was composed sometime between 1628 and 1681 when it was already circulating in literati circles, but it remains unclear whether the text was written before or after the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing (1644–1911) in 1644.⁶ The narrator's voice, however, appears engrossed in late Ming concerns and makes no explicit reference to Qing rule over China. The author's pseudonym suggests a certain nostalgia for an ideal world which traditional Chinese thought associates with the Confucian golden age of the Western Zhou dynasty.⁷ The *Yinyuan zhuan* frequently reminds its readers of this lost paradise from the utopian past while portraying the narrative present by contrast as a satirical anti-utopia.⁸ The bulk of the narrative focuses on the anti-ideal present world, exposing a world of inverted norms and values and chartering the breakdown of Confucian ideal society. The disintegration of the familiar old world is portrayed in burlesque, comic, and grotesque scenes.

The title of the novel announces the didactic message. The narrator deplors the perceived loss of morality and the traditional Confucian world order and declares his aim to bring society to its senses by means of moral insight. Throughout the narrative the narrator searches for the source of happiness, exploring the causes of human misery and sketching a blueprint of ideal society. The narrative defines ideal society as a place without illnesses or suffering and therefore lacking both doctors and cures. This concept of utopia derives from ancient Chinese

⁵ See Hu Shi 胡適, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan kaozheng" 醒世姻緣傳考證, repr. in *YYZ*, 3:1448–1495, who first proposed Pu Songling as the author, but this and other attributions of the novel have all been refuted; see, e.g., Chen Bingzao 陳炳藻, "Pu Songling ye shi Xi Zhou sheng ma?" 蒲松齡也是西周生嗎?, in: *Zhongbao yuekan* 中報月刊 69 (1985), pp. 64–70 and 70 (1985), pp. 45–48; Yenna Wu, "Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World: A Literary Study of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University 1986), pp. 19–58; Cao Dawei 曹大为, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuo yu Mingmo bian" 醒世姻緣傳作于明末辨, in: *Beijing shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue)* 北京師範大學學報 (社會科學) 4.88 (1988), pp. 64–71; Zhang Qingji 張清吉, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan xinkao* 醒世姻緣傳新考 (Zhengzhou 1991), pp. 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 1993), pp. 56–76, Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩, "Xu" 序, in: Xu Fuling (1993), pp. 1–5.

⁶ For 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; for the late limit (a reference to two copies of the novel circulating among literati in the Yangzi delta area in 1681), see Yan Guangmin 顏光敏, *Yanshi jiacang chidu* 顏氏家藏尺牘 (Shanghai 1935), 3.128–29.

⁷ See *YYZ*, 26.378; Yenna Wu (1986), p. 40.

⁸ On the literary utopia in China, see Wu Qingyun, *Female Rule in Chinese and English Literary Utopias* (Liverpool 1995). On the concept of utopia in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, see Yenna Wu (2000), ch. 5.

thought as described in the book of *Liezi* 列子 named after a historically obscure Daoist philosopher from the fourth century.⁹

The fictional world, however, appears as rather different from this utopian ideal and the narrator ironically delves into the details with voyeuristic glee. It is a world plagued by physical and emotional suffering, epidemics and natural disasters, requiring a large number of healers. Illness and healing thus also play metaphorical roles: the ailing individual symbolizes the ailing state. Illness frequently appears as moral retribution sent by supernatural powers to punish humanity for its vices. Figurative comparisons of medicine and politics derive from a long tradition in Chinese thought. The Chinese character *zhi* 治, for example, means both "to heal" and "to govern."¹⁰ The narrative repeatedly stresses this analogy: if there only was a cure for the ills of the world, good government could be restored.

The text links the theme of physical suffering with that of moral breakdown and social dysfunction. Corrupt morality frequently causes illness and pain. Social excesses – such as overindulgence in wine, women, wealth, and wrath (*jiu se cai qi* 酒色財氣), the traditional "four vices of excess" (*sitan* 四貪) –, lead to physical collapse. The underlying message runs: depravity and decadence, the moral sicknesses of society – as perceived by a conservative Confucian mind – must result in physical breakdown. Consequently the many individuals inhabiting the world of the novel need healers to treat their illnesses and injuries.

An unusually large number of healers – more than two dozen – appear in the *Yinyuan zhuan* to treat the numerous conditions of both major and minor protagonists. Among the traditional doctors such as the grand physicians (*taiyi* 太醫)¹¹ who would have graduated from the Imperial Medical Academy and other medical practitioners including surgeons, gynaecologists, obstetricians, and religious specialists, we encounter two bell doctors (*lingyi* 鈴醫) – a type of healer not often described in the conventional historical sources.¹² The healers in the

⁹ YYZ, 24.354. *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing 1979, repr. 1985), 2. 41–43. On *Liezi* see Angus Charles Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of the Tao* (repr. New York 1990), pp. iv–viii.

¹⁰ See Erhard Rosner, *Die Heilkunst des Pien Lu: Arzt und Krankheit in bildhaften Ausdrücken der chinesischen Sprache* (Stuttgart 1991).

¹¹ The term *taiyi* refers to palace physicians since the Former Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 8 A.D.); in the Yuan dynasty (1280–1368) the *taiyi* distinguished themselves from other medical practitioners through graduation from the Imperial Medical Academy, *taiyi yuan* 太醫院. Since the mid-Ming, the term widely applied to specialists we would generally call "doctor." See also Angela Ki Che Leung, "Organized Medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and Private Medical Institutions in the Lower Yangzi Region," in: *Late Imperial China* 8 (1987) 1, pp. 134–166, 150.

¹² On healers in Chinese fiction see 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," in: *Chinese Science* 2 (1977), pp. 37–63; Laurence G. Thompson, "Medicine and Religion in Late Ming China," in: *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990), pp. 45–59; Yoshimoto Shōji 吉元諸昭治, "Kimpeibai to Dōkyō igaku" 金瓶梅と道教医学, in: *Nihon ishi-*

novel offer rare glimpses of orthodox and less orthodox ways of healing, providing the modern historian and literary critic with information that the conventional sources seldom provide.

The present analysis of the novel, its rhetoric and context aims to explore what the novel can tell us about life in the world out of which it emerged, focusing in particular on the image of the bell doctor as a healer. In the following, we shall investigate what the episodes involving the two bell doctors reveal about their ways of treatment, their diagnostic and prognostic abilities, and the society they live in. As both bell doctors remain anonymous, we shall for the sake of convenience refer to them as bell doctor No. One and No. Two.

The Expert in Gynaecology

The first bell doctor belongs to a short sub-plot at the beginning of the novel.¹³ The *Yinyuan zhuan* refers to this kind of healer as an "itinerant doctor jingling a bell."¹⁴ Chinese society identifies the bell doctor, or medical pedlar, as a male itinerant doctor who roams the country-side jingling a bell seeking patients and selling herbal remedies for a small fee. The historian of science Joseph Needham groups these itinerant doctors together with the "common practitioners of folk medicine" (*yongyi* 庸醫) as opposed to the group of the scholar physicians (*ruyi* 儒醫).¹⁵ The distinction from the *ruyi* dates from the twelfth century A.D. when an imperial decree ruled that unqualified medical practitioners must pass provincial examinations in classical studies as well as medical subjects. The successful candidate would then qualify as a *ruyi*.¹⁶ The itinerant practitioner's medical skills would traditionally pass down within the family from father to son. Wolf-ram Eberhard defines in a sociological study the itinerant doctor as a practitioner of folk medicine, a half-educated man from a farmer's family who has had some chance to learn something though not enough to compete in the official examina-

gaku zasshi 日本医史学雑誌 (1992), pp. 36-52; *id.*, "Kimpeibai ni miru Chūgoku igaku" 金瓶梅にみろ中国医学, in: *Nihon ishigaku zasshi* (1992), pp. 133-163; Christopher Cullen, "Patients and Healers in Late Imperial China: Evidence from the *Jinpingmei*," in: *History of Science* 31 (1993), pp. 99-150. Thompson, Yoshimoto and Cullen focus on the *Jin ping mei*. Idema has mentioned the *YYZ* but no detailed study of this aspect is known so far.

¹³ *YYZ*, 8.113.

¹⁴ *YYZ*, 8.113; *T-YYZ*, 39.509.

¹⁵ Joseph Needham, *Clerks and Craftsmen in China and the West: Lectures and Addresses on the History of Science and Technology*. Based largely on collaborative work with Wang Ling, Lu Gwei-Djen and Ho Pin-Yü (Cambridge 1970), pp. 265, 391. On bell doctors, see also Paul U. Unschuld, "Der chinesische Wanderarzt und seine Klientel im 19. Jahrhundert: Rekonstruktion eines Dialogs," in: Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Hrsg.), *Das andere China: Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden 1995), pp. 129-157; Paul U. Unschuld and Zheng Jinsheng, "Handschriften als Quellen chinesischer Medizingeschichte," in: *Monumenta Serica* 48 (2000), pp. 471-494, esp. 487-488.

¹⁶ See Needham (1970), pp. 265, 391.

tions.¹⁷ The stigma of belonging to the "school of bell doctors" (*lingyi pai* 鈴醫派) would not leave these healers even if they rose to official rank as medical officers (*yiguan* 醫官).¹⁸ The social status of independent doctors was not very high.¹⁹ The bell doctor No. One remains a shadowy figure in the narrative. He has few individual traits, but he serves well to illustrate the society he lives in.

The narrative introduces the minor protagonist Little Qingmei 小青梅, a fifteen year-old maid in the family of a certain Commander Liu 劉游击, suffering from amenorrhea (*ganxue lao* 干血癆). Traditional Chinese medicine identifies this illness as emaciation due to chronic blood stasis and blood deficiency.²⁰ The Chinese medical dictionary *Zhongguo yixue dacidian* 中國醫學大辭典 describes the symptoms as the drying up of the blood causing chronic menopause or amenia in women.²¹

The reader of the *Jin ping mei* may recall that the quack Grand Physician Zhao 趙太醫 mentions amenorrhea in a comical context as one of his random guesses and obviously the wrong diagnosis for the over-bleeding Li Ping'er 李瓶兒.²² The ability to diagnose such an illness apparently requires a healer of a higher calibre. The narrating voice in the *Yinyuan zhuan* indicates the seriousness of this illness: "This illness is fatal in a hundred and ten percent of cases, in seven months if it's acute and eight if it's chronic."²³ This implies that a healer who can cure this illness must be very expert.

As Commander Liu's mother Mme Liu 劉夫人 desperately tries to heal Qingmei, a bell doctor arrives by chance: "An itinerant bell doctor was sheltering from the rain under the main gate. As he was chatting to him, the gatekeeper mentioned that this amenorrhea was incurable."²⁴ Chatting with the gate-keeper, the bell doctor displays his medical knowledge:

The doctor said: "There are two kinds of that disease too. If it is an hereditary weakness, and the blood and the *qi* are extremely deficient, then it is like a dried-

¹⁷ See Wolfram Eberhard, *Social Mobility in Traditional China* (Leiden 1962), 230.

¹⁸ Lu Gwei-Djen and Joseph Needham, *Celestial Lancets: A History and Rationale of Acupuncture and Moxa* (Cambridge - New York 1980), p. 157.

¹⁹ See e.g. Jutta Rall, *Die Vier Großen Medizinschulen der Mongolenzeit: Stand und Entwicklung der chinesischen Medizin in der Chin- und Yüan-Zeit* (Wiesbaden 1970), p. 15. Needham (1970), p. 266, however, excludes any idea that the "profession as a whole was a despised one in Chinese civilisation."

²⁰ See Ou Ming 歐明 et al., *Chinese-English Glossary of Common Terms in Traditional Chinese Medicine / Han-Ying changyong Zhongyi cihui* 漢英常用中醫詞匯 (Hong Kong 1982), p. 5; Xie Zhufan 謝竹藩 and Huang Xiaokai 黃孝楷, *Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine / Zhong yiyao cidian* 中醫藥辭典 (Hong Kong 1985), p. 93.

²¹ See Xie Guan 謝觀, *Zhongguo yixue dacidian* 中國醫學大辭典, vol. 2 (Shanghai 1933), p. 2428.

²² *JPMCH*, 61.744.

²³ *YYZ*, 8.113.

²⁴ *YYZ*, 8.113.

up well: however much you clear it out, there is never any water in it. If it is a temporary obstruction of the *qi*, resulting in blockage of the blood vessels, then once the obstruction has been cleared it will naturally get better. How could it be totally incurable?"

The gatekeeper then discussed young Qingmei's illness with him.

He said: "Wait until I've had a look at her. If it is treatable, then I'll feel able to prescribe medication."

The gatekeeper went in and told this to Mme Liu, who asked Qingmei to go to the middle entrance and let the doctor have a look at her. The doctor came and stood there, and took hold of Qingmei's hand in order to feel her pulse. He also saw that although Qingmei had a sallow complexion, she had not become emaciated like a ghost. He then said: "This is not a serious case. Once she's had a dose of medicine, we shall see some effect."²⁵

The bell doctor speaks in the tone of professional medical discourse befitting a grand physician (*taiyi*). His way of examination corresponds to the standard practice in traditional Chinese medicine: he derives his diagnosis from inspecting the patient and feeling the pulse.²⁶ The bell doctor accepts Mme Liu's "Money for Opening the Box of Medicines" with due modesty.²⁷ He gives an accurate prognosis and treats the patient with some unspecified medical pills efficiently and fast. The narrating voice tells how the doctor instantly

took out a packet of pills, about the size of mung beans, and counted out seven of them. He asked for an infusion to be prepared with the addition of safflower and peach kernels, to be taken separate from food. While the doctor was entertained in the anteroom, they prepared food. At the same time they decocted the medicine and gave it to Qingmei, who drank it.

After the time it takes to brew tea, Qingmei started to feel some discomfort in her stomach. In the end, she suffered two bouts of actual pain, and passed several pints of dark, foul-smelling fluid, followed eventually by some spots of bright red blood. They told the doctor.

He said: "This illness is already cured. Avoid consuming cold water, onions, garlic, and raw foods. Get a reputable doctor of internal medicine to administer ten doses of restorative tonic and she will gradually recover her strength."²⁸

The bell doctor appears as a highly efficient healer who corresponds to the ideal physician in attitude and behaviour. His character remains shadowy but he shows virtue as a healer and lacks any specific vices. The bell doctor No. One contrasts

²⁵ YYZ, 8.113.

²⁶ Traditional Chinese medicine bases diagnosis on the doctor's examination of the patient by the four methods of looking, listening, questioning, and feeling the pulse (*wang wen wen qie* 望聞問切).

²⁷ On medical ethics, see Paul U. Unschuld, *Medical Ethics in Imperial China: A Study in Historical Anthropology* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1979).

²⁸ YYZ, 8.114.

with the quack doctor and false grand physicians described elsewhere in the *Yinyuan zhuan*.²⁹ Here, the ideal grand physician and the heterodox doctor change roles: the world in the *Yinyuan zhuan* forms the opposite to norms and conventions. A grand physician should be efficient, but in the *Yinyuan zhuan* he is not.³⁰ A heterodox healer such as the bell doctor lacks qualification and distinctions, but in the *Yinyuan zhuan* he represents a perfect healer. The text ironically inverts the status quo in portraying the unorthodox and unofficial healer as the more knowledgeable and efficient one.

The cure of the patient plays a crucial part in the plot development. Qingmei survives to play her role in the tragic events that lead to the suicide of Ms Ji 計氏, the wife of Chao Yuan 晁源, a member of the local scholar-official elite and one of the main protagonists of the novel. The narrating voice comments on Qingmei's recovery: "It was indeed as the saying goes: 'Medicine cures the illnesses that are not fatal, Buddha saves those who are destined (*yuan* 緣) to be saved'."³¹ This saying appears as common currency in the late Ming.³² It illustrates the belief in the Buddhist concept of *yuan*, destiny, a key-word in the *Yinyuan zhuan*. Qingmei's cure corresponds to this saying. Her illness is not fatal, so the doctor's medicine succeeds in healing her. The religious aspect has special importance: Qingmei at first reacts to her illness by making a vow: "Should she survive, she intends to become a nun."³³ Yet here *yuan* ironically serves to invert religious meaning and to disturb the social order. Upon recovery, Qingmei opts for life as a nun. In particular, she wants to become a Daoist nun. However, she reveals that her motives lack any sense of piety. She discards her other options in society, i.e., to become a concubine, a courtesan, or the wife of a servant or peasant, by exposing the hardship of women in such roles. She even rejects the service of Buddha as she desires the unlimited prospects of a life in sexual liberty and material luxury among the Daoist clergy.³⁴ Here, the narrative opens yet another window on seventeenth-century Chinese society: through Qingmei's eyes, we perceive the decadence among the clergy and their corrupting influence on the gentry womenfolk. The clergy have long lost their purity and sanctity. Depraved nuns infiltrate the elite families and undermine the domestic order.³⁵

²⁹ See YYZ, chapters 2, 3, 4, 18.

³⁰ For a brief survey, see Daria Berg, "Die Heilkunde Chinas im Spiegel des Romans *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* aus dem 17. Jahrhundert," in: *Chinamed* 3 (1995) 6, pp. 59-61.

³¹ YYZ, 8.113.

³² Also in YYZ, 28.416; *JPMCH*, 54.643; 79.1055.

³³ YYZ, 8.113.

³⁴ YYZ, 8.114-116.

³⁵ Chinese society regarded the violation of the sexual taboos among the clergy as the most unpardonable offence. As both male and female members of the clergy had easy access to the gentry families' households, they caused domestic disorder in the scholar-official elite. Cf. Stefan M. Rummel, *Der Mönche und Nonnen Sündenmeer: Der buddhistische Klerus in der chinesischen Roman- und Erzählliteratur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer vollständigen*

The seventeenth-century scholar-official Huang Liuhong 黄六鴻 (ca. 1633–after 1705),³⁶ who served as a magistrate in Tancheng 郯城 county in southern Shandong in the early 1670s, saw in this a particularly demoralising factor in his society. He warned in his handbook for magistrates *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, a guide-book for a better world:

The three sisters [Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns, and female fortune-tellers] and the six old women [procuresses, matchmakers, spirit mediums, madames of brothels, medicine women, and midwives] often act as go-betweens inducing people to wantonness and dissipation. Their talk corrupts virtuous women from honourable families. [...] [The magistrate] then ought to make public notifications that Buddhist and Daoist nuns have to practise religion quietly inside their monasteries and have no permission to enter people's households and solicit subscriptions. [...] The magistrate must survey his district strictly. If anybody disobeys, they should forthwith be reported to the authorities so that we have evidence to arrest and deal with them. Such cases will correct depraved customs to a certain extent. When women's apartments strictly separate inside and outside, we will achieve good social customs. Men and women will all live in virtue and perfect harmony.³⁷

Domestic disorder and social chaos ensue in the world of the *Yinyuan zhuan* – as it lacks the competent magistrate and his measures to restore law and order. Qingmei becomes a Daoist nun and in this role, she visits the elite household of Chao Yuan and Ms Ji. Her visit in turn gives Chao Yuan's concubine Zhen'ge 珍哥 the opportunity to slander Ms Ji for adulterous contact with the clergy. To prove her innocence, Ms Ji commits suicide.³⁸ The healer does not appear in those scenes, but he belongs to their topsy-turvy society and plays a decisive part in it. His cure of Qingmei engenders a scene – an anti-utopian vision – in which the worst of a Confucian's nightmares come true.

The Syphilis Specialist

Like the first doctor, the second bell doctor in the *Yinyuan zhuan* deals with a minor character within a sub-plot recounting the episode of the wicked and rapacious Confucian scholar and teacher Wang Weilu 汪為露. The bell doctor appears in Wang's death scene in chapter 39.³⁹ Like the bell doctor No. One, the

Übersetzung der Sammlung Sengni niehai (Bochum 1992), pp. 74-84; Robert H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China. A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from circa 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* Reprint (Leiden 1974), p. 267; see also the late Ming anthology *Sengni niehai* 僧尼孽海, chapter 3, and part II:11, translated in Rummel (1992), pp. 173-180, 321.

³⁶ On Huang see *Tancheng xianzhi* 郯城縣志 (1763 ed.), 7.26-27; *Wu xianzhi* 吳縣志 (1924 ed.), 76B.4-6; see also Huang Liu-hung, *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence: a Manual for Local Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China*. Trans. and ed. by Djang Chu (Tuscon, Arizona 1984).

³⁷ *FHQ*, 31.11b.

³⁸ See *YYZ*, 8.118-9.130.

³⁹ Expurgated from *YYZ*, 39.577; for the most part in *T-YYZ*, 39.508-510; full text in *TD*, 39.10b-13b.

second doctor has few individual characteristics, but his appearance illuminates some of the darkest corners of society.

The symptoms of Wang Weilu's illness help the local officials to identify him as a wanted criminal who has terrorized, threatened and harassed both his neighbours and his students. The Director of Education suspects Wang Weilu: "I remember you looking like this. At the time I thought: 'This person is totally devoid of facial hair, he must be suffering from syphilis (*yangmei chuang*)'."⁴⁰ The district magistrate of Xiujiang 繡江 county confirms: "He had no facial hair, he must have lost it long before as a result of developing syphilis (*yangmei chuang*)."⁴¹ *Yangmei chuang* 楊梅瘡, plum blossom sores, denotes syphilis.⁴² As the officials can diagnose it, they must have been familiar with this phenomenon in their society. The reference to syphilis strikes the reader as a blatant anachronism as the *Yinyuan zhuan* sets its action within the years between 1440 and 1490. The term *yangmei chuang* occurs first in the *Shishan yi'an* 石山醫按, a medical book by Wang Ji 汪機, written between 1520 and 1533.⁴³ The late Ming pharmacologist and physician Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593) points out that venereal disease but not syphilis has existed in China since antiquity.⁴⁴ Syphilis reached China for the first time via Canton around the year 1500.⁴⁵ The disease spread rapidly. An epidemic occurred for the first time between 1506 and 1521 and a second time around the year 1630.⁴⁶ The modern medical historians Wong and Wu note that syphilis was extremely prevalent in China from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards.⁴⁷ The characters' familiarity with its symptoms

⁴⁰ YYZ, 39.573.

⁴¹ YYZ, 39.575.

⁴² The physician Yu Bian 俞辨 (fl. 1515) reports in his *Xu Yishuo* 續醫說 (1545) on the outbreak of the first syphilitic epidemic in China in 1488–1505. Cf. van Gulik (1974), p. 311; Keizo Dohi, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Syphilis: Insbesondere über ihren Ursprung und ihre Pathologie in Ostasien* (Leipzig 1923), p. 45. As Chinese physicians recognized the link between sexual infection and the illness, the term *yangmei chuang* probably referred to the symptoms and to its sexual association; the plum symbolizes sexuality; see van Gulik (1974), p. 275.

⁴³ Cf. Dohi (1923), pp. 44–45. See also Joanna C. Grant, "Wang Ji's *Shishan yi'an*: Aspects of Gender and Culture in Ming Dynasty Medical Case Histories" (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1997).

⁴⁴ Cf. Wong K. Chimin and Wu Lien-teh, *History of Chinese Medicine: Being a Chronicle of Medical Happenings in China from Ancient Times to the Present Period* (Shanghai 1936) [repr. New York: AMS Press, 1973], pp. 136–137, 217–218.

⁴⁵ I.e. one or two decades before the arrival of the Portuguese. Dohi claims that not the Portuguese, but Chinese pioneers who traded in Malacca where they entertained friendly relations with the Portuguese and other foreigners, carried syphilis into China first. See Dohi (1923), pp. 46–47.

⁴⁶ Dohi (1923), p. 45; van Gulik (1974), pp. 311–312; Wong and Wu (1936), p. 129. The medical monograph *Meichuang bilu* 徽瘡秘錄 (1632) by Chen Sicheng 陳司成 describes the second epidemic in detail.

⁴⁷ Wong and Wu (1936), pp. 136–137.

in the world of the *Yinyuan zhuan* suggests that the novel deals with sixteenth or seventeenth-century Chinese society.⁴⁸

Wang Weilu eventually dies of syphilis. When he is lying on his deathbed, an itinerant doctor passes by jingling his bell. He has medical knowledge:

The doctor said: "If you give me two taels of silver, I will give you a prescription that will relieve his suffering for the time being."

Wei Yun 魏運 [Wang Weilu's brother-in-law] asked his sister for two taels of silver and requested him to provide the prescription.

He said: "You wouldn't be able to find this medicine anywhere, but, as luck would have it, I happen to have some with me."⁴⁹

The narrating voice does not satirise this healer as a quack. The bell doctor gives an accurate prognosis: "His life cannot be saved, all that can be done is to relieve his present suffering."⁵⁰ His medicine – some unspecified powder for external use – has the desired effect. The bell doctor No. Two represents an efficient healer. He demands fair payment, but not an exorbitant amount. The two taels seem a modest request.⁵¹ His moral conduct as a healer, then, lacks any particular vice. Like the first doctor, the bell doctor No. Two primarily exposes the negative aspects of the world around him.

The image of syphilis links the theme of physical illness among certain members of society with that of moral sickness. Chinese physicians recognized the causal connection between the outbreak of the illness and its sexual source of infection as early as the sixteenth century.⁵² The larger part of the population, however, regarded syphilis as one among many dangerous diseases that plagued their country at regular intervals.⁵³ The *Yinyuan zhuan* also refers to syphilis as *tian-bao chuang* 天報瘡, sores of heavenly retribution.⁵⁴ This term conveys the idea that illness represents a higher moral punishment and therefore directly relates to the sufferer's sins, his misconduct in human society. This idea consistently applies within the *Yinyuan zhuan*: syphilis repays Wang Weilu for his sins and in the other cases in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, syphilis similarly functions as higher retribution for crime and depravity.⁵⁵ In sum, syphilis works as a device to pinpoint moral weaknesses and social dysfunction in the world of the *Yinyuan zhuan*.

⁴⁸ See also Hu Shi (1931), pp. 1448-1449. Hu Shi was the first modern scholar to date the *Yinyuan zhuan* into the seventeenth century, mainly for its repeated references to syphilis.

⁴⁹ T-YYZ, 39.510.

⁵⁰ T-YYZ, 39.510.

⁵¹ See YYZ, 67.962.

⁵² See Dohi (1923), p. 45.

⁵³ See van Gulik (1974), p. 312.

⁵⁴ See YYZ, 11.165, 168; 25.373; 93.1324.

⁵⁵ See YYZ, 25.373; 93.1324.

The narrating voice describes Wang Weilu's pathological symptoms through the image of the fictional character Xue Aocao 薛敖曹, the hero of the novel *Ruyijun zhuan* 如意君傳.⁵⁶ The image of Xue Aocao emerges as common currency in late Ming erotic descriptions. For example, the sixteenth-century novel *Jin ping mei* and the seventeenth-century novels *Xu Jin ping mei* 續金瓶梅 and *Xiuta yeshi* 繡榻野史 mention him.⁵⁷ The *Yinyuan zhuan*, however, conjures up his image with a little difference: while other fictional writings stress Xue Aocao's eroticism and heroism, the *Yinyuan zhuan* exploits his features to symbolize an outgrowth of sexual pathology. This allusion and displacement of connotation effect nausea rather than entertainment. The description breaks through all prevalent ideas of order and decency of that time. The narrating voice also delves into obscenity in minute detail when depicting the treatment of Wang Weilu's symptoms with the doctor's medicine.⁵⁸ Lacking compassion or romanticizing tendencies, the narrating voice shows no sentiment as it dissects depravity with voyeuristic delight.⁵⁹ It masterminds the horror vision of an anti-utopian world, conveying a moral shock. The audience shares the disgust the other characters feel with Wang Weilu and his condition. As the narrating voice pushes bawdy entertainment to its limits, the scenario becomes unbearable even to the fictional onlookers.⁶⁰

Wang Weilu's deathbed scene also reminds of the end of Ximen Qing 西門慶, the hero of the *Jin ping mei*,⁶¹ yet the *Yinyuan zhuan* takes its nauseating effect further. The narrating voice exceeds the limits of discretion and taste in showing how Wang Weilu's family employ lowclass prostitutes for his benefit.⁶² Such close details of lowclass prostitution rarely occur in other contemporary

⁵⁶ T-YYZ, 39.509. *Ruyijun zhuan* is a tale (dated ca. mid-sixteenth century) in classical Chinese about the Tang Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 648–705) and her lover Xue Aocao; cf. Patrick D. Hanan, "Sources of the Chin P'ing Mei," in: *Asia Major* 10.1 (1963), pp. 23–67, 43–47.

⁵⁷ JPMCH, 37.416; *Xu Jin ping mei*, by Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢, in *Jin ping mei xushu sanzong* 金瓶梅續書三種, vol. 1 (Jinan 1988), 53.522; *Xiuta yeshi*, partially repr. in R. H. van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206 – A.D. 1644*, vol. 2 (Tokyo 1951), pp. 173–191, 180.

⁵⁸ See T-YYZ, 39.510.

⁵⁹ The writer Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) for example romanticized and idealized life in the brothels. On Feng's views about courtesans, see Ōki Yasushi 大木康, "Fū Bōryū to gijo" 馮夢龍と妓女, in: *Hiroshima daigaku bungakubu kiyō* 広島大学文学部紀要 48 (1989), pp. 71–91.

⁶⁰ See T-YYZ, 39.508, on the prostitutes; YYZ, 39.578, on Wang's wife Weishi 魏氏. Weishi's story also features in the *Liaozhai zhiyi zhaichao* 聊齋志異摘抄, a spurious collection of the *Liaozhai zhiyi* by Pu Songling; cf. Wu (1986), pp. 36–37.

⁶¹ JPMCH, ch. 79.

⁶² TDT, 39.10b–13a.

writings.⁶³ It is significant that the *Yinyuan zhuan* picks up what other works pass over in silence.

The seventeenth-century magistrate Huang Liuhong perceived a problem in prostitution during his time as a magistrate in the seventeenth century. In his *Fu-hui quanshu* he visualizes a cleansed society:

Whenever there are loose women and prostitutes in a village, the local elders and village headmen should get orders to chase them away. Whenever there are frivolous and dissipated young men, the local elders and village headmen together with their fathers and elder brothers should exhort and order them to take up a profession. If this happens, suspicion will be remote and improper intimacy will not occur. Rites and righteousness will prosper whilst wanton customs will naturally end.⁶⁴

Huang Liuhong again takes the magistrate to task:

Whenever there are singing girls in market towns, thoroughfares, and trading centres, the magistrate should order the persons in charge with the maintenance of public order to take stringent action and oust them.⁶⁵

Lacking such strict political control, the world in the *Yinyuan zhuan* is far removed from the ideal society Huang Liuhong envisages. Here vice-figures such as Wang Weilu flourish and low-class prostitution abounds. The episode of the bell doctor exposes a coarse and vulgar, yet also earthy and realistic picture, illuminating the darkest corners of seventeenth-century Chinese society. Realistic details in tendentious hyperbole and grotesque enlargement create an anti-utopian nightmare.

Concluding Remarks

Close reading has shown that the text constructs the two bell doctors to highlight aspects of an anti-ideal world. Narrative technique suggests that the bell doctors both represent one type of healer. Both remain anonymous and shadowy like silhouettes, both deal with minor characters and both treat cases of sexual illness (first, sexual deficiency in a female character and second, sexual excess in a male character). In both cases, sexual illness indicates social dysfunction. Both healers expose shortcomings in society and social relations, revealing decadence and the dark sides of life. The *Yinyuan zhuan* here sketches parallel representatives of one type of healer as mirror images of each other. They personify one phenomenon in the fictional world, one idea in seventeenth-century Chinese imagination. Repetition emphasizes that various episodes in the novel share similar concerns as they depict corresponding incidents of physical and social breakdown. In both

⁶³ Late Ming artists tended to romanticize life while neglecting its dark sides. Medical writers and foreigners provide the main sources of information on venereal disease and prostitution; cf. van Gulik (1974), p. 313.

⁶⁴ *FHQ*, 19.16b.

⁶⁵ *FHQ*, 23.14b-15a.

episodes, satire by inversion reflects the anti-utopian dimension of the fictional world with warning and entertaining overtones.

The characterisation of the bell doctors themselves illustrates the principle of a topsy-turvy society. Their medical proficiency and professional conduct invert common expectations. In the historical context, the bell doctor represents an unorthodox, unofficial folk healer without much claim to professionalism, in contrast to the grand physicians and other medical doctors. The *Yinyuan zhuan* ironically exchanges their roles: while the grand physicians and other medical doctors in the novel lack skills and morality, both bell doctors display efficiency and professional behaviour. Satire attacks not the good healers, but the world around them. Here, the healers primarily expose some of the most discomfiting and disturbing aspects of their world. In this sense, they transcend their roles as literary constructs and acquire significance in terms of their implied social critique.

明末清初小说《醒世姻缘传》中的铃医形象

长篇白话小说《醒世姻缘传》是明末清初最重要的小说之一。十七世纪中叶西周生所写的《醒世姻缘传》承续了讽世小说和人情小说的传统，以喜剧的手法、诙谐的口吻、以及怪诞的故事情节揭示了中国传统社会道德崩溃的社会现实。小说通过理想与社会现实的对比，表现了对儒家理想的追求和对与理想主义背道而驰的社会现实的批判。疾病、医术及行医者在小说中占了很重要的地位。医生中不但有太医、医官、而且也有铃医，后者所使用的非正统的治疗手段、以及通过其所反映的生活中堕落、黑暗的方面，都是在其他作品中很少见到的。本文将置这篇小说于其文学、历史的背景下，来研究它的论点的表达与语言使用的技巧，以便了解作品故事背后所表达的对十七世纪的中国的批判。