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A late Qing Blossoming of the Seven Lotus: hagiographic novels about the Qizhen 七真

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Quanzhen 全真 teachings have played a significant role in the history of Chinese vernacular novels or *tongsu xiaoshuo* 通俗小說. The most illustrious example is the importance of Quanzhen themes in the sixteenth-century masterwork, the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記,¹ long attributed to Qiu Changchun 丘長春 himself,² and later even commented as a Quanzhen scripture by Qing dynasty Daoists such as Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734-ca 1820).³ Besides, Quanzhen Daoists, as studied by Vincent Goossaert in this volume, are alluded to, or directly appear, in a significant number of Ming and Qing vernacular novels. However, Wang Chongyang and his disciples, the Qizhen 七真 or “Seven Perfected” hardly appeared as a group until late into the history of vernacular literature. Though it cannot be ruled out that a Ming novella about them may have existed, it was only at the end of the Qing dynasty that the Qizhen were chosen as the subject of several extant vernacular hagiographies.

This chapter will focus both on the long-term history of vernacular hagiographies and their late Qing revival in guise of the hagiographic novels about the Quanzhen’s patriarchs. One common feature of those hagiographies is that they are not canonical texts: they often take some liberty with the scriptural “truth,” and, as such, have sometimes stirred anger among religious circles. But, as representatives of the *tongsu xiaoshuo* genre, with its long didactic tradition, they aim at instructing and converting, and often claim a religious legitimacy of their own—they are someway not far from constituting an alternative lay canon, crucial for the religious education of the masses.

I will first try to define and characterize the subgenre of the vernacular hagiographic novels and plays during its golden age, from late Yuan to late Ming times. I will then turn to the group of vernacular narratives about the Qizhen that

¹ Liu Cunren, “Quanzhen jiao he *Xiyou ji*.” For recent readings of *Xiyou ji* as an inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) allegory, see Wang Guoguang, *Xiyou ji*; Wang Gang, “*Xiyou ji*.” For a good summary of the interpretation and reception of *Xiyou ji* throughout history, see Wang Ping, “Lun *Xiyou ji* yuanzhi.”

² Widmer, “*Hsi-yu Cheng-tao shu*.”

³ Yu, “Liu I-Ming on the *Hsi-yu chi*.”

have been published or republished during the late Qing and Republican period. I will first consider the two oldest of them: one is a crude vernacular novella, the other a “precious scroll” (*baojuan* 寶卷). Their exact date is unclear, but both were reprinted several times during the last decades of the Qing. These texts served as the basis for three other novels written at the turn of the twentieth century: two of them try to move the narrative back towards historical accuracy and religious respectability, while the third keeps, while chastening it slightly, the fantasy and picaresque tone of the earlier hagiographic narratives. Yet, it is the latter, not the former, that was to receive most religious attention during the modern and contemporary periods. The example of the late Qing Qizhen novels is thus a good illustration of the ambiguity of the vernacular novels’ status in the world of Chinese religions, as they both desecrate and popularize respected holy masters. In conclusion, I will offer some hypotheses as to the role of the vernacular hagiographies in the diffusion of knowledge about Quanzhen Daoism in modern China, and suggest that this role is nowadays being in part taken over by martial arts novels.

The heritage of the vernacular hagiographies

Late Qing Qizhen novels are obviously heirs, in terms of both style and contents, of the earlier tradition of vernacular hagiographies. Therefore, we must look at this tradition, and at the ways it treats holy patriarchs and their teachings to their disciples in particular, to understand how the Qizhen were depicted in our novels, for this genre has its own logics that departs from that of the canonical hagiographies. Non-canonical hagiographies are far from being an innovation of the late imperial period, and recent scholarship has shown the richness and interest for Chinese medieval religious and literary history of the hagiographic material found in medieval *zhiiguai* 志怪 or *chuanqi* 傳奇 collections.⁴ However, it is mostly from the Yuan dynasty on that we witness the appearance of an important number of vernacular plays and novels centered on the life and deeds of holy characters, from Buddhist thaumaturges to Daoist immortals through martial defenders of the cosmic order—those functions being by no means mutually exclusive—slowly constituting an independent literary genre which I call “vernacular hagiography,” containing itself several thematic clusters. As far as the history of Quanzhen

⁴ Dudbridge, “Tang sources,” and *Religious experience, Company, Strange writings, and Traditions*; see also my review article “Prodiges ambiguus.”

hagiography is concerned, two groups of texts are especially relevant: the *dutuo*-type plays and novels, and the *yoyji*-type vernacular novels.

The first to appear, chronologically, is the *dutuo ju* 度脫劇 or “conversion and salvation play” of Yuan-Ming times. Texts in this cluster focus on the dramatic and often violent process of transmission of the Dao from master to disciple, and prominently feature Daoist protagonists. They first appeared during the Yuan period in the vivid four-acts format of the *zaju* 雜劇, and continued to be produced during the Ming, still mainly in the—by then—slightly outdated form of the *zaju*. This thematic cluster is especially important for our subject as it accounts for the first vernacular hagiographies to have some of the Qizhen, Wang Chongyang and Ma Danyang, as their main heroes, though none of these hagiographies show the Qizhen acting as a group. These earliest hagiographic plays are “Ma Danyang leads Crazy Ren three times toward salvation” (*Ma Danyang san du Ren fengzi* 馬丹陽三度任風子), and “Ma Danyang brings courtesan Liu towards salvation” (*Ma Danyang dutuo Liu hangsbou* 馬丹陽度脫劉行首). Many other *dutuo* plays feature not the Qizhen themselves but immortals canonized as Quanzhen patriarchs, most prominently Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓.⁵

By the end of the Ming dynasty, the *dutuo* plays found an echo in some late-Ming vernacular hagiographic novels. These novels as a genre were slowly evolving from a structure built on the duel between master and disciple towards the story of the gathering of a holy group. Some of them feature several *dutuo* chained to each other, as with the “Journey to the East” (*Dongyou ji* 東遊記) which tells the constitution of the group of the eight immortals (Baxian 八仙) by successive salvations of each master by the preceding one. Other collective hagiographies take canonical records of patriarchs as their sources, such as the late sixteenth-century “Biographies of the Twenty-four Holy Arhats who Obtained the Dao” (*Ersbi si zun dedao luohan zhuan* 二十四尊得道羅漢傳) which are actually a vernacular adaptation of Chan 禪 “lamp histories” (*chuandeng lu* 傳燈錄);⁶ but some other sources may have exerted their influence too, like the mutual recruiting of outlaws (as in “Water margins,” *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) or sorcerers (as in “The quelling of the sorcerers by the three Sui,” *San Sui pingyao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳) of earlier vernacular novels. In fact, such *dutuo* novels never really evolved towards collective hagiographies: they are more chained individual stories than stories of a group,⁷ and the longer ones seem to prefer to

⁵ Hawkes, “Quanzhen plays”; see also Goossaert, “Invention of an Order,” 123-6; on *dutuo ju*, see also Idema & West, *Chinese theater sourcebook*. For a short list of Yuan and Ming *zaju* with Daoist heroes, see Pan Xianyi, “Daojiao shenmei,” 25. For a recent more thorough treatment of the *dutuo ju*, see Wang Hanmin, *Shenxian xiqu*, 97-130.

⁶ On the “Biographies of the holy arhats,” see my *La Conversion de l’Orient*, 30-6.

⁷ I intentionally leave aside the two giant novels *Xiyou ji* and *Fengshen yanyi*, which could in many ways be

delay the final *dutuo* of their hero rather than to offer a group portrait of holy men. Even Lü Dongbin, hero of a thirteen-chapter novel by Deng Zhimo, “The flying swords” (*Feijian ji* 飛劍記), has to wait for the final chapter to perform a “real” *dutuo* (of He xiangu 何仙姑), after a long tale of unsuccessful encounters.⁸

The *dutuo* theme is thus only one of those encountered in a rather important group of short vernacular narratives, mostly published during the Wanli era by the Jianyang 建陽 publishers of northern Fujian. The earliest of these texts were published in the illustrated strip format (*shangtu xiawen* 上圖下文); their text was without division or divided in short sections often called *ze* 則.⁹ Towards the end of the Wanli era, they evolved towards the *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 format (vernacular novels divided into storytellers’ sequences or *hui* 回). In terms of structure and contents, these short and clearly hagiographic novels (they are all centered on a well-known god, immortal, or holy monk) could be called “religious journey novels,” which forms our second thematic cluster. They very frequently have indeed the word “journey story” (*youji* 遊記) in their title. They are journeys in several respects: journey through life, as they tell about the incarnation or descent in the world of their heroes, their trials and quest for the Dao; journey through space, when they describe in detail the places visited by their heroes and their itineraries, often relating them to still existing temples and holy places.¹⁰ They are very often also exorcistic campaigns, as they include a martial dimension and stage sometimes lengthy magic battles, even when the usual religious role of their heroes is not that of an exorcistic warrior, such as the martial episodes in the “Story of Guanyin of the southern ocean” (*Nanhai guanyin zhuan* 南海觀音傳) or in the “Journey to the East” (*Baxian dongyou ji* 八仙東遊記).¹¹

characterized as group hagiographies, especially the group of pilgrims of *Xiyou ji* collectively described as the allegorical translation of the various parts of the human body. But by their length and richness, both *Xiyou ji* and *Fengshen yanyi* transcend the narrow definition of the middle-length hagiographic novels, even though they have certainly influenced them to an important extent.

⁸ The long Chongzhen era *Han Xiangzi quan zhuan* 韓湘子全傳 by Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾, with its long conversion/duel of well-known literati Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) by his semi-mythical nephew Han Xiangzi could arguably be called such a long-delayed *dutuo*. See the preface by Philip Clart to his translation of Yang Erzeng’s novel, *The Story of Han Xiangzi*; see also Wu Guangzheng, *Baxian gushi*, 340-409.

⁹ Chia, *Printing for profit*, 245-52.

¹⁰ A “basic” feature of any hagiography, as Michel de Certeau has put it: “l’hagiographie se caractérise par une prédominance des précisions de lieux sur les précisions de temps (...) la vie de saint est une composition de lieux.” Certeau, “Une géographie du sacré,” in *L’écriture de l’histoire*, 331-5.

¹¹ One finds good analysis of the late Ming hagiographic novels, in the works of scholars like Shahar (“Vernacular Fiction and Gods’ Cults”; *Crazy Ji*); Cedzich (“Religious roots of the *Journey to the South*”); Li Fengmao (“Chushen yu xiuxing”; *Xu Xun yu sa Shonjian*); Sun Xun (*Xiaoshuo yu zongjiao*). See my review article of 2002, “Prodiges ambigus.”

One good panoramic example of late Ming hagiographic novels is provided by the trilogy of Deng Zhimo 鄧志謨. Deng, a professional late Ming writer employed by Jianyang publishers, wrote a set of three novels, each one about a well-known Daoist immortal linked with important Daoist orders of the time. These three novels together constitute a rather thematically complementary set. The difficulties of guiding towards salvation undeserving mortals dwelling in a corrupt and careless world are addressed by the *dutuo* novel “The flying swords” (*Feijian ji*), whose hero is Lü Dongbin. The difficulties of leading a pure life and of saving oneself and the others in a contaminating world is addressed by the life of Sa Shoujian 薩守堅 entitled “The jujube incantation” (*Zhouzao ji* 咒棗記). Finally, the themes of the cosmic exorcistic fight and the ordering of a dangerous world are the main subjects of the story of Xu Xun’s 許遜 epic fight against evil dragons in the “Iron tree” (*Tieshu ji* 鐵樹記). Thus, many of the patriarchs related to active Daoist schools had by the late Ming been granted a hagiographic novel; yet, no Ming edition of a hagiographic novel dedicated to the Quanzhen Qizhen patriarchs has survived to the present.

Qizhen vernacular narratives in the late Qing era

After the end of the Ming dynasty, the hagiographic *zhanghui xiaoshuo* seems to have more or less disappeared, possibly replaced by newer styles of vernacular hagiographies such as the *baojuan* 寶卷 literature. Two centuries later, during the last decades of the Qing dynasty, hagiographic novels appear anew and, this time, the group of the Qizhen features prominently among the holy persons honored by the new novels. As in the late Ming vernacular hagiographies, we find in those texts narratives of the picaresque tribulations and the difficult transmission of the Way by succeeding religious masters. We have four such extant novels written or (re)published during the Guangxu era of Qing dynasty: the “Arranged Biographies of the Patriarchs, the Seven Perfected,” *Qizhen zushi liezhuan* 七真祖師列傳 (republished with 1893 and 1903 prefaces; hereafter: *Zushi zhuan*);¹² the “Stories of the Karmic Links of the Seven Perfected,” *Qizhen yinguo zhuan* 七真因果傳 (written in 1893; first (?) printed in 1906; hereafter: *Yinguo zhuan*);¹³ the “Biographies of Chongyang and the Seven Perfected,” *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan* 重陽七真傳 (written

¹² On *Zushi zhuan*, see Zhang Ying & Chen Su, “*Zushi liezhuan kaozheng*” and “*Zushi liezhuan*”; Ning Jiayu & Wang Zhenliang, “*Qizhen zushi liexian zhuan*”; Li Mengsheng, “*Qizhen zushi liezhuan xu*.”

¹³ On *Yinguo zhuan*, see Zhang Ying & Chen Su, “*Yinguo zhuan*”; Zeng Chuanhui, “*Jiaokan ben xu*”; Ye Kai, “*Qizhen yinguo zhuan*”; Endres, *Die sieben Meister*; Eichorn, “Bemerkungen über einen taoistischen Roman.”

in 1899, printed in 1919);¹⁴ and the “History of the Golden Lotus Immortals,” *Jinlian xianshi* 金蓮仙史 (written in 1904, published in 1908).¹⁵ A cognate text is the earlier “Precious Biographies of the Heavenly Immortals the Seven Perfected,” *Qizhen tianxian baozhuan* 七真天仙寶傳 (allegedly composed by spirit-writing in 1712; first published in 1830; hereafter: *Baozhuan*), which belongs to the *baojuan* format although it also has some features of the novel—it uses the *zhanghui* format and some narrative devices such as the *queshuo* 卻說 (“let’s now tell that...”).¹⁶ Geographically, the novels come from very different parts of China: the 1903 preface of the *Zushi zhuan* was probably from the Ningbo area (see below); the author of *Yinguo zhuan* wrote his book in the Wuhou 武侯 temple in Chengdu,¹⁷ but it was first printed in Guangzhou. *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan* was composed in the holy Daoist site of Mount Wudang 武當山, to be later published in Shandong capital Jinan 濟南 during the Republican period. *Jinlian xianshi*, by an author who was probably from the Tiantai mountains (Zhejiang)¹⁸ was first published in Shanghai. *Baozhuan* is said to have been revealed in Beijing, and has been printed several times from 1821 to the end of the Qing, in places as far apart as Beijing, Gansu, or Yunnan.¹⁹

Four of these five texts have recently been very conveniently republished together by two Chinese publishers in two independent volumes, who reprinted the vernacular narratives in modern punctuation, together with some earlier canonical hagiographic material.²⁰ I will now present the four novels and the *baojuan* in turn, beginning with the two older texts, before comparing their hagiographic strategies and their impact.

The older narratives: Qizhen zushi liezhuan and Qizhen tianxian baozhuan

¹⁴ I am not aware of any study on *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*: it is briefly mentioned by Zhang Ying and Chen Su, “Ming Qing yilai de yuguai,” among late Qing novels that have not yet been reprinted in recent times. I know only one edition of this book, a Republican period print made in Jinan and kept in the Shanghai library.

¹⁵ On *Jinlian xianshi*, see Zhou Huabin, “*Jinlian xianshi*”; Zhang Ying & Chen Su, “*Jinlian xianshi*”; Wei Fengjuan, “*Jinlian xianshi*”; Luo Weiguo, “*Jinlian xianshi*”; Huang Yi, “*Jinlian xianshi xu*.”

¹⁶ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, n° 811, 203-4. *Qizhen tianxian baozhuan* is divided in 32 *hui* (chapters); another text *Qizhen baojuan* (Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, n° 810, 203) is divided in 10 *hui* only. I have not seen this last text. For a short analysis of the Daoist elements in *Qizhen tianxian baozhuan*, see Luo Yanan, “*Qizhen tianxian baozhuan de zongjiao neihan*.”

¹⁷ Preface by the author Huang Yongliang, *Quanzhen qizi zhuanji quanshu*, 70.

¹⁸ Huang Yi, “xu,” 1.

¹⁹ See Che Xilun, “Gansu de baojuan” and *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*; Duan Xiaolin, “Mingshantang shuji.”

²⁰ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*; *Quanzhen qizi zhuanji quanshu*.

The *Qizhen zushi liezhuan*, in two *juan*, tells the story of Wang Chongyang 王重陽 and his seven disciples, from the initial encounter and initiation of Wang by Lü Dongbin and Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 disguised as beggars, through the recruiting of the seven disciples, to the final meeting in Heaven of Wang, the Qizhen, Lü, and Zhongli, just after Qiu Changchun has conquered through a magic duel the Beijing monastery Baiyun guan 白雲觀 and founded the Quanzhen order.

In spite of its title, most of the narrative is actually made up by the story of Wang Chongyang and Qiu Changchun and of the *dutuo* of the latter by the former: Wang Chongyang is the main character of *juan* one, Changchun of *juan* two (and of good parts of *juan* one as well). The couple Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 and Sun Buer 孫不二 (the latter being much more in evidence) come in the third position for their place in the narrative, but they play a mostly transitory role between Wang Chongyang and Qiu Changchun. A rather long section (at the end of *juan* one and beginning of *juan* two) is taken up by the story of Liu Chuxuan's 劉處玄²¹ self-cultivation in the brothels and his subsequent conversion of Chan patriarch Bodhidharma. There is a single remarkable scene staging Hao Taigu 郝太古, but it is very brief: Hao, who was meditating, is discouraged to follow the way of stillness by Wang Chongyang, who comes back from Heaven to preach to him. The others among the Qizhen can be said to be treated quite perfunctorily.

Though existing only in a late-Qing edition, the *Zushi zhuan* is the most problematic text in our corpus as far as its date of composition is concerned: its format is very unusual for the late Qing, and its editors clearly state that they are making a re-carving (*chongke* 重刻). Is it the “old version” that the authors of the other novels refer to, disapprovingly? It is not a *zhanghui xiaoshuo*, and it is simply divided into two *juan* of roughly the same length. It is a rather short text (slightly under 44,000 Chinese characters). Its language is a rather crude *baibua*, without much of *tongsu xiaoshuo* stylistic embellishments. These features have led some scholars like Zhang Ying and Chen Su to suspect that the text could be much older than its late Qing edition:²² its format is reminiscent of the fourteenth-century *pinghua* 平話, or, later, of the short hagiographies published by Jianyang editors, or of the first Jigong 濟公 hagiography of 1569, “Records of sayings of Chan Master Crazy Ji” (*Jidian chanshi yulu* 濟顛禪師語錄).

It would thus be tempting to suppose a Ming origin for the *Zushi zhuan*, as it would be conveniently filling a gap: the lack of Quanzhen hagiographies during the golden age of this genre in the late Ming. Zhang Ying and Chen Su quote the *Zhao*

²¹ Written Liu Chuyuan 元 in the novels (except *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, published during the Republican period) in accord with the taboo on Kangxi's name observed in all Qing texts.

²² Zhang Ying, Chen Su, “*Qizhen liezhuan kaozheng*.”

Dingyu shumu 趙定宇書目, a Ming private catalogue by Zhao Yongxian 趙用賢 (1535-1596) which lists two books entitled *Qizhen zhuan* 七真傳.²³ Other Ming catalogues mention biographical works about the Qizhen under various titles: *Wuzu qizhen zhuan* 五祖七真傳 (quoted by four catalogues); *Qizhen xian zhuan* 七真仙傳 (quoted by four catalogues); *Qizhen zhuan* 七真傳 (quoted by five catalogues).²⁴ *Wuzu qizhen zhuan* could hardly be our *Qizhen zusbi liezhuan*, which does not tell the story of the Five patriarchs:²⁵ the sole Wang Chongyang is depicted in the latter text in some detail, while Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin appear only during their brief encounter with the Quanzhen founder. But one cannot exclude that one of the other two titles quoted by the Ming catalogues could have referred to the same text that was reprinted in 1893. These titles are not listed under fictional works but under such categories as *daoshu* 道書, but some hagiographic works like the *Jidian chanshi yulu*, a Ming vernacular novel, in spite of its title recalling the Chan school's logia, was listed under the *foshu* 佛書 section in some of the same catalogues.²⁶ Besides, the recent discovery of a volume, in the characteristic Ming Jianyang format, of a novel about the Fujianese goddess Chen Jinggu 陳靖姑, until then believed to have appeared under *xiaoshuo* format only in the late Qianlong era, has shown that some long forgotten vernacular Ming hagiographies do sometimes resurface.²⁷

On the other hand, one cannot exclude that the texts quoted in the Ming catalogues could as well have been other lost texts of a very different nature. One of those very texts may actually be still extant, as Günther Endres has seen in Taiwan National University's library a "Ming dynasty manuscript" entitled *Qizhen xian zhuan* that "presents separate biographical accounts for Wang Chongyang and the six male disciples."²⁸ This text on the format of the Yuan-period canonical hagiographies is obviously very different from the *Qizhen zhuan*. So, in spite of its archaic stylistic features, which may indeed betray an early (Ming?) origin, I shall resist here the temptation to further speculate on the date of the *Zusbi zhuan* and stick to the

²³ Zhang Ying, Chen Su, "*Qizhen liezhuan kaozheng*," 109. *Zhao Dingyu shumu*, in *Zhongguo zhuming cangshujia shumu*, vol. 8, 61, 81.

²⁴ I am indebted to Wang Gang (Richard Wang) for providing me with a carefully established list of Ming catalogues quoting Qizhen biographies.

²⁵ The group of Quanzhen "five patriarchs" includes its founder Wang Chongyang, together with four immortals of the past whom he took as models or inspirers: Wang Xuanfu 王玄甫 (Donghua dijun 東華帝君), Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 (Zhengyang dijun 正陽帝君), Lü Dongbin (Chunyang dijun 純陽帝君), and Liu Haichan 劉海蟾 (Chunyou dijun 純佑帝君).

²⁶ *Zhao Dingyu shumu*, 55.

²⁷ Ye Mingsheng, "Guben Chen Jinggu xiaoshuo."

²⁸ Endres, *Die sieben Meister*, 20-1. See also Boltz, *Taoist Literature*, 279-80, note 172.

objective fact that it was republished in the late Qing and was then quickly imitated by contemporary novelists.

The Baozhuān

The *Baozhuān* is the second of our texts that could claim a relatively long history. It is in four *quan* 券 and 32 chapters (*hui*). With 58,800 characters, it is about one fifth longer than the *Zushi zhuān*. Its first dated print is from 1821, but a preface claims that it was written as early as 1712.²⁹ This writing, besides, is not an ordinary one: the preface claims that the *baojuan* was revealed through spirit-writing by none other than Fuyou dijun 孚佑帝君, the imperial title of Immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓; the revelation is said to have taken place in a Shuanglong monastery 雙龍寺, in the Beigao 北臯 neighborhood of the Capital. The 1821 edition's preface is said to have been written “in the Immortal cave of Chaoyang” (Chaoyang xiandong 朝陽仙洞—Chaoyang being a Beijing district that encompasses Beigao). But the preface is now signed by a Yaoshan zi 樂山子 (“Master who takes his joy from the mountains”) and dated of the first year of Daoguang.³⁰

The *Baozhuān* text is both close to and rather different from the *Zushi zhuān*. It is close by the plot (with some inversions in the order of episodes) and includes basically most of its material. It takes more time to introduce the seven disciples in turn, and adds some details about the war against the barbarians Qiu Changchun takes part into by the end of the text. But the style and tone of its verse narrative set it further apart from the *xiaoshuo*. It is a typical *baojuan* 寶卷-style prosimetric text: each of its 32 chapters begins and ends with a heptasyllabic regular poem (*lüshi* 律詩); the body of each chapter consists in two long sequences of verse, introduced each by a short prose passage: the first sequence is in heptasyllabic, the second in decasyllabic verses. And the text is interspeded by lyrical evocations of deities, in a quite typical *baojuan* way. On the other hand it is rather singular as far as the genre of *baojuan* is concerned: though it is by no means unusual for a *baojuan* to be divided into chapters, if we refer to the standard catalogue of Che Xilun, *Qizhen tianxian baozhuān sanshier hui* is one of only a few to carry a *hui*-chapter division in their very title, just like in the contemporary *xiaoshuo*. The *Baozhuān*, with its preface from the Kangxi period and a more likely Daoguang printing date, could be a kind of “missing link” between the possible Ming hagiographic novel and the late Qing creations; but, once again, this is still rather speculative.

²⁹ This preface appears at least in two editions: the 1903 Lanzhou edition, and the 1911 Yangzhen xianyuan edition reproduced in *Sandong Shiji*, vol. 17, 663-793.

³⁰ *Quanzhen qizi zhuānji quanshu*, 388-9.

The late Qing rewritings: *Qizhen yinguo zhuan*, *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, and *Jinlian xianshi*

Let us now turn to the three clearly late-Qing novels, who have in common that they claim to have been composed because their authors felt the need to rewrite and correct older narratives, very likely to be the *Zushi zhuan* or related texts. We will see, however, that they each engage in such rewriting in a very different way.

Qizhen yinguo zhuan

The *Yinguo zhuan* is a late Qing rewriting and extension of the *Zushi zhuan*, possibly influenced by the *Baozhuan* as well. In his preface, the author Huang Yongliang 黃永亮 expresses his dissatisfaction towards existing novel(s): “there has been for a long time a book about the Qizhen, but, unfortunately, its style is not good enough to convey its meaning, and it is not interesting enough to help the reader grasp its message.”³¹ In spite of his disapproval of the “long existing book(s)” —which, by contrast to the other late Qing commentators, he does not criticize on moral grounds—Huang Yongliang’s work follows the same lines as the *Zushi zhuan*, though the *Yinguo zhuan* text is about twice as long as the former (around 86,000 characters). Its greater length is explained by the inclusion of new episodes, and particularly by material on those of the Qizhen who were absent from the *Zushi zhuan*. Many didactic sections are added through the narrative as well. But its length is also due to the adaptation to the *zhanghui xiaoshuo* format: the text is divided into twenty-nine chapters, and the features of the genre (narrator’s interventions, poems) are more systematically present than in the *Zushi zhuan*. A lot of minor corrections are made, too, such as correctly listing the successive names and styles of Wang Chongyang, whom the *Zushi zhuan* presented quite carelessly, once for all, as “having Wang as surname and Chongyang as name (*ming* 名).” Some other corrections tend to soften traits of the *Zushi zhuan* judged too crude or scandalous by the author of the *Yinguo zhuan* (see below). However, some awkward features of the *Zushi zhuan*, notably the royal encounters of Qiu Changchun taking place at the end of the Yuan dynasty instead of its beginning, are kept in the *Yinguo zhuan*. As a whole, the relationship of the *Yinguo zhuan* to the *Zushi zhuan* reminds me of the rewriting done in the seventeenth century by the “Drunken Bodhi” novel in twenty chapters (*Zui puti quanzhuan* 醉菩提全傳) on the early hagiographic

³¹ *Quanzhen qizi zhuanji quanshu*, 70.

material of the sixteenth-century *Jidian chanshi yulu*.³² a softened and longer version, presented in a more fashionable format. As a result, the *Yinguo zhuo* seems to have become the most popular Qizhen novel, and it is the only one to have been translated in foreign languages, with German,³³ English,³⁴ and Korean³⁵ translations.

Chongyang Qizhen zhuo

As its author states at the beginning of his book, the *Chongyang Qizhen zhuo* (complete title *Chongyang Qizhen yanyi zhuo* 重陽七真演義傳) is a “correction and abridgment” (*shanzheng* 刪正) of the *Zushi zhuo*. It is printed in two *juan* and divided in nine sections (*jie* 節), and is about 25,200 characters long, making it the shortest of the late Qing rewritings of the Qizhen’s story.³⁶ In his “autobiographical note” (*ziji yi ze* 自記一則), the author Yangzhen zi 養真子 (“The Master who nurtures perfection”) says that he has for a long time been harboring the intent to correct the “vulgar version” (*suben* 俗本) of Chongyang and the Qizhen stories. He does not question the sincerity of the author of this earlier version (“he was deluding himself and the others while believing that he was guiding people towards salvation by means of a precious raft”), yet he claims that it resulted in an extremely harmful text, for both his generation and the readers to come. He says to have been encouraged to amend the “vulgar version” by Lü Dongbin himself, who appeared to him in a dream he made on Mount Wudang. The immortal pressed him to produce a better version, by collating the story with “the Daoist canon and the books of the immortals” (*Daozang xianshu* 道藏仙書), in order to lead the world towards salvation, including specifically the “former author” whom Lü Dongbin suggested was suffering in Hell for his unrespectful treatment of the Qizhen. In an interesting “guidelines for correction” (*tiaoli bianzheng* 條例辨正), Yangzhen zi expounds his principles: he has used the “books of the immortals” to correct the factual errors of the “vulgar version.” Namely, Wang Chongyang has never been a butcher; there were numerous mistakes concerning names, places, dates, and the relatives of Chongyang and the Qizhen: Ma Danyang and Sun Bu’er, for example, had three children and did not leave the world without posterity, etc. He objects to

³² Shahar, *Crazy Ji*, 83-90.

³³ Endres, *Die sieben Meister*.

³⁴ Wong, *Seven Taoist Masters*.

³⁵ Published by Yǒnhwajang Segye in Seoul, 1997.

³⁶ As this book has not been recorded by the standard bibliographies, I add a short formal description: it is a xylographic print, of 117 pages, with 9 rows of 24 characters each. It was printed in 1919 in Jinan 濟南, Shandong, by the Beilong wen zhai 北隆文齋. The printing blocks are said to be kept in the Constellations temple (Xingxiu miao 星宿廟) of Nanguan 南關 district of Jinan.

obscene and vulgar expressions, and to some risqué episodes like Liu Chuxuan's self-cultivation in the brothels, and confesses to have made a few stylistic embellishments as well.

The text itself shows indeed that the author has taken care to correct many errors: the dates are systematically given, using the Jin dynasty era names, and the awkward anachronism of the end of the book corrected as Qiu goes to meet Genghis Khan, and not the last Yuan emperor. The text shows a deep respect towards the patriarchs, and the picaresque dimension of the earlier narrative is indeed softened. The author evinces a much more precise knowledge of Quanzhen Daoism, adding many technical terms and quotations: patriarchs are meditating in Quanzhen's typical "enclosures" (*huandu* 環堵). Immediately after Sun Bu'er has been sent to Luoyang, the narrative stops to describe the pious activities³⁷ of Chongyang in Shandong, and even quotes from his "Rules for the five congregations of the three prefectures" (*Sanzhou wubui huayuan bang* 三州五會化緣榜).³⁸ Later, When Qiu Changchun's female disciple, Li Chunhua 李春花, has completed her self-cultivation, Yangzhen zi adds a phrase precisizing that she have "severed the red meridian, and already laid the basis of the foundation" (*xiu de chimai zhanjin, ji yi zhubeng* 修得赤脈斬盡基已筑成), a phrase referring to the progress of the female adept towards salvation through the suspension of her menstrual cycle, which was absent from the *Qizhen zhuan*.³⁹ One could quote many other examples. Many stances (*jue* 訣), poems, or poetic prose of the patriarchs are included, and the author shows indeed a rather good knowledge of the "books of immortals" he has used. The 1918 edition recalls in several places that the book is "different from the vulgar version." However, Yangzhen zi's work still follows very closely the narrative of the *Zushi zhuan*, and, if many episodes are corrected, he refrains from enriching the original narrative itself or departing from it. It is more a corrected version than a really new novel.

Jinlian xianshi

Such restraint from innovation was absent from *Jinlian xianshi*, the last of the Qizhen novels to be written. Its author Pan Changming 潘昶明 is even more critical than Yangzhen zi towards the older versions of the Qizhen's story: "the old version of *Qizhen zhuan* (*jiuben Qizhen zhuan* 舊本七真傳), he writes, is not only

³⁷ Including the printing of morality books (*shanshu*).

³⁸ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *juan shang*, 29. The *Sanzhou wubui huayuan bang* is found in the *Chongyang jiaobuaji*, *juan 3*, a collection of texts attributed to Wang Chongyang compiled shortly after his death.

³⁹ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *juan xia*, 30. Cf. the *Qizhen zushi liezhuan* text, *Quanzhen qixi quanshu*, 225. On the severing of the menstrual cycle, also called "decapitating the red dragon," see Despeux, *Immortelles*, 243-68.

completely devoid of any Daoist meaning, but its style is loose and messy. Besides, the lives of the different patriarchs are told without any regard to the historical sources: I fear that it may have a longlasting harmful effect, inducing people to take falseness for truth.”⁴⁰ The author vows to use as many sources as he can find to repair the damage done. Indeed, though his “History of the Golden lotus immortals” includes a great deal of the same material as the other Qizhen novels, both the tone and the organization of this twenty-four chapters novel set it apart from the other four texts. The author attempted to accomplish two things at the same time: a very respectful religious history and a standard *xiaoshuo*. I would venture to say that these objectives are not met, and that the *Jinlian xianshi* is both a literary and religious failure, but an interesting text nonetheless. Let me try to briefly explain why.

The *Jinlian xianshi* is a rather lengthy novel, running to over 110,000 characters (about one third longer than the *Yinguo zhuàn*). From the *tongsu xiaoshuo* genre, the author borrows mainly the *zhanghui*-style chapter structure and the role of the verse parts: for example, we have not only *shi* 詩 regular poems by the narrator, but many *ci* 詞 irregular poems and descriptive vernacular rhapsodies (*sufu* 俗賦) as well. But the language of the narrative itself is closer to a semi-classical idiom than to the literary *baihua* more often met in the genre, and is rather heavy. It imitates some other features of older *xiaoshuo*, such as the theme of the descent on earth of a banished celestial couple: Wang Chongyang and his wife (who was alluded to by earlier Quanzhen lore, only to be abandoned by her awakened husband!) are now depicted as two celestial immortals sent to earth to accomplish their mission, in a way that recalls some early Qing *xiaoshuo* such as the “Story of the Coming from the West of Emperor Wu of the Liang” (*Liang Wudi xilai yanyi* 梁武帝西來演義) or the “Unofficial History of Female Immortals” (*Nüxian waishi* 女仙外史). Yet, in the prefaces of the book, the other Qizhen novels are criticized for their lack of accuracy and the author praises himself for his command of canonical Daoist sources: his work, entitled “immortals’ history” (*xianshi* 仙史), tries indeed to be a work of historiography, and we are carefully provided, for example, with details on changes in era-names by the Song and Jin emperors. The awkward late-Yuan setup in the first group of novels is duly corrected, and, as in the *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, we read a short account of the well-known meeting between Qiu Changchun and Genghis Khan, completely obliterated by the other three texts.

But chronological accuracy is not the only preoccupation of the author: his text is marked by a stern respect towards the Quanzhen patriarchs. Nothing impure or even controversial seems allowed to approach them. As a result, the picaresque tone

⁴⁰ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 256.

usually found in Chinese hagiographic novels of the past, and that the *Zushi zhuàn*, and, in a milder way, the *Yinguo zhuàn* and the *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, maintained, is utterly lost. This is a key point for understanding the status of the hagiographic novels in China, and we will return to it below.

Although the narrative remains centered on the story of Wang Chongyang and the Qizhen, the seven Quanzhen patriarchs are not the only Daoists to feature in the *Jinlian xianshi*: other loosely contemporary immortals appear as well. The story of Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 and Chen Niwan 陳泥丸, for example, is told in chapter 16, and we even find an account of the life of Sa Shoujian 薩守堅 at the beginning of chapter 24. This final chapter first gives a list of Daoist immortals rewarded with titles by Qubilai (the Shizu 世祖 emperor of the Yuan, 1215-1294) which includes, in this order: Lü Dongbin, Liu Haichan 劉海蟾, Wang Chongyang, then the “Five southern patriarchs” (*nan wuzu* 南五祖: Zhang Ziyang 張紫陽, Shi Xinglin 石杏林, Xue Zixian 薛紫賢, Chen Niwan, and Bai Yuchan⁴¹), and eventually the Qizhen themselves and Sa Shoujian. Shortly after, at the very end of the book, the Jade Emperor nominates to Heavenly ministerial functions Zhongli Quan, Lü Dongbin, Sa Shoujian, Liu Haichan, Zhang Boduan, Qiu Changchun, and Sun Buer. By adding the Qizhen to the so-called southern patriarchs and other influent masters, the author seems to have wished not to miss any prominent late Song or Yuan Daoist master, even at the cost of weakening the storyline of the Qizhen’s legend.

It appears that one of the main sources for the *Jinlian xianshi* may have been the work of Xu Dao 徐道. Xu began in 1645 to work on a rather original book, entitled “Comprehensive Mirror of the Immortals through History” (*Lidai shenxian tongjian* 歷代神仙通鑿 or “Records of the Common Origin of the Three Teachings,” *Sanjiao tongyuan lu* 三教同源錄).⁴² It was eventually finished and printed in 1700 only by Cheng Yuqi 程毓奇. This very long text is a fascinating attempt to write a sort of Daoist *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑿:⁴³ it retraces the religious history of China from the beginning of time to the Xuande 宣德 era of the Ming (1426-1436) by telling the story of the masters of the Three teachings (even including the story of foreign masters, such as Jesus, whose birth is briefly mentioned in *juan* 9), but it is clearly Daoist in its general inspiration. This text is hardly a *tongsu xiaoshuo*, though it

⁴¹ On the group of the “five southern patriarchs,” likely to have been a late thirteenth-century imitation of the Qizhen, see Boltz, *Taoist Literature*, 173-5. There exist two lists of these patriarchs: one beginning with Liu Cao and ending with Chen Niwan (Chen Nan), and another, followed by the *Jinlian xianshi*, beginning with Zhang Boduan (Ziyang) and adding Bai Yuchan as the last name.

⁴² The book has been republished in 1998 by Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe 中國文聯出版社 under the title *Zhongguo shenxian da yanyi* 中國神仙大演義. See also Shu Mu, “*Sanjiao tongyuan lu*.”

⁴³ The *Zizhi tongjian* (“Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government”) is the title of the well known general history of China written during the Song dynasty by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086).

is included in the current bibliographies of this genre: it uses simple classical Chinese and no storyteller style at all. It is divided in 22 *juan*, but it gathers 194 sections, which, though not called *hui*, bear as a title a pair of heptametric verses, quite in the manner of the Ming and Qing *xiaoshuo*.

The story of Wang Chongyang and the Qizhen is told on *juan* 20, sections 172 to 177, of *Lidai shenxian tongjian*. Its style and content are very reminiscent of the *Jinlian xianshi*: both combine Qizhen and other immortals' hagiography, and intersect their religious tale with events of imperial history. Some episodes may have been directly borrowed by the author of *Jinlian xianshi*, such as the encounter between Wang Chongyang and Chen Niwan and the Kongtong 崆同 meeting called by Laozi (section 172 of *Shenxian tongjian*, chapter 5 of *Jinlian xianshi*). The author of the late Qing novel could very well have used the book of Xu Dao,⁴⁴ together with canonical sources⁴⁵ and the other Qizhen novels. But with its historiographic obsession, it is closer to the first model than to its other sources.

Some features and themes of the different versions of the Qizhen novels

To better apprehend the commonalities and differences between our five Qizhen novels, let us turn now to a comparison of the way they treat a few important themes. For this purpose, I have selected four themes that seem characteristic of the more original traits of the Qizhen novels: the relationships of the masters between themselves, with women, with opponents, and with imperial power.

Masters and masters

As we have seen, the *dutuo* theme, i.e. the transmission of the Dao from master to chosen disciples, is a rather ancient one in vernacular hagiographies. This theme has a strong didactic dimension, as the master teaches the reader at the same time as he instructs his fictional disciple. More specifically, the hagiographic novel as a

⁴⁴ There is a reprint of the *Shenxian tongjian* by the Shanghai publisher Shanghai jiangdong shuju 上海江東書局, undated but very likely to be late Qing, or early Republican period. One cannot prove that the author of *Jinlian xianshi* has seen this edition, but it at least shows that Xu Dao's book was the object of some interest during that period. See Shu Mu, "*Sanjiao tongyuan lu*."

⁴⁵ Zhou Huabin, "Jinlian xianshi," lists the *Lidai shenxian tongjian* among the likely sources of *Jinlian xianshi*, together with *Qizhen nianpu* 七真年譜, *Jinlian zhenzong ji* 金蓮真宗記, *Zigang gangmu* 紫綱綱目, *Lixian zhuan* 列仙傳, and *Lüzū quanzhuan* 呂祖全傳.

genre has two specific didactic qualities: its use of vernacular, oral ways of transmitting a religious message, and its strategy of showing holy characters as feeble humans, closer to the ordinary readers than stern and remote immortals. These qualities are all in evidence in most of the Qizhen novels.

Sermons and didacticism

Early Quanzhen masters were well known for their use of semi-vernacular forms of teaching, such as *ci* poetry. In this respect, they share a characteristic with the hagiographic *tongsu xiaoshuo*, which include didactic *ci* and *shi*, as well as rhymed prose passages: chapter three of early seventeenth-century *Feijian ji*, for example, which shows Lü Dongbin being taught by Zhongli Quan, is an effective little *neidan* primer. In the same way, the novel “The Story of Han Xiangzi” (*Han xiangzi quanzhuan* 韓湘子全傳) contains “an unusually large number of poetic passages, many of which give rather profound summaries of alchemical wisdom.”⁴⁶ One could quote many other examples. Some poems of Quanzhen masters even found their way into the texts of *xiaoshuo*: well-known examples are the poems by Ma Danyang in *Xiyou ji*.⁴⁷

The Qizhen novels do contain such material: taking the *Zushi zhuan* as an example, one could quote the long (64 lines) *shi*-poem told by Sun Buer to convince her husband Ma Danyang that they should turn to religious cultivation;⁴⁸ the sermon Wang Chongyang gave to Hao Taigu to discourage him from turning exclusively to meditation as a religious exercise;⁴⁹ the rhymed prose sequence where Liu Chuxuan explains the proper way of cultivation in the brothels;⁵⁰ and the ultimate sermon proffered by Metal Star (Jinxing 金星) to Qiu Changchun at the end of his ascetic self-cultivation.⁵¹ The *Yinguo zhuan* has some similar pieces, such as a discourse on the “marvelous principles of Quanzhen” (*Quanzhen miaoli* 全真妙理) in chapter 2, but elsewhere alters much of the *Zushi zhuan* material, and prefers *shi*-poetry or long prose discourses to convey didactic contents, like the lengthy lecture given to Ma and Sun by Chongyang on the four evils and proper meditation in chapter 8. As for the *Jinlian xianshi*, one finds in it mostly didactic *shi* and *ci* verses like in *Yinguo zhuan*, but it is much more concerned with written texts: its author

⁴⁶ Philip Clart, “translator’s introduction”, Yang Erzeng, *Han Xiangzi*, xxii.

⁴⁷ Liu Cunren, “Quanzhen jiao he *Xiyou ji*,” 1344-5.

⁴⁸ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 171-2.

⁴⁹ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 194-6.

⁵⁰ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 201-2.

⁵¹ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 217-8.

likes to quote the titles of the works of the characters he stages, sometimes including quotations as well. *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan* similarly likes to quote directly from canonical texts, including many *shi* or *ci* poems.

Beside songs and sermons, our novels contain embodied ways of teaching, including thaumaturgic feats, some of which are known also from canonical hagiography. Thus, Wang Chongyang, during his journey to the south with four of his disciples, has two of them nearly freeze to death outside as he is making a huge fire inside, threatening to burn the two other disciples who remain with him in the house, while he himself quietly sits among the flames: a concluding poem links the capacity of enduring extreme cold and heat to one's progress in inner alchemy.⁵² A cruder bodily technique is used by Wang Chongyang after his death: to discourage unworthy disciples from following his casket back to Shaanxi, he causes a terribly foul odor to emanate from his dead body; when all the ordinary disciples, except the Qizhen, have fled, the horrible stench turns into perfume.⁵³ The four novels, however, do not treat equally such themes: the dead body stench episode is used to chase away the ordinary disciples in *Zushi zhuan* and *Yinguo zhuan*, but not in *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan* and *Jinlian xianshi*. In the latter text, the change into perfume takes place as soon as the disciples have reached the Shaanxi borders, becoming a mere route indication given by their dead master to his disciples.

The picaresque master

Our novels insist on the immediate appeal of the Dao felt by the would-be masters, but present their way toward perfection as full of difficulties and trials. And, in this last respect, the Qizhen and their master Wang Chongyang are often presented as hesitating and doubting humans, both heroic and sometimes ridiculous or guilty, like holy picaros.

Wang Chongyang, for example, is said by the *Zushi zhuan* to be a butcher at the time of his initial conversion by Lü and Zhongli. The theme of the converted butcher, though present in Quanzhen lore since Yuan times *zaju*, was not known to have been transferred to the person of the most holy patriarch himself before the *Zushi zhuan*. Another example of Wang's depiction as a faulty mortal is the explanation given to his famous "tomb of a living man" (*huorenmu* 活人墓).⁵⁴ In

⁵² *Quanzhen qizhi quanshu*, 188-9; see a slightly different version in chapter 14 of *Yinguo zhuan*.

⁵³ *Quanzhen qizhi quanshu*, 191. *Yinguo zhuan*, chapter 15, 82. *Jinlian xianshi*, chapter 10, 324.

⁵⁴ *Quanzhen qizhi quanshu*, 170; *Quanzhen qizhi zhuanji quanshu*, 8. Note that the canonical sources called it, slightly differently, *huo si ren mu* 活死人墓, "grave of the living dead," or "the grave of the revival of the dead" if we follow the reading of Marsone, "Accounts of the foundation of Quanzhen," 100, note 17. *Jinlian xianshi* uses the correct form *huo si ren mu*.

both *Zushi zhuàn* and *Yinguo zhuàn*, far from being the symbol of his renunciation of his earlier sinful life as usually interpreted in the canonical hagiographies, the tomb episode is an attempt by Wang to escape from his duty as the savior of the Qizhen, to shun his mission: the *Zushi zhuàn* even depicts him descending to Hell (the *difu* 地府, or subterranean palaces) to avoid going to Shandong to fetch his disciples, forcing the Jade Emperor to send the Thunder God to break open his abode and send him back into the world! More softly, the *Yinguo zhuàn* has him hide in a closed cave, which Lü and Zhongli eventually break open (without the help of the Thunder God) to take back their reluctant disciple. The *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn* depicts the tomb as a mere retreat.

If Wang Chongyang is shown dodging his duties in one instance, the weaknesses and trials of the other disciples are depicted much more graphically. Sure enough, the reputation of Wang Chongyang as a brutal and sometimes cruel master is well attested in historical sources. But, especially in *Zushi zhuàn*, the *dutuo*-confrontation between him and Qiu Changchun becomes highly dramatic: Qiu is often depicted as undeserving, and is preached to and scolded repeatedly by his master, fellow disciples, or gods sent by Heaven before he eventually completes the course of his self-cultivation training. First rejected by his master, he even receives from him a malediction when, out of curiosity, he discovers that the allegedly dead Wang Chongyang is actually begging food for his disciples, who are carrying his casket on their way back to Shaanxi. The angry Wang Chongyang then curses Qiu Changchun to experience “seven great starvations, and many small ones.” Food and hunger then become the main theme of the Quanzhen ascetic self-cultivation as the novel tells the legend of Qiu Changchun: he will be rejected by Ma Danyang too, who has come to monitor his progress, only because he has dreamed of getting some food while they were starving together in an isolated temple, inducing the Earth god to arrange a believer to bring them some food offerings! He then patiently experiences the “seven starvations,” being saved from death each time at the very last moment, until the Metal Star descends to correct his last errors.

Just at this point intervenes what I would call the “cow dung episode,” also related to food, which I will now treat in some detail as it illustrates the different ways our four novels speak of their Daoist heroes. This episode is of peculiar interest as it touches to themes such as impurity and punishment by Heaven, and violence used by the masters and gods.

The cow dung episode

In the *Zushi zhuàn*, a rich landowner named Wang is annoyed by the begging Qiu Changchun, who has been standing at his gate, sharing the food of his retainers for

more than a month. Wang orders his servants to feed the Daoist patriarch with cow dung. Qiu eats it without hesitation, but, worried about the impurity the cow dung has brought to his mouth, refrains from singing an “invocation to Miluo” (*Miluo gao* 彌羅誥) that he is used to perform regularly in honor of the Jade Emperor. Astonished at not receiving anymore this pleasant prayer, the Jade Emperor sends the Metal Star to discover the reason of Qiu Changchun’s silence and, furious upon hearing the report of his envoy, orders the Thunder God and the Dragon King to drown Wang and his whole household, with the exception of a charitable servant girl, Li Chunhua, who has been feeding Qiu secretly in spite of her masters’ orders. Qiu Changchun, as he has been instructed by the gods, has Li Chunhua riding a stone lion while the flood kills all living beings in the region.⁵⁵

Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn tells the episode in nearly the same way as the *Zushi zhuàn*, just adding a striking short narrative: when the Jade Emperor is surprised by Qiu’s silence, he sends Divine officer Wang (Wang lingguan 王靈官) to look after him: unable to spot anywhere in the human world the white vapours (*baiqi* 白氣) usually floating about Qiu Changchun’s head—they have been temporarily obscured by the unclean food Qiu was obliged to take—the Divine officer descends in Hell to search for him: he cannot find Qiu in any of the courts or jails, but notices that Qiu’s name is inscribed in the “Register of Life and Death” (*Shengsi bu* 生死簿) as fated to die of starvation. Wang order the Emperor of Fengdu Hell 酆都天子 to have the register corrected: Qiu, the “first laureate among heavenly immortals” (Tianxian zhuangyuan 天仙狀元), is henceforth registered as fated to eventually ascend to Heaven and has no business with the Netherworld anymore.⁵⁶

The same episode is told in chapter 25 of *Yinguo zhuàn* with some minor changes: Wang is depicted, not only as a miser, but as a cruel local tyrant, and a desecrator of temples as well.⁵⁷ He does give excrements (horse dung in this case) to Qiu Changchun as food, but, if Qiu accepts it, he does not eat it, which causes the theme of the impurity preventing him from chanting his prayer to the Jade Emperor to disappear from the narrative, together with the direct intervention of the god. The deleted story is replaced by a rather well-crafted passage: Qiu Changchun has warned Li Chunhua to regularly check the stone lion: as soon as the eyes of the statue would turn red, she will have to run to a temple in the mountains. She tells the story to a young herd-girl, who, to make fun of her friend, rubs the statue’s eyes with red clay: as soon as she has done so, a storm breaks out, and the

⁵⁵ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 219-20.

⁵⁶ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, *juan xia*, 21-2.

⁵⁷ The movement for desecrating temples, launched by Kang Youwei in 1898 remained a hotly debated topic during the late Qing and early Republican periods when the novels were written. See Goossaert, “1898.”

two girls have just the time to run away with their life. After the flood has receded, the stone lion remains as the only trace of the Wang estate.⁵⁸ In the *Zushi zhuan* passage, Qiu Changchun himself rubbed the lion's eyes with red clay, and the stone statue actually floated to save the girl, the only survivor of her clan. Even though this touch of marvel disappears in the *Yinguo zhuan* version, the girl's joke involuntarily beginning the Heavenly punishment of the Wang clan is a quite brilliant narrative feature.

In the *Jinlian xianshi*,⁵⁹ the story is considerably weakened: the angry Wang just snatches from Qiu Changchun a dumpling that one of his workers was giving him as alms, and feeds it to a dog. The Jade Emperor, informed by the Heavenly inspector (*gongcao* 功曹) in duty, sends the lethal flood. Warned by Qiu Changchun, the servant girl Li Chunhua is saved, as well as the craftsmen and workers employed by Wang. They escape simply by running to the hills, and the theme of the magic stone lion just vanishes. The *Jinlian xianshi* narrative appears here bland and unconvincing: Wang's much less offensive behavior makes his punishment by the gods seem much out of proportion and cruel, and the poetic value of the episode is essentially lost. This episode illustrates well the different ways by which the four novels treat their object: Qiu Changchun accepts impurity in the *Zushi zhuan*; he is simply confronted with it in the *Yinguo zhuan*; and he is totally exempt of any impure encounter in the *Jinlian xianshi*. *Chongzhen Qizhen zhuan* does not shun the theme of impurity, but takes the opportunity, though the journey to Hell of Divine officer Wang, to remind the reader of Qiu's future exalted status.

Masters and women

Another very important common trait of the Qizhen novels is that all of them stress and value the role of women, even though *Zushi zhuan* and *Yinguo zhuan* are more radical than *Jinlian xianshi* or *Chongzhen qizhen zhuan* in this respect. Sure enough, they place themselves in a long *xiaoshuo* tradition of stressing the role of female magicians. Besides, the theme of female superiority was recurrent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels.⁶⁰ But at the same time, they bring a kind of hagiographic justice to the many women adepts of a rather feminized order such as Quanzhen.

⁵⁸ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 133-4.

⁵⁹ *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, chapter 13, 346-9.

⁶⁰ McMahon, "Superiority of the Talented Woman."

Sun Buer

It is a well-known fact that the only woman of the group, Sun Buer, has been included among the Qizhen only at a relatively late stage, and somewhat reluctantly.⁶¹ The Qizhen novels, however, treat her as a very different figure. In the *Zushi zhuan* (and in a milder way in *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan* and *Yinguo zhuan*) her role is absolutely outstanding: she is the one who preaches to her husband enjoining him to lead a religious life, even before they have met with Wang Chongyang. A little later, she becomes the first among the Qizhen to be enlightened by the master. Later again, she completely defeats her husband in a duel of thaumaturges. The *Zushi zhuan* even avoids the well-known requests made by Wang Chongyang that his two disciples must separate as a couple before being enlightened.

In the *dutuo* of Sun Buer by Wang Chongyang as told by the *Zushi zhuan*, Sun becomes concerned with the brevity of life and comes to request Wang to lead her immediately to salvation. Wang begins by suggesting that she should follow some “inferior or middle vehicles” (*xia, zhong sheng* 下、中乘), more fit for the woman that she is. As Sun refuses and requests to be led through the superior vehicle (*shangsheng* 上乘), Wang objects that she is too beautiful to be so taught, and Sun without hesitation goes to burn her face with hot oil. Wang accepts her on the spot as “his first disciple, who will ascend early to Heaven,” and gives her a poetic-prose lecture on how to cultivate the Dao. The narrator concludes with a description of her face, like the one of “a Monkey Sun who has been burnt by a fire (*huoshao de Sun houzi* 火燒的孫猴子).”⁶² I believe that there is more than a coincidence in this small intertextual note. Of course, it is facilitated by the common surname of Sun Buer and the Monkey King Sun Wukong 孫悟空. But if we consider the dialogue between Wang Chongyang and Sun Buer, it follows quite closely Subhūti’s teaching to Sun Wukong in the first two chapters of *Xiyou ji*: in both cases, we see the master offering first to teach minor religious techniques, then the refusal of the disciple, who has to successfully overcome a trial before being taught the superior way.⁶³ The place of the two episodes also seem related: this awakening scene takes place at the beginning of the narrative, before the “proper” awakening cursus, that is, the itinerary of Qiu Changchun and the other Qizhen in our novels, and the pilgrimage to the West in the *Xiyou ji*. Last, I would like to suggest that Monkey Sun and Sun Buer may have yet something more in common: they are both somewhat

⁶¹ Marsonne, “Accounts of the Foundation of Quanzhen,” 109; Despeux, *Immortelles*, 121-2; see the English version in Despeux & Kohn, *Women in Taoism*. See also Eskildsen, *Early Quanzhen Masters*, 204 n. 13.

⁶² *Quanzhen qizhen quanshu*, 182.

⁶³ *Xiyou ji*, 15-20.

illegitimate in their quest of religious awakening: Sun Wukong as a non-human, a *jingguai* 精怪, and Sun Buer as a woman, a *yin* 陰 being.

Li Chunhua

An interesting feature of the Qizhen novels is that they all add a second woman-disciple, of Qiu Changchun this time: Li Chunhua. Li appears during the cow dung episode as the charitable maid secretly feeding Qiu. Just after having her life saved by the master, she turns to a quest for a higher level of salvation. In the *Yinguo zhuan*, she has to engage in religious life alone, resolving to retreat in a temple to be a lay adept (*daiifa xiuxing* 帶髮修行); she will have to wait for the end of the story to be freed from her mortal bonds by Qiu. In the other versions however, the girl is preached to by Qiu Changchun, but in an interestingly very contrasting manner. In the *Zushi zhuan*—and *Chongzhen qizhen zhuan* as well—Qiu asks Li Chunhua not to retreat in the mountains to cultivate the Way—which is what she is actually doing in the *Yinguo zhuan*. This would be mere “small cultivation” (*xiao xiuxing* 小修行), which only brings minor achievements. Much better is the “great cultivation,” which consists in “going to the noisy places of this world of dust, to feign craziness, begging along the streets, and sleeping at night in dilapidated temples.” When Li Chunhua objects that, as a woman, she would expose herself to be molested, Qiu Changchun simply answers that “if she follows the Way with a true heart, she will be under the guard of Dragon gods.” Totally different is the discourse found in *Jinlian xianshi*: in a very patriarchal language, Qiu Changchun warns her that it is very difficult for women, with their “five leaks body” (*wulou qu* 五漏軀)⁶⁴ to attain enlightenment. However, it is fortunate that Li Chunhua is still a virgin, and, if careful to sever the seven passions and “kill the six thieves” (the six senses), she has some hope to perfect the Way. He stays with her a few months before eventually sending her begging as a crazy mendicant, not to make her practice the “great cultivation” alluded by the *Zushi zhuan*, but just because it would be improper for her as a woman to share his abode any longer.

The theme of the humble female servant dutifully caring for the beggar immortal is a classical one. It could have been taken from the Lü Dongbin lore, for example from the *Feijian ji* where He Xiang is precisely depicted as such a young servant girl of a rich household.⁶⁵ In the vernacular Qizhen novels, it reinforces the feminization of the saintly group by making her one of the main converts outside

⁶⁴ For an example of the use of the expression of “five leaks body” as specifically designating female bodies in a late Ming novel, see *Chan zhen yishi*, chapter 6, 80.

⁶⁵ One may add that, in *Feijian ji*, He Xiang attains immortality on the order of Lü by burning herself in a stove, not unlike the way Sun Buer responds to Wang Chongyang’s demand in the *Zushi zhuan*.

the Qizhen themselves—even though the *Jinlian xianshi* temperates such a feminization by having Qiu Changchun accept her rather reluctantly.

The role of female disciples is crucial in all three Qizhen novels. The first disciples of the two main masters are indeed women: Sun Buer is the first convert made by Wang Chongyang after his enlightenment, and Qiu Changchun converts Li Chunhua just after the end of his initial ascetic self-cultivation. Even the very circumspect *Jinlian xianshi* maintains this female anteriority. The *Jinlian xianshi* actually goes a step further: strangely, as this novel is usually quite obsessed with historical accuracy, it adds a third holy woman to its narrative. It grants Wang Chongyang a saintly wife, sent down with him by Heaven, and whose name is... He Yuchan 和玉蟾, who is well-known in Quanzhen history as an early companion of Wang Chongyang, but a male one!

The courtesans

Female disciples are not the only women that Quanzhen masters encounter on their fictional journeys. Another case in point are the prostitutes whom Liu Chuxuan uses as both temptresses and self-cultivation partners during his stay in the brothels. In all five versions, Liu is indeed going to the brothel with the aim of getting rid of sexual temptations: to his shame, he has just been turned out by Heaven and sent down to Earth because, while visiting the Jasper pool of goddess Xiwang mu, he has given a lustful glance to the celestial maidens in attendance. But the four novels, as well as the *baojuan*, take very different stances towards the brothel episode. The *Baozhuan* treats the girls, poetically, as earthly flower immortals, but avoids any sexual allusion. The *Zushi zhuan*, however, comes close to make the prostitutes the protagonists of an acceptable sexual “dual cultivation” (*shuangxiu* 雙修): Liu is depicted as performing with the girls a kind of erotic game which, if resulting eventually in severing lust and desire forever and strengthening his body, does not exclude actual intercourse. All three late Qing rewritings take issue with this episode and take pain to chasten it. In the *Yinguo zhuan*, the narrative presents the episode only as a case of dominated temptation: Liu is likened to a little child “who acts playfully without understanding what it is all about”; he causes the “three old gentlemen,” that is his heart, ears, and eyes to turn still, deaf, and blind, so he may lie besides the beautiful courtesan Like-Jade, oblivious to her beauty, as if she was “a stinking bag of flesh” or a “powdered skeleton.”⁶⁶ The *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, with stronger accents, criticizes the “vulgar version” in his “guidelines for correction”: the “vulgar version’s” author has mistaken Liu’s firm self-refinement

⁶⁶ *Yinguo zhuan*, chapter 20, *Quanzhen qizi quanshu*, 106-7.

(*lianji chixin* 煉己持心) in the brothel for “depravity and sexual vampirism” (*xingyin caizhan* 行淫採戰). In his rewriting, he takes pain to have Liu sleeping between two very young dwellers of the brothel, the sisters Ruo 弱, who are still virgins and will remain so...⁶⁷ At the end of the episode, the author dutifully quotes the famous misogynistic poem about the dangers of the “sixteen-year old” beauties, whose soft thighs hide a lethal sword which will behead the unsuspecting man...⁶⁸ Eventually, the two girls will be bought back by Liu and will leave the brothel to practice chaste self-cultivation in a cave near Luoyang, where Liu will come later to take them formally as his two disciples and instruct them with the help of poems on female self-cultivation used in the past by Lü Dongbin for his female disciple Zhang Zhennu 張珍奴.⁶⁹ As for the *Jinlian xianshi*, it simply ignores the whole story.

Masters and rivals

One of the more frequent traits of hagiographic novels from the Ming onwards is the depiction of the masters’ ability to defeat opponents. The Qizhen novels are no exception, though it would be exaggerated to describe them as exorcistic journeys like the late Ming hagiographic *youji*. They do however include important scenes of magical contests (*doufa* 鬥法), in a way sometimes reminiscent of the earlier hagiographic novel tradition. Specifically, all four novels (as well as the *Baozhuannan*) include encounters with Buddhist rivals.

The first rival to appear is none other than the Chan patriarch Bodhidharma. After Liu Chuxuan has been practicing for a while in the brothels, Bodhidharma turns up, believing that this stray Daoist will be an easy convert to his teachings. But, conversion actually works the other way round: Liu kindly invites Bodhidharma for lunch, then, with the heat of his sole body, cooks cakes on his belly, then boils water in the same way to prepare tea for the Indian patriarch. The impressed Bodhidharma converts on the spot to Quanzhen Daoism! To defeat Bodhidharma, in a brothel, through a feat of inner alchemical magic, is highly significant: belonging to the category of barbarian monks, of long-standing erotic connotation,⁷⁰ the presence of Bodhidharma in such a place is not a surprise. It is

⁶⁷ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *juan shang*, 56-7.

⁶⁸ This poem can be found in many Ming and Qing novels, for example in chapter 79 of *Jin Ping Mei cibua*, 1050, commenting on the death by sexual exhaustion of wastrel Ximen Qing.

⁶⁹ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *juan xia*, 16-7.

⁷⁰ Durand-Dastès, “Désirés, raillés, corrigés,” and Charleux, “Les ‘lamas’ vus de Chine.”

also related to the old “awakening of prostitutes” lore,⁷¹ illustrated by both Buddhist and Daoist holy men. But here the situation is, not without humor, reversed: it is the visiting holy man who turns out being converted by a man who is apparently a sinful long-time brothel dweller. Moreover, master of “wall meditation” Bodhidharma, though a figure of Buddhist origin, is sometimes also considered as a champion of inner alchemy: his “conquest” is indeed a glorious trophy for the Qizhen.⁷²

A second Buddhist master is depicted by all three novels, but in quite contrasted ways: Chan Master White Cloud, Baiyun chanshi 白雲禪師. This second fight against a Buddhist opponent is this time won by Qiu Changchun, and has the important result to gain for the Quanzhen order both imperial protection and control over the Beijing monastery Baiyun guan 白雲觀. In *Zushi zhuan*, *Chongzhen Qizhen zhuan*, and *Yinguo zhuan*, Baiyun chanshi is a Buddhist master dear to the heart of the devout Yuan empress. A divination contest is organized between the two masters, asked to predict the sex of the child the empress bears. As the two masters have correctly silently foreseen, the child is a girl. But, while the Buddhist monk announces so, Qiu Changchun predicts instead a baby boy. Just after the birth, Qiu commands the gods to swap the imperial child with the male heir of the barbarian king he has just defeated in a preceding episode. The Buddhist monk, who had vowed to go into exile if defeated (Qiu Changchun, not intending to lose, had staked his own head instead!) has to give his monastery to Qiu Changchun: the holy site of the Baiyun guan has thus been won to the Quanzhen.⁷³

The *Zushi zhuan*'s White Cloud episode ends with the departure of the defeated master. But *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *Yinguo zhuan*, and *Jinlian xianshi* have them later become very good friends, reconciling in their persons the Two teachings, but also uniting religious tradition with vernacular literature: chapter 29 of the *Yinguo zhuan* thus explains that, in order to educate the world, Qiu Changchun writes the *Xiyou ji* (the 100-chapters novel about Xuanzang's pilgrimage, not the narrative of Qiu's journey to meet Genghis Khan), and has it sent to Baiyun. Baiyun is delighted by the gift, and responds by writing the other supernatural late Ming novel “Enfeoffment

⁷¹ Lévy, “Le moine et la courtisane.”

⁷² *Chongyang qizhen zhuan* tells the story too, but seems somewhat uneasy about using Bodhidharma to strengthen the glory of the Qizhen: he is called “the barbarian monk” (*buseng* 胡僧), and, though being described as a man coming from the West, meeting emperor Liang Wudi, and meditating in Shaolin monastery, he is not actually named.

⁷³ *Zushi zhuan* and *Yinguo zhuan* both add here a last magical fight episode: a disciple of defeated Baiyun chanshi builds a new Buddhist monastery called Xifeng si 西風寺 (Monastery of the Western wind), as “the western wind dissipates the white clouds.” But this name magic is efficiently countered by Qiu Changchun.

of the gods” (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義)! A concluding poem praises the two novels as complementary tools to guide humans through the dangers of existence.

Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn reverses the order of this episode: it is an angry Baiyun, who, in his exile, writes the *Fengshen yanyi* to make fun of Daoism (*jifeng daojia* 譏諷道家). However, Qiu laughs as he receives the book, exclaiming that “it was meant to defame us but actually praises us”. He replies by writing the *Xiyou ji*, whose heroes are holy Buddhist monks, and thus “humbles Daoism and exalts Buddhism” (*qian dao zun fo* 謙道尊佛). Baiyun is so touched that he experiences a complete “Buddho-Daoist” enlightenment: after three years of self-cultivation, he has “completely nourished the embryo of the Dao” (*daotai yangquan* 道胎養全) and after nine years realizes “the fruit of arhathood” 証阿羅漢果).⁷⁴ Besides, preoccupied with historical accuracy, the author has the Baiyun guan given by the Mongol emperor before the divination duel takes place, and, while keeping the theme of the conquered monastery, makes Baiyun chanshi’s Beijing abode a vague “Great Buddha temple” (Dafo si 大佛寺), not the Baiyun guan...

The *Jinlian xianshi* also features the exchange of novels and wisdom between Changchun and Baiyun, but goes even further by emptying it of any conflict: forgotten is the battle for the conquest of Baiyun guan, or any other monastery, as Qiu Changchun meets Baiyun chanshi at the end of his own journey to the West to meet Gengis Khan, in a remote Western monastery named Divine vulture monastery (Lingjiu si 靈鷲寺): the Buddhist monk thus finds himself at the very place occupied by the Buddha in the Ming novel *Xiyou ji*... The Daoist nonetheless gains the upper hand: Baiyun chanshi first writes the *Fengshen yanyi*, and, when Qiu Changchun reads it, he discovers that it is indeed a holy work, but that in it the “fire nature is not yet extinct” (*huoxing weimie* 火性未滅), and then writes the *Xiyou ji* as a complement and correction.

One of the four novels even adds another prestigious Buddhist cleric subjugated by the prestige of Qiu Changchun: the Dalai Lama. Telling of some of the miracles that happened after Qiu’s departure from this world, the author of *Chongzhen qizhen zhuàn* recalls that the Qing Qianlong emperor, doubting that the body of the Quanzhen patriarch had self-mummified as he was told, has his grave opened to examine his remains: but as soon as the gravediggers begin their work, a marvelous flavour fills the city and the palaces. The frightened emperor immediately orders the profanation to be stopped. But the flavour is carried by the winds far away, and is perceived by the “Living Buddha of Tibet” (Xizang hufo 西藏活佛), who states that “There is a saint in the Middle Kingdom, The Buddha Prabhūtaratna has come

⁷⁴ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, *juan xia*, 39-40.

to this world again.” He orders the “Lama Panchen” 喇嘛班禪 to go and deliver to the emperor of China a precious alms-bowl, and receives in exchange the begging-calabash (*yanpiao* 岩瓢) of Changchun, “which can still be seen there nowadays.”⁷⁵ There is little doubt that, in those last year of the Qing dynasty, showing the then famous and prestigious Tibetan hierarch paying tribute to Qiu would have seemed a welcome adjunction to his small retinue of seduced Buddhist monks.

The polemics and fights between Buddhists and Daoists, at the Chinese court as well as in literature, have indeed a very long history, and our late Qing novelists may have had many precedents in mind, one of the closest stylistically and religiously being the well-known duel between Lü Dongbin and Huanglong chanshi 黃龍禪師.⁷⁶

Another religious opponent appears in *Yinguo zhuàn*, chapters 17 and 18. His name is Hunran zi 渾然子, or Master Confusion, and he is to be defeated by Wang Yuyang. This master represents a more dangerous kind of opponent: by contrast to the unambiguously Buddhist Baiyun or Bodhidharma, he is a mixed character, without a precise affiliation, a “neither Buddhist nor Daoist adept” (*bu seng bu dao de xiuxing ren* 不僧不道的修行人). He pretends to be connected with many Buddhist and Daoist masters though, claiming to be in very good terms with Zhang Sanfeng 張三丰, Lü Dongbin, Bodhidharma, and Jigong! It is very classical for religious novels to criticize “outside the Three teachings” masters,⁷⁷ suspected to be dangerous heretics (*xiejiao* 邪教). But a typical late-Qing trait is added: Hunran zi is also an anticlerical who preaches against both the Buddhist and Daoist clergy. I assume that the *Yinguo zhuàn* novelist, a Quanzhen sympathizer in a growingly anticlerical world,⁷⁸ added this last opponent for an apologetic purpose.

Masters and kings

A peculiar category of characters in our novels, sometimes opponents of the Qizhen, sometimes their protectors, are the kings and emperors, either Barbarians or Chinese. A character encountered in the *Zushi zhuàn*, the *Chongyang qizhen zhuàn*,

⁷⁵ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, *juan xia*, 46.

⁷⁶ On the Lü-Huanglong opposition, see the unfortunately unpublished master thesis of Isabelle Ang (Ang, “Un conte polémique”), and Wu Guangzheng, *Baxian gushi*, 73-109.

⁷⁷ For an example, see the portrait of Changzhua fanzhi 長爪梵志 in the late-Ming novel *Dongdu ji* 東度記; my *La conversion de l'Orient*, 135-44.

⁷⁸ On Chinese anticlericalism as a whole, see Goossaert, ed., *L'Anticléricalisme en Chine*, and, on the late Qing and early Republican anticlerical atmosphere, Goossaert, “1898.”

the *Yinguo zhuàn*, and the *Baozhuàn* is a Western barbarian king called Dawang 達王 or “Tartar king”.⁷⁹ Qiu Changchun responds to the Emperor’s request to quell this unruly borderlands monarch, who has been repeatedly and bloodily defeating the Chinese armies sent against him. In both *Zushi zhuàn* and *Yinguo zhuàn*, Qiu Changchun has only to appear in the clouds above the battleground to obtain the submission of the unruly barbarian, but, it should be noted, the *Baozhuàn*, for this episode, stages a full-fledged magic battle with opposed magico-strategical mazes (*zhen* 陣), that Qiu eventually wins. In any case, Dawang will be “rewarded” for his submission by having his baby-son stolen by Qiu and swapped with the daughter of the Emperor of China.

One striking feature of both the *Zushi zhuàn* and *Yinguo zhuàn* is their awkward relationship with Chinese history. They depict Qiu Changchun as being called by the Mongol Court, but his hosts are the last Yuan emperor, Shundi 順帝 (r. 1333-1367), and his minister Tuotuo 脫脫 (1314-1355)! *Jinlian xianshi* as well as *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn* take a completely opposite stance, being very careful to replace the lives of Wang Chongyang and the Qizhen in their proper historical context, and having Qiu visit only Gengis Khan. As for the *Baozhuàn*, it cares even less than the *Zushi zhuàn* and *Yinguo zhuàn* for historical accuracy, as he has Qiu Changchun meeting an unnamed “Song emperor” (Song di 宋帝).

I still cannot fully explain the choice of the last Yuan emperor as a patron of Qiu Changchun. Zhang Ying and Chen Su ascribe the *Zushi zhuàn* to an early Ming author, who would have been a Yuan loyalist, but I am not really convinced by this hypothesis.⁸⁰ If it had been a blatant ideological stance, the certainly late-Qing author of *Yinguo zhuàn* could have corrected it, and he did not. Perhaps the choice of the last Yuan emperor was a kind of compromise: Yuan Emperor Shundi, a barbarian king ethnically, but also the Son of Heaven in a settled dynasty, just about to be followed by a new Chinese monarch and dynasty, was maybe more acceptable than the great foreign conqueror Gengis?

The two other late Qing’s novels, however, do correct the *Zushi zhuàn*’s “mistake.” *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn* does not seem to find Gengis’ appearance

⁷⁹ It is not here a proper name but more likely a rather vague term meaning “Tartar king”: the character *da* 達 was often used instead of the proper *da* 韃 to refer to northern or northwestern barbarians as a whole, in Ming times often meaning Mongols, and Mandchous in Qing times.

⁸⁰ Zhang and Chen speculate on the appearance of a general Zhu Liangzu 朱良祖, who is defeated by the Tartar king, making Qiu’s help necessary: they think that this officer may be identified with Zhu Liangzu 朱亮祖 (d. 1380), indeed a general of the last Yuan emperor who defected to Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang. Showing this traitor to the Yuan suffering the shame of an imaginary defeat at the hands of the barbarians would be a veiled criticism of the Ming founder and his partisans. See Zhang Ying & Chen Su, “*Zushi liezhuan kaozheng*,” 110-1.

problematic: he even places the attack of the “Tartar king” and Qiu’s magical appearance on behalf of the Emperor at the very moment of his meeting with Gengis, who will reward Qiu with the title of “Perfect Changchun, master of armies and protector of the State” (Huguo junshi Changchun zhenren 護國軍師長春真人). Actually, Yangzhen zi seems above all concerned by strengthening the prestige of the Qizhen by insisting on the various emperors having conferred titles and protection onto the Daoist patriarchs, be they Song, Jin, Yuan, or, later, Qing emperors.

Jinlian xianshi also frankly addresses the issue of the meeting between Qiu Changchun and Gengis Khan, and one could be tempted to assume that this last novel is not more concerned than *Chongzhen Qizhen zhuàn* with patriotic themes. I believe that it is actually quite the contrary: *Jinlian xianshi* is continuously obsessed with patriotism, as it is careful to replace the Qizhen in the history of Han Chinese, and not barbarian dynasties. Its last chapter ends precisely with the fall of the Song dynasty, and, as a matter of fact, in spite of its precise depictions of the political moves of Jürchen or Mongol monarchs, it is mainly concerned, from the beginning, with the Han-Chinese “legitimate” dynasty: the narrative is systematically interrupted by moves and decisions of the Song emperors and their generals. At the beginning of the novel, Lü Dongbin leads the soul of Three Kingdoms hero General Zhang Fei 張飛 to perform an exorcism on behalf of the Song emperor, announcing at the same time that Guan Yu 關羽 will soon be reborn as General Yue Fei 岳飛 in order to save the dynasty from the Barbarians. This new patriotic preoccupation of Lü Dongbin is rather amusing if one recalls that several Ming novels (“Journey to the East,” *Dongyou ji*; “Story of the generals from the Yang family,” *Yang jia jiang yanyi* 楊家將演義) had him participate in the wars of the Song... on the Barbarians’ side! When the *Jinlian xianshi* introduces Wang Chongyang, it is to portray him as a patriot and a military officer disgusted by the corruption of the time and the lack of efficiency of the anti-barbarian resistance—a disappointment that leads him to turn to Daoist self-cultivation.⁸¹

Of course we can expect late Qing works such as our Qizhen novels to contain patriotic elements and disguised anti-Manchu themes. It is quite obvious in the case of *Jinlian xianshi*, but the choice of the *Zushi zhuàn* and *Yinguo zhuàn* of the Yuan dynasty’s last monarch as a patron of the Quanzhen patriarch keeps a part of its mystery.

⁸¹ On the patriotism of Wang Chongyang as a late Qing theme, see Marsone, “Accounts of the Foundation of Quanzhen,” 95.

Authors and editors of the Qizhen novels

In spite of their rather different attitude towards the Qizhen masters and their teachings, our late Qing Qizhen novels claim a similar religious motivation: all of them are published by self-styled Quanzhen or Daoist followers. Yang Mingfa 楊明法 and Pu Bingzeng 濮炳燴, the authors of the *Zushi zhuan*'s 1893 preface, call themselves “Longmen disciples” (*Longmen dixi* 龍門弟子). Huang Yongliang 黃永亮, the writer of the *Yinguo zhuan*, claims to be a “Junior follower of Longmen (*Longmen houxue* 龍門後學)”: according to his preface, he took residence, coming back from Shaanxi to Sichuan, in the Zhuge Liang temple in Chengdu. It is there that he wrote his book.⁸² Even if his real name remains a mystery, we know more about Yangzhen zi, the author of *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, thanks to the “autobiographical note” he placed at the beginning of his book. He seems to have been a devout Daoist for most of his life, and used since childhood to see and worship Lü Dongbin in his dreams. When he was a young adult, he got tuberculosis and was ill for around ten years until a healing formula (*zhenjue* 真訣) was transmitted to him by “an eminent person” (*gaoren* 高人) and cured him. Over the following ten years, he became the disciple of five (Daoist) masters, studying the *Daozang* and Daoist books. In 1892, he met in Chengdu the “Master Alchemist Yuanlang” (Yuanlang lianshi 圓郎煉師), a descendant of Hao Taigu, who was working as a diviner: impressed by his knowledge, he became more convinced than ever of the importance of the Qizhen.⁸³ In 1898, while in Shanghai, he met in the house of the well-known merchant and reformer Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (Luofu he shanren 羅浮鶴山人, 1842-1922) the Daoist priest Zidong daoren 紫東道人 (Li Lishan 李理山, 1873-1956, abbot of the Monastery Fuxing guan 福星觀 atop Yuhuang shan 玉皇山 in Hangzhou), whom he told about a dream he had made about climbing to a mountain temple with a golden summit. Zidong daoren told him it was for sure Mount Wudang, where Yangzhen zi took abode in the Zixiao 紫霄宮 temple, and wrote his book the following year after receiving the command to do so from Lü Dongbin in a dream.⁸⁴

Pan Chang 潘昶, the author of the *Jinlian xianshi*, adds his religious name, Tainan Qingyang daoren 台南青陽道人; according to Huang Yi, he may well have been a Tiantai shan 天台山 Daoist priest, as Tainan (“south of Tai”) could refer to the

⁸² *Quanzhen qizi zhuanji quanshu*, 70.

⁸³ This meeting with the descendant of Hao Taigu is not told in the biographical sketch, but inserted in the text itself, in a section devoted to praising the quality and virtue of some of the Qizhen's offspring: *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, *juan xia*, 48.

⁸⁴ *Chongyang Qizhen zhuan*, “ziji yi ze 自記一則.”

holy Daoist site of Chicheng shan 赤城山, often called “South gate of Tiantai” (Tiantai zhi nanmen 天台之南門).⁸⁵

All of these authors vowed to produce a “religiously correct” version of the patriarchs’ hagiography. The 1903 edition of the *Zushi zhuàn* even carries a preface by Lü Dongbin himself, using his frequent disguised name of “Daoist Hui” (Hui daoren 回道人, which is a classic graphic pun for the two *kou* 口 constituting the surname Lü 呂). It was indeed far from rare to find spirit-writing (*fujū* 扶乩) written prefaces or comments of hagiographic *tongsu xiaoshuo* by well-known deities, and it is still the case today. The *Baozhuàn* makes a similar claim, in a preface allegedly written during the Kangxi era, stating that the book itself was revealed by Lü Dongbin through spirit-writing.

The authors’ claims to being Daoists and to write proper Daoist stories were taken seriously by later readers, as we can see from the novels’ later reeditions and reprints from the late Qing to the present. The *Zushi zhuàn*, which may have been considered as outdated by the beginning of the twentieth century, disappeared indeed quickly after its two late Qing publications, in 1893 and 1903: it was not to be reprinted until its inclusion in the late twentieth-century Qizhen anthologies. Though the late Qing print does not mention a publisher name, the 1893 “Hui daoren” preface does carry a place name, as it has been written “in the new hall of Nanping, Zhenyi” (*yu Zhenyi Nanping xinyuan* 於鎮邑南屏新院) and the second preface carries the signature “Zhou Zudao 周祖道 from Zhenyi 鎮邑.” Zhenyi could be the Zhejiang port city of Zhenhai 鎮海, near Ningbo 寧波: there was actually a Zhou Zudao from Zhenhai, who was active at the same time as a writer of morality books (*shanshu* 善書): he is the author of the anthology entitled “Seeing through the world,” *Kanpo shijie* 看破世界, published by the Suzhou Manao jinfang 瑪瑙經房 in 1910. It is not unlikely that the Lü Dongbin revealed preface could have been written in a Zhenhai spirit-writing hall,⁸⁶ under the supervision of Zhou Zudao or his associates.

In terms of religious publishing in modern times, the most popular of our five Qizhen narratives seems to have been the *Yinguo zhuàn*. Most of its publishers in the first half of the twentieth century have been religious institutions: its first known publisher was one such venture, the Guangzhou-based Wenzaici shanshu fang 文在茲善書坊, founded by Tan Deyuan 談德元 (1857-1910), a religious activist linked to “Way of Former Heaven” (Xiantian dao 先天道) circles. His publishing house did print many “Three teachings” books and a wide selection of morality books in

⁸⁵ Huang Yi, “xu”, 1.

⁸⁶ One may speculate that this hall could have Jigong as a main deity, as “Nanping”, the burial place of Jigong in Hangzhou, is often associated to his figure and titles.

the last decades of the Qing.⁸⁷ The *Yinguo zhuban* was republished in Sichuan in 1914, the province where the book was first written, by the Zhigu tang 治古堂, a Chongqing publisher.⁸⁸ Then, in 1918, another Sichuan editor, a charitable hall known for having published many morality books and religious works, the Huishan tang 會善堂,⁸⁹ reprinted this novel. In 1923, another Shanghai religious book publisher, known for its publishing of spirit-writing material from the Huizhou 徽州 area, the Hongda shanshu ju 宏大善書局, printed it again.⁹⁰ A 1936 Tianjin “new print” (*xin kan*) of *Yinguo zhuban*, seems to have been a religious venture as well, carrying as a prefatory material 64 *jueju* poems and a *lüshi* poem expounding the basis of Inner alchemy, whose number intended to mirror respectively the 64 *Zhouyi* hexagrams and the Taiji.⁹¹ After 1949, the *Yinguo zhuban* continued to receive attention among religious circles in Hong Kong and Taiwan: in 1969 and 1974, a version held in the archives of the temple Qingsong guan 青松觀 of Hong Kong was published. In 1979, the Juexiu gong 覺修宮 temple in Taipei serialized it in the journal *Daojiao wenhua* 道教文化, and, later, in a slightly different version, in the *Zhengyan zazhi* 正言雜誌 (1981-1983).⁹² The book was included in Taiwan in the well-distributed collection of Daoist texts *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 in its volume 5 of series 8, under the title *Beipai qizhen xiudao shizhuan* 北派七真修道史傳.⁹³ The mainland’s 1999 collection *Daoshu jicheng* 道書集成 was later to include it under the

⁸⁷ On this publisher of religious books, see Yau Chi-On, *Shan yu ren tong*, 73-5. Yau, relying probably on the 1893 author’s preface, even gives a publishing date as early as 1893 for the *Yinguo zhuban*. Wenzaici shanshu fang was indeed active in the 1890’s, thus it is not impossible that the book has been printed that early. However, all the other sources give 1906 as the date of the Wenzaici shanshu fang edition.

⁸⁸ A Zhigu tang edition of *Yinguo zhuban* is kept in Shanghai library.

⁸⁹ Huishan tang was operated by a spirit-writing cult embedded in a charitable association named Cishan hui 慈善會. Huishan tang published works such as *Xingshi tu* 醒世圖 (1918), *Kunfan jizheng yunyu* 坤範輯證韻語 (n.d.), and *Xingmi lu* 醒迷錄 (1919), and, according to one of its leaders, *Xiyou yuanzhi* 西遊原旨, *Wenchang xiaojing* 文昌孝經, *Qulao shi* 劬勞詩, *Sizi bianmeng* 四字便蒙, *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇, *Yinzhi wen* 陰鸞文, *Yuli zhi baochao* 玉歷至寶鈔, *Wannian li* 萬年歷, *Wugong mojie jing* 五公末劫經, *Duoxin jing* 多心經, *Jinguang zhou* 金光咒, and *Jiehui zhou* 解穢咒. These works circulated rather widely, sometimes beyond the borders of Sichuan. See Wu Zehan 吳澤涵, “Hechuan Huishan Tang.” I am indebted to Philip Clart for providing references about the religious background of Huishan tang and the books it published.

⁹⁰ Tarumoto Tetsuo, *Qingmo Minchu xiaoshuo mulu*, 546; Yau, *Shan yu ren tong*, 78. About the publishing of Huizhou 徽州 spirit-writing texts by the Hongda shanshu ju, see Wang Zhenzhong, “Du shanshu.”

⁹¹ The Tianjin edition was published by *Zhonghe yinshuaju* 中和印刷局. The poems, entitled *Wuzhen chanyou* 悟真闡幽, “expounding the mysteries of the awakening to perfection,” had been written in 1930 by a self-styled ‘Man of the Dao of the Snowy mountain of old Ninghai’ 古宁海雪山道人. The text of this preface and a part of the poems (based on a fragmentary edition) can be found on the blog of Li Junhong 李均宏, librarian at Chang’an daxue; see Li, “*Wuzhen chanyou* qiu bu.” A sample of this book can be found on the Hanan collection at Harvard University library.

⁹² Boltz, *Taoist Literature*, 279-80 note 172; Endres, *Die sieben Meister*.

⁹³ Taipei: Ziyou chubanshe, 1965. I thank Vincent Goossaert for this reference.

same title.⁹⁴ In the meantime, in 1994, ten thousand copies of the the Wenzaici shanshu fang edition were reprinted by the Yunquan xianguan 雲泉仙館, a Hong Kong temple dedicated to Lü Dongbin, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its founding.⁹⁵

In 1990, an English translation of the *Yinguo zhuàn* was made by Eva Wong, and published by Shambhala, a Boston-based press known for producing books marked by a New-age style of religious orientalism. Interestingly, the translator replaced her work in the context of her own Daoist religious education: the Chinese text was given to her in 1988 by her master, a Hong Kong Daoist named Moy Lin-Shin living in Canada, with the following instruction: “You must translate the book called *Seven Taoist Masters*, for it is one of the best introductions to the teaching of Daoism.”⁹⁶ A further recent development related to the *Yinguo zhuàn* takes us back to China’s mainland. There, the scholar of Daoism Zeng Chuanhui 曾傳輝⁹⁷ recalls that he himself discovered the *Qizhen zhuàn* in 1993, through Taiwanese colleagues, during a “cross-strait” meeting of Daoist scholars held at the Beijing Baiyun guan. A year after this first contact, Zeng Chuanhui was given by “a Baiyun guan employee” (*gongzuo renyuan* 工作人員) two “overseas-printed versions” of the novel, apparently circulating in Chinese Daoist circles abroad. Then, during a trip to the US, he met Eva Wong and was definitely convinced of the value of the book as a text for the vulgarization of Daoist studies. It was only after these encounters that he discovered an older Mainland edition of the *Yinguo zhuàn*, which had been published in 1933 by the Baiyun guan, with annotations explaining Quanzhen terms. Zeng had this text republished in 1999 by the Tuanjie chubanshe 團結出版社 in Beijing, together with a translation of Eva Wong’s preface and two further additions by himself: a selection of *Zhouyi* 周易 hexagrams as an opening for each of the 29 chapters, and the text of the *Jinlian zhengzong xianyuan xiangzhuàn* 金蓮正宗仙源像傳 (“Illustrated Biographies of the Immortal Spring of the Correct Lineage of the Golden Lotus,” a 1327 canonical hagiography of the Qizhen).⁹⁸ What is remarkable in this story is how those successive foreign encounters have led to the diffusion of a kind of catechetic book, by a mainland general publisher, based on a Republican period Baiyun guan-sponsored edition. The religious diffusion of the *Yinguo zhuàn* continues nowadays: its text can be found on the website Quanzhen zangjing ge 全

⁹⁴ *Daoshu jicheng*, vol. 60.

⁹⁵ Yau, *Shan yu ren tong*, 258, 272. On Yunquan xianguan, *idem*, 298-301.

⁹⁶ Wong, *Seven Taoist Masters*, xvi.

⁹⁷ Zeng is the author of an annotated edition of the *Liezi* in the *Daozang* version, and of a *Yuandai cantong xue* 元代參同學 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2004).

⁹⁸ Zeng Chuanhui, “Jiaokan ben xu,” 1-4.

真藏經閣 (“Pavilion of the Quanzhen Canon”),⁹⁹ with the Chinese text, completed by Eva Wong’s English translation, together with seventeen other texts. It is the only *xiaoshuo* to have found its way into the list, and it is in prestigious company, following the *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 and the *Daodejing* 道德經, and preceding the *Huangting jing jingyi* 黃庭經精義, the Heart sūtra, *Zhouyi Cantong qi* 周易參同契, *Xingming guizhi* 性命圭旨, etc.

Though neither *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn* nor *Jinlian xianshi* were as successful as *Yinguo zhuàn*, their early publishing history is very similar to the latter’s. To my knowledge, *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*’s was published only once, but in interesting circumstances: it was printed in Jinan in 1919, and the carving blocks, says the title page, were stored in the Constellations’ temple (*Xingxiu miao* 星宿廟) of Jinan’s Nanguan district. This very temple was since the previous year the seat of the General office for the organization of the Virtuous league of the Nations of the world (*Wanguo daode hui choubei zongchu* 萬國道德會籌備總處). Its main leader, Jiang Zhongxiu 江鍾秀 (?-1926), is the prefacer of the book. Jiang was a self-taught Confucian activist: he had written in Qing times a “Basics for the veneration of Confucius” (*Zun Kong da yi* 尊孔大義), whom he had tried to get endorsed by Confucius’ descendants. He was interested in Daoism as well, as he had written a “Correct principles of Daoism” (*Daojiao zhengyi* 道教正義) that he had similarly sent to the Heavenly Master in Jiangxi for approval. His Virtuous league of the Nation of the world aimed at encouraging the Great unity of of mankind by uniting Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam under the guidance of Confucianism. The League was to receive in the early 1920’s the support of prominent politicians and thinkers including Yan Xishan 閻錫山 (1883-1960) and Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and would eventually reportedly count hundred of thousands of members.¹⁰⁰

The cover page of the book contains an attack on “the students of materialism” (*wuzhi xuejia* 物質學家) who dominate the world, and reaffirms the necessity of the belief in gods and retribution in order to save mankind. In his preface, Jiang recalls with emotion that he had been reading Daoist books all his life. If only the world could revert to times like those of the Qizhen, when kings were protecting men of the Dao, when people were not afraid of hardships and were competing for virtue and not for power and wealth, such things as the bloody European war would not have happened! He recalls that, in 1915, he has, weeping, side by side with his son

⁹⁹ <http://www.qztao.url.tw/bookpage.htm>, accessed April 10, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ “Jiang Zhongxiu.”

Jiang Xizhang 江希張,¹⁰¹ vowed to found the Virtuous league of the Nations of the world, and ends his preface hoping that the Qizhen will help him to fulfill this oath.

Jinlian xianshi began its career under a similar context: it was first published by the Yihua tang 翼化堂, a well-known publisher founded in 1857 in Shanghai by Zhang Xuetao 張雪堂,¹⁰² that published many morality books as well as Buddhist and Daoist¹⁰³ texts continuously until the late 1930's. In 1933, another Shanghai religious publisher, the Jingshu liutong chu 經書流通處, reprinted it.¹⁰⁴ However it was to be later mainly included in collections devoted to novels, such as the 1989 *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi* 中國近代小說大係 (“Complete collection of recent [i.e., late Qing and Republican period] Chinese novels”, Jiangxi renmin chubanshe), or the *Shida gudian shenguai xiaoshuo* 十大古典神怪小說 (“Ten famous ancient novels about strange facts and gods,” Shanghai guji chubanshe) in the late 1990's.¹⁰⁵ *Jinlian xianshi*, whose author was convinced to have written the most respectful and religious contribution to the Qizhen legend, seems to have been taken eventually less seriously by religious circles than the “vulgar” hagiographies in opposition to which it was written.

By contrast, the *Baozhuan*, perhaps more religiously marked from the beginning by its *baojuan* format and contents, has an undiscontinued history of religious diffusion. As Che Xilun has shown, *Baozhuan* belongs to a group of hagiographic *baojuan*, “actually composed by the Way of Former Heaven or other branches of popular religious groups”, which were printed and widely circulated all over China.¹⁰⁶ Its preface states clearly that it was revealed by Lü Dongbin himself in a Beijing temple. Its opening parts refer to the goddess Wuji laomu 無極老母, worshipped by many non official religious groups.¹⁰⁷ Though the publisher of the 1820 Beijing print is unknown, all its other late Qing or early Republican prints seem linked to religious organizations: the 1860 edition was by a “altar of all-

¹⁰¹ Child prodigy Jiang Xizhang (1907-2004), though only eight at the time, was already the author of a “Colloquial explanation of the Four classics” (*Sishu baihua jieshuo* 四書白話解說). He had the honour to be attacked by Lu Xun himself in a 1918 article for having “blended rubbish from Confucians, Daoists, Buddhist monks and Christians, with adjunction here and there of a few ghost tales” (*Xin Qingnian*, 5-4, 15-10-1918).

¹⁰² On Yihua tang, see Yau Chi-On, *Shan yu ren tong*, 76-8.

¹⁰³ Including texts related to some of the Qizhen like poems on women's self cultivation like Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧 (1880-1969)'s “Annotated poem's by Sun Buer on women's inner alchemy” (*Sun Buer nüdan shizhu* 孫不二女丹詩注). See Liu Xun, *Daoist Modern*.

¹⁰⁴ Tarumoto Tetsuo, *Qingmo Minchu xiaoshuo mulu*, 340.

¹⁰⁵ Tarumoto Tetsuo, *Qingmo Minchu xiaoshuo mulu*, 340-1.

¹⁰⁶ Che Xilun, “Gansu de baojuan,” 46.

¹⁰⁷ *Qizhen tianxian baozhuan*, Yangzhen xianyuan edition (1911), reproduced in *Sandong shiyi*, vol. 17, 676. Note that the modern reprint in the *Quanzhen qizi zhuanji quanshu* does not include this passage.

encompassing salvation” (Guanghua tan 廣化壇) from Northeast China; the 1909 one was by the “Hall for the gathering of sages” (Juxian tang 聚賢堂), and the 1911 print by a “Garden of immortals for the nourishment of perfection” (Yangzhen xianyuan 養真仙苑). More recently, the *Baozhuan* has easily found its place in religious collections, being for example reprinted in the recent mainstream Daoist collection *Sandong shiyi* 三洞拾遺. Its digital text may also be found on a typical “Three teachings” website named Confucius-Taijiquan 孔子太極拳. It figures in the “Daoist section” of a page proposing from top to bottom Confucian classics, Taijiquan classics, Daoist classics, Buddhist classics, Christian classics, Muslim classics, and “other books.”¹⁰⁸

As we have seen, all of the Qizhen novels or prosimetric narratives have circulated or still circulate in both lay and religious contexts, but the religious editions quite clearly dominate the stage, especially in late Qing or Republican times: all of our novels have been published or republished by morality books publishers, charitable societies and/or religious halls connected with spirit-writing cults. Among its authors, publishers, or supporters, we find immortals speaking through spirit-writing or dreams, self-styled or ordained Daoist priests, tradition-minded reformers, and philanthropists and editors of spirit-writing and morality books. One interesting feature of this piece of literary and editorial history is that it illustrates quite well the porosity between “orthodox” Daoism and charitable societies, connected or not with spirit-writing cults: for example, texts like the *Yinguo zhuan* have been published in the same years by orthodox institutions like the Baiyun guan as well by publishers connected with various “heterodox” cults like the Way of Former Heaven. On the other hand, a text very likely to have been composed by “sectarian” hands like the *Baozhuan* can now reappear in an official collection like *Sandong shiyi*. But this porosity is hardly surprising, considering the importance taken by spirit-writing cults, especially those of Lü Dongbin, in the compilation of Quanzhen texts in late imperial times.¹⁰⁹

It is thus no surprising at all to meet the well-known immortal at several points of this history, even in seemingly contradictory roles: as a commentator of the old “vulgar” novel as well as an inspirer of the corrected version by Yangzhen zi.

Conclusion: What is proper hagiography and what is “only” *xiaoshuo*?

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.kztjq.com>, accessed April 10, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ See Esposito, “Longmen Taoism,” 201-5 and her chapter in this volume.

In the second preface (1903) of the *Zushi zhuan*, Hui daoren (Lü Dongbin) praises the book as a valuable material for Daoist self-cultivation. Sure enough, the preface says, it is only “shallow studies” (*qianxue* 淺學), but, as it has been written with a sincere heart, it can be a good base for serious self-cultivation. But in the same preface, the immortal dismisses another tale, very popular at the time:

The plays about “three times flirting with Bai mudan” (*sanxi bai mudan* 三戲白牡丹) that are played nowadays are actually about the dissolute immortal (*sanxian* 散仙) of Han times Zhang Dongbin 張洞賓: How could I be like that? But as soon as evil talks have become the gossip of ordinary people, all the water of the Yellow river would not be enough to clean it.

What is particularly striking in this remark is that, if the Lü Dongbin *sanxi baimudan* was played in theatres all over China in late Qing times, and was turned into a long *tongsu xiaoshuo* of 72 chapters (*hui*) at about the same time as the appearance of our Qizhen novels, it was indeed a development of the Lü Dongbin legend, already present in its early stages, and has not always been discarded as apocryphal.¹¹⁰ But late Daoist authors often felt uneasy about showing the celebrated immortal practicing a kind of sexual vampirism—or, at least, sexual alchemy—and often avoided the story or pretended that its Daoist protagonist was another man, just like in the *Zushi zhuan*'s preface.¹¹¹ Ironically however, the text of the *Zushi zhuan* itself contains, as we have seen, a scene of sexual alchemy that all the late Qing Qizhen novelists will take care to correct.

What is religiously acceptable, and what is not, has always been a matter of subjective evaluation and clearly changed with time. *Tongsu xiaoshuo* was clearly attractive as a way to communicate with a broader public, but, with its picaresque masters and often risqué anecdotes, has always been exposed to the accusation of desecration. One may recall a late Ming incident in Nanjing, when the believers of the religious group founded by Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩, incensed by the publication of the *Sanjiao kaimi guizheng yanyi* 三教開迷歸正演義, a religious novel whose hero was their founding master, destroyed the book and the printing blocks in their anger.¹¹² Later critics,¹¹³ though, have generally found this very novel to be quite

¹¹⁰ On this legend, see Wu Guangzheng, *Baxian gushi*, 184-217.

¹¹¹ See Wu Guangzheng, *Baxian gushi*, 189-90. It is often a Yan Dongbin 顏洞賓 of the Song dynasty who is said to have misbehaved with Bai mudan.

¹¹² Dean, *Lord of the Three in one*, 128-9.

¹¹³ See for example Berling, “The romance of the three teachings”; Lin Shanwen, “Sanjiao kaimi de Lin Zhaoen

sympathetic towards the ideas and the character of Lin Zhaoen, and some have even ventured to suggest it was produced within the circle of Lin's adepts. Nowadays, Ming or Qing hagiographic novels about Chen Jinggu,¹¹⁴ Mazu, Jigong,¹¹⁵ and Han Xiangzi,¹¹⁶ can be found in temples or among adepts who hail them as authentic versions of the saint's history, sometimes annotated and commentated through spirit-writing revelations by the gods or immortals themselves. In other times and places, they could as well have been rejected in the dark zones of disrespectful fantasies. To meet public success, novels about religious heroes cannot be too outrageous, but certainly not too respectful either. A novel such as *Yinguo zhuàn* seems to have been found, by its late Qing and early Republican readers, to be a proper compromise: lively and straightforward in many ways, but refined and self-conscious enough, it sounded neither as old-fashioned as the *Zushi zhuàn*, nor as stern and pedantic as the *Jinlian xianshi*.

But the judgment on a text is very much dependant on the global context of the comparable texts circulating at the same time. This chapter, having dealt diachronically with the legacy of hagiographic novels, has indeed not stressed enough the comparison with contemporary late Qing works. The late Qing and early Republican period was a time of intense production of “traditional” novels. To properly evaluate the impact and status of the novels of that period, one would have to take into account many books that have never been reprinted since their first publication.¹¹⁷ Actually, a short look at some currently available sources shows that several nineteenth-century Daoist authors seem to have considered the novel as an acceptable medium for popularizing the Way. Quanzhen Master Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734-ca 1820) has authored a Daoist commentary of the novel *Xiyou ji*, reviving the religious legitimacy of the Ming well-known odyssey—the reader may recall that the three late Qing authors of the Quanzhen novels all pictured the *Xiyou ji* as a religious novel written by Qiu Changchun, though lending it various meanings. Beside the Qizhen novels, late Qing China saw actually several novels written with the avowed intent to seriously propagate Daoist ideals: as early as 1853, a Master Sweeping the dust [of the world] (Fuchen zi 拂塵子) wrote “The Pavilion of Embroidered Clouds” (*Xiuyun ge* 綉雲閣) a 143-chapter long novel centered on the theme of Daoist self-cultivation:¹¹⁸ it was printed in Sichuan in 1869 and 1918.

sixiang.”

¹¹⁴ Berthier, *La Dame-du-bord-de l'eau*, 21.

¹¹⁵ Shahr, *Crazy Ji*, 230-1, 241.

¹¹⁶ Herrou, *La vie entre soi*.

¹¹⁷ Zhang Ying, Chen Su, “Ming Qing yilai de yuguai.” See also Chen Dakang, “Jindai xiaoshuo de shuli miaozhu”; Wang Zengbin, “Jindai xiaoshuo wenti.”

¹¹⁸ Fuchen zi, *Xiu yun ge*. On Fuchen zi and his novel, see Kang Xiaofei, “Fox spirits and Daoism.”

In 1868, another novelist who signed Stainless Man of the Way (Wugou daoren 無垢道人) wrote a new version of the Eight immortals' legend, "Story of the Completion of the Way by the Eight Immortals" (*Baxian dedao zhuàn* 八仙得道傳). In many ways, this new novel corrects and chastens the older Ming times *Baxian dongyou ji*: Lü Dongbin is for example shown "three times testing" (*sanshi* 三試) Bai mudan, instead of "three times flirting" (*sanxi*) with her.¹¹⁹ Just as Yangzhen zi after him, Wugou daoren depicts himself in a preface as a long-time pursuer of the Dao, without stating however that he is an ordained Daoist. Born in Sichuan¹²⁰ in the first half of the nineteenth century, he received the lessons of a Daoist priest named Zhiyuan 志元 in the Qingyun guan 青雲觀 of Chengdu. After wandering for years in troubled South China, he took abode in 1852 in the Beijing Baiyun guan, where he completed his novel in 1868. In words very close to those of Hui daoren's preface to *Zushi zhuàn*, he confessed in his preface that he resorted to this popular medium in order to propagate as widely as possible a message that current-day Daoists did not understand well anymore, but that he was aware that, by doing so, he could not use "profound or eminent" words (*wu qu yu gao shen ye* 無取於高深也).¹²¹

We may find several reasons indeed to explain the production of the late Qing Qizhen novels. One could be that such vernacular works represented continuity: Was not *tongsu* language a well-established way of transmitting the Dao, from the songs of the Quanzhen masters to the late Ming *xiaoshuo* masterworks like *Xiyou ji*? An additional motive could have been to bring improvements to this tradition and to resurrect the format of earlier hagiographic novels while correcting their content or style: Wugou daoren's rewriting of the Eight immortals' novels or the corrections brought to *Zushi zhuàn* by the three late Qing novelists would belong to this category. A third motive could have been the wish to counterbalance the influence of "lesser" contemporary *xiaoshuo*, mainly magic fantasies about Lü Dongbin as a gallant immortal such as the Sanxi bai mudan cycle, or the growing genre of fantastic martial arts novels. The authors of these martial art fantasies, which were becoming very popular at the time, did not feel at all restrained in their use of ancient Daoist or Buddhist figures as thaumaturgic warriors. Authors of "serious" hagiographic *xiaoshuo* like the Qizhen novels may have been wary of this trend: they

¹¹⁹ See Wu Guangzheng, *Baxian gushi*, 207.

¹²⁰ It is rather striking to note that at least three nineteenth-century Daoist novels (*Xiyun ge*, *Baxian dedao zhuàn*, and *Yinguo zhuàn*) seem to have been written in Sichuan; Yangzhen zi, the author of *Chongyang Qizhen zhuàn*, met the descendant of Hao Taigu during a trip in Chengdu.

¹²¹ Wugou daoren, *Baxian dedao*, 4.

would probably have disapproved Republican-period magic martial fantasies like, for example, those of Huanzhu louzhu 還珠樓主.¹²²

Nowadays, the same dialectic of acceptable and non acceptable novels continues. When an author such as Jin Yong 金庸, nourished by the tradition of martial arts novels but at the same time animated with a “serious” quest for historical truth, decided to take Wang Chongyang and Qiu Changchun as heroes in his *She diao yingxiong zhuan* 射雕英雄傳, first published in 1957-1959, he would likely have partially met the approval of some of the late Qing authors of Qizhen novels, but stirred their anger on other points at the same time. However, being one of the most widely read Chinese authors of the twentieth century, his choice of some of the Qizhen to nourish his narratives could at the same time have long enduring effect on the Qizhen imaginary and religious career of Quanzhen Daoists.¹²³ Such are the strengths and paradoxes of the *xiaoshuo*.

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¹²² Pen name of Li Shoumin 李壽民 (1902-1961).

¹²³ In her paper for the Berkeley conference, Kang Xiaofei quotes a contemporary Quanzhen monk recalling that he was first attracted in the 1980’s towards Quanzhen Daoism by reading Jin Yong’s accounts of Wang Chongyang and Qiu Changchun; see also David Palmer’s chapter in this volume.

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Quanzhen Daoists in Chinese Society and Culture, 1500-2010.

Liu Xun & Vincent Goossaert, eds.

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