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# **Conflicts and Anxieties over Money**

## **in Late Ming Vernacular Stories**



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## List of Acronyms and Story Abbreviations

- GJ *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993).
- TY *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993).
- HY *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993).
- EK *Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010).
- XSY *Xing shi yan* 型世言 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993).
- SDT *Shi diantou. Zui xing shi. Jing wu zhong* 石點頭. 醉醒石. 警寤鐘 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1994).
- WSX *Wusheng xi. Lian cheng bi* 無聲戲. 連城璧 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992).

Book Titles	Abbreviations of Stories' Numbers and Titles	Story Titles
<i>Jingshi tongyan</i>	5. "Lü Dalang"	"Lü dalang huanjin wan gurou" 呂大郎還金完骨肉 (Lü Yu Returns the Silver and Brings about family Reunion)
	31. "Zhao Chun'er"	"Zhao Chun'er chong wang Caojiazhuang" 趙春兒重旺曹家莊 (Zhao Chun'er Restores Prosperity to the Cao Farmstead)
<i>Xingshi hengyan</i>	2. "San xiaolian"	"San xiaolian rangchan li gaoming" 三孝廉讓產立高名 (Three Devoted Brothers Win Honor by Yielding Family Property to One Another)
	18. "Shi Runze"	"Shi Runze tanque yu you" 施潤澤灘闕遇友 (Shi Fu Encounters a Friend at Tanque)
	34. "Yiwen qian"	"Yiwen qian xiao xi zao qi yuan" 一文錢小隙造奇冤 (For One Penny, a Small Grudge Ends in Stark Tragedies)

	37. “Du Zichun”	“Du Zichun sanru Chang’an” 杜子春三入長安 (Du Zichun Goes to Chang’an Three Times)
<i>Erke pai’an jingqi</i>	22. “Chi gongzi”	“Chi gongzi henshi zaopi qian, xian zhangren qiaozhuan huitou xu” 痴公子狠使噪脾錢, 賢丈人 巧賺回頭婿 (A Stupid Young Master Spends Money Intensely for Thrill; A Good Father-in-law Cleverly Makes His Son-in-law Mend His Ways)
	37. “Cheng ke”	“Die juqi Cheng ke dezhu, san jiu’e haishen xianling” 疊居奇程客得助, 三救厄海神顯靈 (Guest Cheng Receives Help in Hoarding and Speculation; A Sea Goddess Appears to Save Him from Danger Three Times)
<i>Xing shi yan</i>	23. “Baiqiang”	“Baiqiang dongxin jiaoyi jue, shuangzhu rumeng siyuan ming” 白鏹動心交誼絕, 雙豬入夢死冤明 (A Friendship Ends due to the Temptation of Silver; An Unjust Death is Redressed Because of a Dream about Two Pigs)
<i>Shi diantou</i>	8. “Tanlan han”	“Tanlan han liuyuan mai fengliu” 貪婪漢六院賣 風流 (An Avaricious Man Sells Romance with Six Courtesans)
<i>Wusheng xi</i>	8. “Gui shuqian”	“Gui shuqian huoren huan duzhai” 鬼輸錢活人還 賭債 (A Ghost Loses Money and a Living Man Returns the Debt of Gambling)

## Introduction

In the highly commercialized modern society, money is needed and required in almost every part of our life, and the pursuit of it is perfectly justified and even valued and encouraged. However, throughout the history of various cultures, money-making and money-mindedness were regarded as a moral peril. As Parry and Bloch point out, in Western Europe, the attention devoted to money, trade, and avarice as a moral peril during the eleventh or the twelfth century grew with the rapid urban growth and a major expansion of market trade.<sup>1</sup> A similar development of the money economy appears significantly in late Ming China. As represented in stories written in the sixteenth or the seventeenth century China, people in this changing socio-economic context seem to have had a intriguing perception and interpretation of money and money-making. I was immediately fascinated with the ideas and the world reflected in these stories, where money and money-making are not necessarily seen as a danger to mores but are indeed closely linked to certain conflicts and anxieties.

Although money has a long history in China, as Von Glahn states, “perhaps at no time did money have greater symbolic import than in the late Ming period, when domestic economic growth and the infusion of foreign silver engendered a rapid expansion in its use.”<sup>2</sup> Especially in the highly commercialized regions, money irrupted extensively into the daily life not only in cities, but also into towns and villages. More currency in circulation than ever boosted the business boom, on the one hand, and threatened social orders and relationships based on the agricultural economy, on the other. In this sense, an exploration of the representation and mentality regarding money of the late Ming period is rather worthwhile.

The present study is concerned with several such late Ming vernacular stories. The textual corpus mainly covers stories from the *Sanyan* collections (entitled respectively, *Gujin xiaoshuo/Yushi mingyan* 古今小說/喻世名言 (Stories Old and New or Illustrious Words to the World, 1620), *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (Stories to Caution the World, 1624) and *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Stories to Awaken the World, 1627) by the eminent litterateur Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646); the *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案驚奇 (Slapping the Table in Amazement, 1628 and 1632) collections by Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644); *Shi diantou* 石點頭 (The Rocks Nod Their Heads, unknown) by Tianran chisou 天然痴叟 (no life dates); *Xing shi yan*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, “Introduction: Money and the Morality of Exchange,” in *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, ed. J. Parry and M. Bloch (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Von Glahn, “The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51:2 (1991): 651.

型世言 (Exemplary Words for the Time) by Lu Renlong 陸人龍 (no life dates); and *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 (Silent Operas, ca. 1658) by Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1679/80).<sup>3</sup> It attempts to contribute to the discussion about various aspects and attitudes concerning money as represented in the corpus in this period.

The publication of the vernacular stories in the present corpus approximately coincides with China's second half of the “silver century,” 1550-1650.<sup>4</sup> Although the motifs adopted tended to be derived from storytelling or written classical tales, it is evident that the detailed contents of these stories were largely influenced by contemporary society and culture in evolution, which was similarly the case for novels, such as *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (Golden Lotus, or The Plum in the Golden Vase). However, several features of the vernacular story make this genre more feasible for the analysis of money-related issues. First, these collections, comprising over 260 stories, cover a wide range of themes and motifs, which represent the society and culture of the late Ming from different angles, providing abundant materials for analysis. Second, as compared with novels, vernacular stories are generally ruled more by the mode of authorial comment. Compared with contemporary novels, the comments in the story were often more extensive and even more elaborated, especially in the prologues and epilogues.<sup>5</sup> Third, the writers/editors, such as Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu valued their comparatively realistic depiction of life.<sup>6</sup> In order to make their stories valuable for moral cultivation and lesson to the public, they rendered the plot of public importance.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, more or less influenced by Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) and the cult of feeling (*qing* 情), the writers/editors were inclined to stress love and other feelings in various important relations.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, on the one hand, these stories reflect the mentality of these scholar writers/editors and their social milieu to some extent. On the other hand, they could serve as informative source materials for analyzing and interpreting money-related representations in everyday life concerning a variety of social groups, including scholar-officials, villagers, courtesans, lower merchants, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> There is evidence that *Xing shi yan* was published around 1632 and *Shi diantou* was published between 1641 and 1646. According to Hanan, the actual author of *Xingshi hengyan* is also Langxian, but the present study would not differentiate much regarding authorship. See Liu Meiyuan 劉美源, “Duanpian xiaoshuoji *Xing shi yan* ji qi chengshu niandai” 短篇小說集《型世言》及其成書年代, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 古典文學知識 3 (2000): 84-87; Ji Dejun 紀德君, “You *Shi diantou* de yize benshi tuice qi chengshu shijian” 由《石點頭》的一則本事推測其成書時間, *Wenxian* 文獻 2 (2009): 188f. See also Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 120f.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 113.

<sup>5</sup> Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

There has not been much research on stories regarding conflicts and anxieties over money in the present corpus. However, some excellent studies are rather inspiring for the present thesis. Ariel Fox's article traces money's symbolic meanings and embodiments chronologically, referring to tales and stories in which money transforms into human form.<sup>9</sup> It provides me with important methods of analyzing the changing images of money from medieval to late imperial China. Another work, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700*, by Von Glahn, is also crucial to my study, for it provides a comprehensive survey of different policies and comments about copper cash and silver as currencies, which facilitates my understanding of the market economy in late imperial China. The collection of studies by Yu Ying-shih, in his book *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen*, offers significant discussions on social order, Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist moralities, and the merchant class in imperial China, especially in the Ming-Qing period.<sup>10</sup> It helps me understand the changing attitudes towards money and money-making from a more macroscopical perspective. In regard to the texts per se, Patrick Hanan's *The Chinese Vernacular Story* is a comprehensive study on features of the vernacular story, the life experiences and the ideas of four of the five writers/editors, and their vernacular works. Therefore, my analysis of the texts is indebted primarily to the studies mentioned above and their interpretive approaches.

The texts that constitute the main body of the corpus are eleven stories in these collections. For convenience, the titles are abbreviated by keywords in transcription.<sup>11</sup> In accord with a typical feature of the vernacular story, most of these eleven stories were written on the basis of one or several classical tales or a storytelling script. For example, the source text of "Du Zichun" was written in the Tang dynasty (618-907),<sup>12</sup> which allows a study of the textual history and a comparison of different versions. Some other stories share motifs with contemporaneous anecdotes or stories. The classical parallels, which were usually much simpler, are also crucial materials for a close analysis of different treatments and focal points in the different versions.

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<sup>9</sup> See Von Glahn, "The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan," 651-714; see Ariel Fox, "Precious Bodies: Money Transformation Stories from Medieval to Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 76: 1&2 (2016): 43-85.

<sup>10</sup> Yu Ying-shih 余英時, *Rujia lunli yu shangren jingshen* 儒家倫理與商人精神 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> For the list of story titles and abbreviations see page 1 and 2 of the current paper.

<sup>12</sup> The Tang tale "Du Zichun" is from either *Xuan guai lu* attributed to Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (780-848) or its alleged sequel *Xu xuan guai lu* 續玄怪錄 by Li Fuyan 李復言 (no life dates known). For the full text see Wang Rutao 王汝濤 et al. ed., *Taiping guangji xuan* 太平廣記選, 2 vols. (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1981), vol. 2, 36-44.



Among these stories, only the potential source texts or parallels of “Yiwen qian” and “Baiqiang” remain unclear.<sup>13</sup>

These stories are selected for the present corpus because they provide clear descriptions and comments on money and related issues. They also cover conflicts and anxieties over money in a variety of social relations and attitudes, which allows a discussion of money from different perspectives. I firstly contextualize the stories in the late Ming socio-economic and ideological contexts. My analysis is then based on a close examination of the texts, which also entails a comparison between the vernacular stories and classical tales that share the same motifs or are potential sources of their motifs. This would allow me to trace the alteration in the vernacular narratives as influenced by a different and changing society. Furthermore, the ideas of the writers/editors and their social milieus are also taken into consideration.

The present study primarily discusses four aspects: the late Ming context, social relations, gender ideals, and religion. It attempts to answer the following questions: Under what broader circumstances were these stories produced? How were conflicts and anxieties over money represented in these stories? In what ways were money and relevant issues viewed and imagined? How were they influenced by the larger social context?

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter discusses the background information, including the definition and discourses on money and related concepts and the historical and socioeconomic context of the late Ming. The second chapter deals with stories concerning social relations in a monetized society. In the third chapter, I analyze gender ideals with respect to money. The fourth chapter examines money in stories related to religious ideas by contextualizing them in the contemporary religious environment. In the concluding chapter, I summarize findings from each chapter and discuss them from a macroscopical angle.

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<sup>13</sup> For a scrutiny of potential sources of part of the stories in the present corpus, see Hu Shiyong 胡士瑩, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* 話本小說概論, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), vol. 2, 697, 703f., 706f., 712, 716, 718, 743, and 748.

# 1. Ideas about Money and the Late Ming Society

## 1.1 Concepts and Discourses about Money

Money has a long history in human societies, but its forms and the ways it is viewed and imagined vary in different civilizations and periods. Recently, in China, where electronic payment is employed intensively in daily life, what comes to mind when people talk of money is almost only a series of digital numbers, while twenty years ago, the images of paper currency and coins were what people would think of. In retrospect to the ancient time, men in all countries chose metals as money, for they can be kept with minor loss and be divided into parts and reunited again through melting. In China, although other commodities such as cloth and grain were also used as media of exchange, it was the bronze coin that “constituted the fundamental form of money in China throughout the imperial period,” which was probably due to the shortage of silver and gold mines.<sup>14</sup> From the Spring and Autumn period (c. 770-476 BC) to the Warring States period (c. 476-221 BC), money appeared in various forms, including cowrie shells, metallic objects, silk cloth, leather, bronze in the shapes of spades and knives, etc.<sup>15</sup> It was First Emperor of the Qin (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇) (r. 221-210 BC) that established round bronze coins perforated with a square hole (*fangkong yuanqian* 方孔圓錢) as the standard currency.<sup>16</sup> Bronze coins then had been quite dominating from the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD) to the early Ming dynasty.

The employment of another metal, silver, became relatively frequent since the Five Dynasties (907-960). In the Song (960-1279), silver was even used for tax payment.<sup>17</sup> Several centuries later, the new discovery of silver mines in the New World and the busy foreign trade apparently provided the Ming with steady inflows of silver, which played an essential role in the contemporaneous transformation of the fiscal system and economy.<sup>18</sup> By the mid-seventeenth century, silver had already become a rather common and standard monetary medium.

Money, as discussed in the present study, therefore, refers primarily to copper cash and silver (ingots) since the former was used as petty cash and the latter in both daily and tax payments from the late Ming. In the selected narratives, copper cash and silver play mainly three functions: as means of exchange, as measure of value, and as

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<sup>14</sup> See Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Peng Xinwei 彭信威, *Zhongguo huobi shi* 中國貨幣史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1958), 20-47.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>18</sup> Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 3.

store of value.<sup>19</sup> Besides, it is necessary that some other commodities that could be quite easily converted to common currencies, such as gold and jewelry, also be taken into consideration. As another precious metal with a long history, gold was less circulated in the markets after the Northern and Southern dynasties (386-589). Unlike bronze and silver, gold seldom served as a means of exchange but mostly as a store of value throughout history.<sup>20</sup> In the vernacular stories, gold and jewelry usually appear as property. Apart from them, real estate, including dwelling and farmland properties, could also be exchanged for silver easily. However, since the economy of China was based on agriculture for a long time, abandoning real estate, especially farmland, in exchange for money tended to be presented as a remarkable danger to the protagonists. Since the perception and symbolic meanings of the different forms of money and property mentioned above vary, they are sometime treated as a whole and sometime in differentiation in the present study.

### *Chinese Discourses on Money*

It is known that the late Ming witnessed a further monetization of the Chinese economy. This led to the great demand for monetary media in everyday life and evident anxieties over money. Nevertheless, the criticism and satire of money have existed since early times. In order to have a better understanding of attitudes towards money in the late Ming, it is worth discussing two earlier treatises on money, “Qianshen lun” 錢神論 (Debates on the Spirit of Cash) and “Qian bencao” 錢本草 (Cash Pharmacopoeia), respectively written in the Jin dynasty (266-420) and the Tang.

The note for the entry “Qianshen lun” in *Jin shu* 晉書 (Book of Jin) shows that the author Lu Bao 魯褒 (no life dates) wrote it down due to the destruction of the social order after the Yuankang 元康 period (291-299) and expressed in it contempt about the corruption and vulgarity of contemporary people.<sup>21</sup> While ironically enumerating the wide range of uses of money in attaining diverse goals, he also describes the metallic nature as well as the symbolic meaning of the bronze coin. According to Lu Bao, copper cash was designed by an ancient sage, and its square hole and round shape embody earth and heaven. He also illustrates the advantages of cash, including its durability and convenience in exchange, which makes his attitude towards the invention quite neutral. However, it is the corruption, extravagance, bribe, and greed for money among the aristocrats and high officials that caused Lu’s

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> See Lu Bao 魯褒, “Qianshen lun” 錢神論 [Treatise on the God of Money], in Chen Shaowen 陳紹聞 ed., *Zhongguo gudai jingji wenxuan* 中國古代經濟文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1980), vol. 1, 108-114.

indignation. What he criticizes most is the corruptive atmosphere in the court and among officialdom, as in the following passage:

諺曰：「官無中人，不如歸田」；雖有中人，而無家兄，何異无足而欲行，無翼而欲翔？使才如顏子，容如子張，空手掉臂，何所希望？

A proverb says: If you have no connection to influential people in front of the emperor, you had better return to your farmland. Even though you have the connection, without money, you are just like intending to walk without feet or to fly without wings. Even if you have talents like Yan Hui and an appearance like Zizhang,<sup>22</sup> when your hands are empty and your arms are hanging down, what can you hope for?<sup>23</sup>

This passage clearly indicates the anxiety of scholar-officials in a court where they have to socialize with powerful officials and spend large amounts of wealth, thus it almost only concerns the misuse of money in the upper class.<sup>24</sup> At that time, the recommendatory system (*chaju zhi* 察舉制) virtually excluded lower-class people from being recommended and admitted to the officialdom, even if they were talented. Therefore, in Lu Bao's text, money closely associated with gift-giving in exchange for political power, higher social status, dispute settling, etc. Instead, contempt for money due to its close connection with everyday conflicts, commerce, and luxury is downplayed.

In the last passage of this treatise, the bronze coin is personified, who then claims that other precious metals, gold, silver, lead, and tin, are all his relatives. He satirizes the relentless eagerness of greedy people when seeing him. Such a personification not only helps reveal Lu Bao's perspectives but also betrays people's imagination of money (cf. subchapter 4.1). Moreover, throughout the text, Lu Bao compares ancient and contemporary people several times. For him, while in the Spring-and-Autumn period, virtues like wisdom, bravery, and talent were required for becoming a perfect person, becoming a contemporary outstanding person merely requires sufficient amount of copper coins. It is presumable that from his point of view, money has resulted in a deterioration of morality in the upper class to some extent.

While Lu Bao's evaluation of the nature of money is relatively neutral, another text written by Zhang Yue 張說 (667-730, *zi* Daoji 道濟), in the Tang, renders it differently. When Zhang Yue held the position of prime minister, he was once impeached for corruption and imprisoned. Before long, he was pardoned by the

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<sup>22</sup> Yan Hui 顏回 and Zizhang 子張 are students of Confucius. Yan Hui is famous for his talents, and Zizhang has good appearance.

<sup>23</sup> Lu Bao, "Qianshen lun," 113f. The English translation is mine.

<sup>24</sup> See He Ping 何平, "Zhongguo ziran jingji xia de huobi baiwujiao jingdian 'Qianshen lun'" 中古自然經濟下的貨幣拜物教經典《錢神論》, *Zhongguo qianbi* 中國錢幣 5 (2019): 47.

emperor and then wrote the short text “Qian bencao,” in which he discussed the nature of money and the proper ways of managing it.

Zhang claims that cash per se is poisonous, due to its sweet flavor. Whether it could benefit the state, solve problems, or keep people healthy depends on whether people could balance the accumulation and distribution of it. By attaining, using, giving, and spending it correctly, people could acquire virtues such as righteousness, benevolence, wisdom, etc.<sup>25</sup> While Lu Bao, as a hermit, expressed a strong contempt for the disorder driven by the possession of money, Zhang Yue, who was known for his love for money even in the late Ming,<sup>26</sup> emphasized the control over money and how money could benefit people. In this regard, the definition that the nature of cash is poisonous seems only to caution people against treating it without discretion.

The above two treatises offer good opportunities to look into historical views about money per se. They both criticize the disorders and disasters driven by the misuse of bronze cash. Nevertheless, their perception of money is apparently contextualized in an upper-class milieu rather than plebeian everyday life. Concerning the two authors’ life experiences and social positions, their views of money are also put forward more from a political aspect than economic concern, even though commerce and entertainment were quite busy in the capital Chang’an 長安 in the Tang. In later dynasties, when the commodity economy developed rapidly, and especially in the Ming, when money penetrated every part of society, anxieties and conflicts over money were represented in different ways and concerned other groups of people.

## 1.2 Luxury and the Ming Economy

In the increasingly commercialized and prosperous late Ming society, luxury played a more significant role in everyday life and was closely related to money, commerce, and merchants. It is thus necessary to include this concept in my considerations. The idea of advocating frugality and objecting to luxury has long existed in both Chinese and European cultures.<sup>27</sup> Since the economy of the empire was based on agriculture for a long time, agriculture was defined as the root, whereas craft or industrial

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<sup>25</sup> For a full text of “Qian bencao” see Zhang Yue 張說, “Qian ben cao” 錢本草, in *Shi lun shisan pian* 史論十三篇, ed. Zhongyan zhengce yanjiushi zhexue lishi yanjiuju 中央政策研究室哲學歷史研究局 (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 2002), 341f.

<sup>26</sup> In *Tao’an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, Zhang Dai 張岱 (1587-1679) writes in “rui cao xi ting” 瑞草溪亭 of his cousin reading a story, in which a man dreamed of traveling to Hell and saw thousands of evil ghosts minting “ill-gotten copper cash for Zhang Yue” 為燕國公鑄橫財. Zhang Dai 張岱, *Tao’an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 78.

<sup>27</sup> See Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 101-125.

production, and trade or commerce were classified as “extremities.”<sup>28</sup> In ancient times, there were already discourses regarding luxury. For example, Mo Zi 墨子 (c. 476-390 BC) argues that devoting human and material resources to the production of necessities rather than luxury goods would facilitate the accumulation of state wealth. Differently, Confucius’ idea of thrift lies more in maintaining the social hierarchy.<sup>29</sup>

Christopher Berry has provided a clear definition of luxury goods, which are ‘refined’ goods, including sustenance, shelter, clothing, and leisure, which are desired instead of needed.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Berry has pointed out several features of luxury goods that are relevant to the present study. The first one is its transient status, as he argues that “luxury is not something static, it is dynamic; it is subject to development as the desires, and necessarily attendant beliefs, are met and then fueled with further qualitative modifications or refinements.”<sup>31</sup> The second feature shows that luxury is commonly associated with superfluity, which indicates that luxury goods go beyond the basic needs.

These features would evidently arouse anxieties and condemnation by Ming people towards luxury goods because of the uncertainty and instability they might bring. At the first place, the founder of the Ming dynasty, the Hongwu Emperor 洪武 (r.1328-1398), retained a simple agrarian economy to support his authoritative control over his court and the empire. As a consequence, “agricultural production was of paramount interest to the state; other economic activities were not taken seriously.”<sup>32</sup> To maintain his monetary policy of paper currency, the Hongwu Emperor even prohibited common people from transacting with silver. However, the employment of paper currency, inherited from the Song and the Yuan, soon gave way to copper coins and silver due to its remarkable devaluation.<sup>33</sup> The two metal currencies became increasingly essential.

With the considerable development of the domestic economy and population and the import of enormous amount of silver from the New World, in the sixteenth century, the economic situation was vastly different from that in the Hongwu period. When the Ming state rejected luxury and made every attempt to control consumption through the operation of a system of sumptuary laws, what it faced was a complex society with increasingly available commodities. As a result, there were more complaints about luxury, waste, and excess from this period on. Zhang Han 張瀚

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<sup>28</sup> Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 141.

<sup>29</sup> See Wang Jie 汪潔, “Zhongguo gudai gongli zhuyi jingji sixiang kaolue” 中國古代功利主義經濟思想考略, *Lishixue yanjiu* 歷史學研究 2 (2006): 71.

<sup>30</sup> Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 9, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Denis Twitchett, ed, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part II* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107.

<sup>33</sup> Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 461-465.

(1511-1593), in his book *Song chuang meng yu* 松窗夢語 (Dream Essays at the Pine Window), criticized the boundless extravagance of dress which flouted the regulation of the state.<sup>34</sup> As Berry states, “Indeed the rationale underlying sumptuary laws was to reserve particular fabrics and ornamentation for certain social orders in order to distinguish them and uphold the social hierarchy.”<sup>35</sup> It can be seen that luxury in everyday life in the monetized and commercialized society was further threatening the earlier social stratification and the perceived stability of society.

In late Ming vernacular stories and novels, excessive extravagant lifestyle usually leads to the fall of a household, either logically or due to karmic retribution. In the novel *Jin ping mei*, wealth and lust are represented as the most disastrous things that just cause the tragedy of Ximen Qing’s 西門慶 family. The luxurious objects are bitterly satirized in the first chapter as follows:

若有那看得破的，便見得堆金積玉，是棺材內帶不去的瓦礫泥沙；貫朽粟紅，是皮囊內裝不盡的臭淤糞土。高堂廣廈，玉宇瓊樓，是墳山上起不得的享堂；錦衣繡襖，狐服貂裘，是骷髏上裹不了的敗絮。

If someone can gain an insight into it, he would see that the pile of gold and jade is the rubble and sand in the coffin; The rotten string of copper cash and the moldy red grain are the stinking silt and dirty soil which cannot be contained entirely in the human body. The high halls, large buildings, and bejeweled jade palaces are the sacrificial halls that cannot be built in the cemetery hill. The brocade clothes, embroidered jackets, and coats made out of fox and ferret fur are the broken cotton wadding that cannot be wrapped on the human skeleton.<sup>36</sup>

According to this passage, the seemingly gorgeous luxury objects, including sustenance, shelter, clothing, and leisure, are in reality associated with filth, decay, and death. It betrays that they are morally negatively associated and can bring decadence to human life. Furthermore, unlike the common belief in China that money and goods could be transferred from the living to the dead, these sentences deny this possibility but emphasize the transient status of luxury goods, which also mirrors the drastically fluctuant life of the Ximen family. In addition to the instability of money and luxury goods, human relationships also become unstable because of people's reckless pursuit of them. Social climbers who curry favor with the rich serve as a factor contributing to chaos and disasters (cf. subchapter 2.3).

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<sup>34</sup> Zhang Han 張瀚, *Song chuang meng yu* 松窗夢語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 76-80. Cf. Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 147, 154.

<sup>35</sup> Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生, *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin ping mei* 新刻繡像批評金瓶梅 (Hongkong: Sanlian shudian, 1990), 3. The English translation is mine.

Another reason for opposing luxury is that common people could not benefit from it. The late Ming early Qing prominent scholar Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695) attributed poverty to adverse customs, religion, and luxury. He contended that commodities tended to be provided for Buddhism, shaman, entertainers, and unusual and extreme skills, but they were usually unavailable for ordinary people in daily use.<sup>37</sup> Although he came up with the famous idea that craft industry and commerce both were “roots” rather than extremities (*gong shang jie ben* 工商皆本), the lavish expenditure in certain businesses was regarded as detrimental to people’s livelihood. However, early in the sixteenth century, a different voice underscored the advantages of luxury. Lu Ji 陸楫 (1515-1552) analyzed how extravagant custom could provide employment and interest for ordinary people by arguing as follows:

大抵其地奢則其民必易為生；其地儉則其民不易為生者也。[...] 吳俗之奢，莫盛於蘇杭之民，有不耕寸土而口食膏粱，不操一杼而身衣文繡者。蓋俗奢而逐末者眾也。

In general, if a place is accustomed to extravagance, then the people there will find it easy to make a living, and if a place is accustomed to frugality, then the people there will find it difficult to make a living. Why? Because this is caused by the trend. [...] As for extravagant custom, there is no place where it surpasses that of the people in Soochow [Suzhou] and Hangchow [Hangzhou], where numerous people consume fine food without tilling one inch of soil and wear embroidered textiles without touching the shuttle. This is because the custom there is extravagant and there are many people pursuing secondary occupations.<sup>38</sup>

Intriguingly, the observation and argument of Lu Ji coincide with the tendency of demoralization of luxury in the West in the seventeenth century when European scholars recognized that luxury stimulated consumption, which in turn generated trade and employment.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Lu Ji’s idea was apparently not in line with mainstream values and morality. About a century later, certain occupations and industries benefiting from extravagance, as mentioned by Lu Ji, were still regarded as harmful and morally inferior in Huang Zongxi’s discourse.

After the fall of the Ming, its economic policies were harshly criticized. Throughout the dynasty, although silver served as an instrument of exchange now and then, it was the famous “single whip reform” policy (*yitiaobian fa* 一條鞭法) in the

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<sup>37</sup> Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, *Mingyi daifang lu jiaoshi* 明夷待訪錄校釋, ed. Sun Weihua 孫衛華 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2011), 97-100.

<sup>38</sup> See Yu Ying-shih, *Shangren jingshen*, 223-225; for a cited full text see Fu Yiling 傅衣凌, *Mingdai Jiangnan shimin jingji shitan* 明代江南市民經濟試探 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957), 107-108; for the English translation see Yang Lien-sheng, “Economic Justification for Spending: An Uncommon Idea in Traditional China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20:1/2 (1957): 50-52.

<sup>39</sup> See Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 101-125.



late sixteenth century that established silver instead of commodities such as grain as the means of standard tax payment, which further elevated the significance of silver and money. From the perspective of some late Ming scholars, it was this policy that was to be held responsible for the decline of the agriculture. To explain the disadvantages of adopting metal currency for tax payment, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682) quoted the argument of Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) as follows:

錢者，桑地不生銅，私家不敢鑄，業於農者何從得之？至乃吏胥追徵，官限迫蹙，則易其所有以赴公程。當豐歲則賤糶半價，不足以充緡錢。遇凶年則息利倍稱，不足以償逋債。[...] 是以商賈大族乘時射利者，日以富豪；田壟罷人望歲勤力者，日以貧困。

When speaking of the cash, the land of mulberry tree does not produce copper, and the private households dare not to mint it. Where can people who engage in agriculture get it? When minor officials urge to tax, and the official deadline is approaching, they exchange all they have to conform to the official standard. In bumper years, they sell grain for half the price. It is not enough for copper cash tax. In bad years, the interests multiply. Their income is not enough for paying the debt. [...] Therefore, merchants and big clans who take the time and pursue the interest become increasingly rich; the poor in the field who work hard hoping for a good harvest become poorer.<sup>40</sup>

The taxation of silver in the late Ming also required the “melting loss” (*huohao* 火耗)<sup>41</sup> to be included, which laid more burden on farmers. Thus, the gap between the rich and the poor further expanded. Having witnessed the extreme corruption and the fall of the Ming, Huang and Gu naturally saw the defects of the late Ming fiscal system and considered the high demand for money and luxury as an important factor. Indeed, when metal currencies and superfluous luxury goods and leisure activities increasingly penetrated people’s daily lives in an agricultural state, social order, morality, and social relations were all in confusion. From the perspective of an ordinary magistrate, in the early seventeenth century, the simple and self-sufficient economy of the Hongwu period may have appeared peaceful and ideal, without any deception and litigation at the local level. As the later merchant activities increased, fortunes rose and fell unpredictably.<sup>42</sup> The magistrate contends, “it was capital that brought power; land was not a permanent prospect.”<sup>43</sup> Such a socio-economic context largely influenced the stories written in the decades before the collapse of the Ming.

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<sup>40</sup> Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, ed., *Rizhi lu jishi* 日知錄集釋, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), vol. 2, 653f. This is my translation.

<sup>41</sup> It is the extra tax for the loss that occurs during the melting procedure of casting fragmentary silver into silver ingots.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1998), 1-4.

<sup>43</sup> Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 4.

However, similar to the above discourses, short stories also convey multiple voices commenting on money and luxury, which makes it all the more interesting to explore these literary texts in closer detail.

### 1.3 The Writers/Editors and the Jiangnan Context

The corpus of the present study generally concerns five authors/editors/compilers, Feng Menglong, Ling Mengchu, Langxian, Lu Renlong, and Li Yu, who all lived in the seventeenth century in the Jiangnan 江南 region.<sup>44</sup> They are from Suzhou 蘇州, Yangzhou 揚州 or Songjiang 松江<sup>45</sup> in Jiangsu Province, and Wucheng 烏程 (Huzhou 湖州 today), Qiantang 錢塘, and Jinhua 金華 in Zhejiang Province. and moved to Hangzhou and Jinling 金陵 (Nanjing 南京 today). As indicated in Lu Ji's essay and also commonly believed, this region was a center of both economy and culture. Suzhou and Hangzhou 杭州 were especially famous for their extravagant customs, industry, and commerce. He described people there visiting the lakes and hills, saying that "whenever they go out, they always have painted boats, sedan chairs, delicacies, and superior wine, together with singing and dancing."<sup>46</sup> It was also in this region that the textile industry flourished. The Ming court established the departments of textile (*zhiran ju* 織染局) in Suzhou, Jiangning 江寧 (Nanjing), and Hangzhou. As Von Glahn states, "galvanized by the growth of cotton and silk textile industries, the towns and villages of Jiangnan became the nuclei of increasingly far-flung networks of exchange."<sup>47</sup> Another important and renowned industry in these three cities was book publishing (*keshu* 刻書), which greatly facilitated the publication and circulation of the collections of vernacular stories. For example, except for several years of tutoring and official posts in other places, Feng Menglong spent most of his life in Suzhou and was actively engaged in cultural activities there, such as collecting popular songs.<sup>48</sup> Presumably, these men of letters and their stories were primarily influenced by the Jiangnan economic and cultural milieus and their own life

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<sup>44</sup> This region encompasses the city of today's Shanghai, the southern part of Jiangsu Province, the southeastern part of Anhui Province, the northern part of Jiangxi Province and the northern part of Zhejiang Province.

<sup>45</sup> According to Wang Lei 王磊, Langxian's family name is Xi 席, and he came from Yangzhou; Yang Xiaodong 楊曉東 has argued that the name of Langxian is Shi Shaoxin/shen 施紹莘 (1588-?), who came from Songjiang 松江. See Wang Lei 王磊, "Shi diantou kao lun" 《石點頭》考論, *Qiusuo* 求索 9 (2004): 208f.; Yang Xiaodong 楊曉東, "'Langxian' gouchen" '浪仙'鈎沈, *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究 5 (1991): 106-110, 77.

<sup>46</sup> See Yang Lien-sheng, "Economic Justification for Spending," 51.

<sup>47</sup> Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 142.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed discussion of life experiences of Feng Menglong see Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, 75-82. Cf. Fu Chengzhou 傅承洲, *Feng Menglong wenxue yanjiu* 馮夢龍文學研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013), 15.

experiences, although they were editors, adaptors, and compilers rather than authors of stories. While some vernacular stories were based on motifs from classical tales, the new versions actually reflected much of their contemporary context.

It is known that commercial activities already flourished, and being a merchant was regarded as a good choice of an occupation in the late Ming, especially in the Jiangnan region. According to the customs of Huizhou 徽州, being engaged in business was even superior to being ranked in the imperial examinations (EK 37.609). Money and wealth became increasingly crucial in determining social status. Besides, the identity as a man of letters no longer secured a superior social status. As Ho Ping-ti notes, “the demarcation between those of the educated who entered government service and those of the educated who failed to break into the officialdom was no less fundamental than the gulf separating those who labored with their minds and those who labored with their physical strength.”<sup>49</sup> The boundary between scholars and merchants was blurring. There were more cases in which scholars became merchants and vice versa, though not through the examinations but rather via the purchase of an official position. The specific attitudes towards different occupations and money as represented in the vernacular stories are explored in the subsequent chapters.

Since these authors/editors themselves seldom succeeded in entering the officialdom, they belonged to the lower elite group, except for Feng’s three-year experience as a prefect. Both Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu published their vernacular collections before assuming official positions, while Li Yu himself never took any post but built good relationships with some high officials for their patronage.<sup>50</sup> Li Yu was a different case also in that his stories were published in the early Qing. Although the life experiences of Lu Renlong and Langxian are not fully clear, it is presumable that they also once struggled in the imperial examinations just as the other three did, yet the latter three achieved commercial success as writers and playwrights. Ling Mengchu mentioned in his preface to the first series of *Pai’an jingqi* that book dealers were so impressed by the rapid circulation of Feng’s collections of short stories that they encouraged Ling to publish such stories, too.<sup>51</sup>

Both Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu stated the warning and persuasive purposes of their stories in the prefaces, but Ling was a more highly self-conscious writer than Feng, while Li Yu was even more independent.<sup>52</sup> While the didacticism is explicitly stated in the prefaces to their collections, scholars such as Timothy Wong

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<sup>49</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 21.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge et al.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, *Chuke pai’an jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 1. For the English translation see Ling Mengchu, *Slapping the Table in Amazement*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2018), 3f.

<sup>52</sup> Robert E. Hegel, “Introduction”, in Ling Mengchu, *Slapping the Table in Amazement*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), XIVf.

stress the entertainment function of these works.<sup>53</sup> However, in the present study, the purposes of didacticism or entertainment and authorship are not the primary concerns, but the stories are read more as a reflection of the Jiangnan socioeconomic contexts and as the production of an integrated social milieu of the lower elite. Attitudes in the different collections sometimes overlap, and multiple voices could be heard even in one story. Furthermore, in the prefaces to their works, Feng and Ling contend that the stories should be meaningful but not necessarily authentic.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, their narratives and comments reflect the motifs they read and heard of, their imaginations of the world, in addition to the realities they saw.

The late Ming not only witnessed a highly prosperous monetized economy in which copper cash and silver transactions were an important aspect of everyday life but also saw multiple voices regarding money-related issues, including criticism, anxieties, and recognition. The five writers/editors just lived in the most representative commercialized region of Jiangnan, but enjoyed only limited power and social status as lower elite. Their representations of money and the world are then discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Timothy C. Wong, "Entertainment as Art: An Approach to the Ku-Chin Hsiao Shuo," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3:2 (1981): 244.

<sup>54</sup> Ling Mengchu, *Chuke pai'an jingqi*, 1; for the English translation see Ling Mengchu, *Slapping the Table in Amazement*, 4; Feng Menglong, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, ed. Wei Tongxian 魏同賢 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 663f.

## 2. Money and Social Relations

In the vernacular stories of the present corpus, issues regarding money tend to serve as the central focus of conflicts and anxieties in the development of the plots. On the one hand, these conflicts often concern social relations within the family, or between families, covering a wide range of relationships, from brothers, husbands and wives, neighbors, to strangers. Fei Hsiao-tung has put forward a model of *chaxu geju* 差序格局 (differential mode of association) for describing and explaining Chinese social relations. According to this model, “social relationships spread out gradually, from individual to individual, resulting in an accumulation of personal connections.”<sup>55</sup> This structure is self-centered to each person and is regulated according to the Confucian concept of *renlun* 人倫 (human relationships), such as *fuzi* 父子 (father and son), *qinshu* 親疏 (the intimate and the unconnected), *fuqi* 夫妻 (husband and wife), *zhangyou* 長幼 (senior and junior), etc. Each relationship is then guided by moral orders. However, the foundation of such social relationships is a relatively simple and stable agricultural society, which is closer to what the Hongwu Emperor envisioned at the beginning of the Ming dynasty. The rapidly developing market and monetized economy in the late Ming brought more and more uncertainty and threat to these elementary relationships.

On the other hand, as Ho Ping-ti points out, the quadruple functional division of commoners, comprising *shi* 士 (scholar-officials), *nong* 農 (farmers), *gong* 工 (artisans) and *shang* 商 (merchants), is almost entirely useless for the stratification of post-feudal Chinese society.<sup>56</sup> The blurring of the social status of different occupations, especially *shi* and *shang*, is also influenced by the money economy to some extent. Therefore, it is worth discussing how money functions in the confusion of social order and relationships in these stories.

### 2.1 Within Family: Wealth as a Bond

The second story of *Xingshi hengyan*, “San xiaolian” represents how relationships within a family are threatened by a potentially dangerous treatment of family wealth, which is the division of family property. As a typical feature of many stories in *Sanyan*, this story is comprised of two parts, a prologue, including three stories on

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<sup>55</sup> Fei Hsiao-tung, *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo*, trans. Gary G Hamilton and Zheng Wang (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1992), 70.

<sup>56</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success*, 20.

brotherhood, and a narrative proper being an expansion of the story of Xu Jing's 許荊 grandfather Xu Wu 許武 from the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Book of the Later Han).<sup>57</sup> Both the first story in the prologue about the Tian brothers and the narrative proper are on the same theme. They develop quite opposite positions toward the intention and practice of dividing up family wealth. The story about the Tian brothers is presumably an adaption of an entry in a *biji* collection written in the Liang dynasty (502-557).<sup>58</sup>

In the potential source text, Tian Zhen 田真 and his two brothers discuss dividing their family wealth, including a Chinese redbud tree, which they plan to cut into three pieces. However, before cutting it, they find the tree has withered suddenly. Being shocked, Zhen grieves and realizes that brothers are just like the tree growing from the same root that must not be separated. When he decides not to cut the tree, the tree mysteriously flourishes again, and the three brothers continue to live together with their wealth managed together.

While no reason is indicated for their original plan of separation, new plot elements are added in the vernacular version. It is the third brother's wife that urges her husband to divide the family fortune with his brothers because she contends that "with no private accounts or scales to weigh out separate portions of provisions, she could not very well have anything to eat for her own personal enjoyment"<sup>59</sup> (不用私錢，不動私秤，便私房要喫些東西，也不方便; HY 2.18). However, what she tells her husband is that the family properties and fortune are all managed by the elder brothers, which would turn out to be a huge disadvantage for her husband if the wealth declined one day. Later, when the brothers are reunited upon seeing the withered tree, the third sister Tian finally commits suicide out of shame.

The narrative proper is set in the Han dynasty (25-220), when candidates for official posts were usually recommended on the grounds of being considered filially pious and incorruptible (*xiaolian* 孝廉). The protagonist Xu Wu's motivation of dividing up the family fortune and taking up most of it is only to build a good reputation for his two younger brothers; thus, they could be potentially recommended. His plan works out well, and after he finally reveals his original plan, the brothers separate their wealth again justly. The vernacular story then ends with the following commentary verse:

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<sup>57</sup> For the story of Xu Wu see Fan Ye 範曄 and Sima Biao 司馬彪, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, 2 vols. (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994), vol. 2, 1067f.

<sup>58</sup> Wu Jun 吳均, "Zijing shu" 紫荊樹, in *Han Wei Liuchao xiaoshuo xuan* 漢魏六朝小說選, ed. Shen Weifang 沈偉方 and Xia Qiliang 夏啓良 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhuashe, 1982), 185.

<sup>59</sup> Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 23.

今人兄弟多分產，古人兄弟亦分產。古人分產成弟名，今人分產但鬪爭。古人自污爲孝義，今人自污爭微利。孝義名高身並榮，微利相爭家共傾。安得盡居孝弟里，卻把鬪牆來愧死。(HY 2.29)

Brothers of today divide up family property; Brothers of old did the same, but only for the benefit of their brothers, while those of today tussle in ugly fights. The ancients stooped low out of filial devotion; People of today stoop low for petty profits. Filial piety leads to fame and glory; Fights over petty profits ruin all. The worthy live in Filial Piety Village, Shaming to death those brothers at strife.<sup>60</sup>

Xiao 孝 (filial piety) and ti 悌 (fraternal duty) have long been a part of the core values of Confucianism. The stories and comments clearly indicate an edifying tone of valuing brotherhood and fraternal duty and avoiding strife. The story implies a denunciation of selfish greed which could potentially damage the basis of kinship relations. In the first story, the family property, the Chinese redbud, serves as an metonymy of the brothers, and the separation of property is equated with the dissociation of family members. This reveals a strong connection of a family to their land in pre-modern China. In the late Ming version, Tian the Eldest cries when seeing the tree withered, saying, “The tree flourished because from the roots grew the trunk, from the trunk the branches, and from the branches the leaves. [...] If we three brothers split, we’ll go the way of this tree. What prosperity will there be to speak of?”<sup>61</sup> (根生本，本生枝，枝生葉，所以榮盛。[...] 我兄弟三人若分離了，亦如此樹枯死，豈有榮盛之日; HY 2.19). As indicated in this story, only the connection to the earth and the kin could bring prosperity to the family, while any possible mutability of the family wealth is regarded as morally problematic. However, clans tended to fail to keep more than three generations living together throughout Chinese history, and those who succeeded were hailed as paragons of virtue.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Fei Xiaotong has pointed out the immobility and enduring attachment to the soil of the Chinese agricultural community, since farmers get the resources directly from the fixed land and there is no need to move.<sup>63</sup> Any change would harm the balance of a relatively stable and isolated rural community. In this sense, the root in fact symbolizes a capacity of production for family prosperity with regard to economy and relationship.

While in the source tale of Tian Zhen, no reason for dividing up family wealth is mentioned, the vernacular version identifies the reason in the personal desire of the youngest brother’s wife. The satisfaction of selfish greed is seen as another threat to common benefit, in this case, family, fortune, and well-being. The final comments

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<sup>60</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>62</sup> See Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success*, 162.

<sup>63</sup> Fei Hsiao-tung, *From the Soil*, 37-44.

further contrast the contemporary strifes to an idealized past as represented by Xu Wu's story, in which the seeking of "petty profits" (*weili* 微利) is positioned opposite to "filial piety and righteousness" (*xiaoyi* 孝義). Presumably, petty profits and selfish desires would potentially bring about conflicts leading to the division of family fortune, which is to the disadvantage of social stability and prevents the accumulation of family property. As Wang Rigen has noted, there was an expansion of clan structures among the lower classes in the Ming-Qing period. Different from upper class clans whose wealth was based on political power and official position, the development of grassroot clans depended on the stability and increase of collective wealth.<sup>64</sup> The pursuit of personal profit obviously contradicted this goal.

Furthermore, in some cases as discussed by Ling Mengchu, certain "wicked gentry" (*buxiao jinshen* 不肖縉紳) even seek profits in the mediation of wealth division, asking both sides to bribe them with gifts.<sup>65</sup> Such an image differs tremendously from the righteous elders in the neighborhood who witness Xu Wu's revelation as portrayed in "San xiaolian." Therefore, the division of family property not only symbolically puts the core values of filial piety and brotherhood at risk but also involves other members of the community, thus threatening social stability in both psychological and realistic ways.

## 2.2 Beyond Family: Money Leading to Death and Life

### *Text, Local Context and Symbolic Meaning*

Conflicts and disputes over money beyond the family realm, in the neighborhood and the wider community context, are elaborated in the narrative proper of the 34th story of *Xingshi hengyan*, "Yiwen qian." It involves a variety of social relations, including neighbor and neighbor, wineshop owner and his assistant, landlord and his rival, landlord and his clansman, etc. The story "Yiwen qian" divides up into two parts. The introductory story relates the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin's 呂洞賓 trials of human beings,<sup>66</sup> in which a monk misses the opportunity of transcendence due to the attachment to his one thousand strings of cash. The narrative proper presents a series of conflicts, schemes, and murders among diverse groups of people originally

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<sup>64</sup> Wang Rigen 王日根, *Ming Qing minjian shehui de zhixu* 明清民間社會的秩序 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2003), 417.

<sup>65</sup> Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, *Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 177.

<sup>66</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the early images of the immortal Lü Dongbin see Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: the Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 52-93.



resulting from a fight over only “one penny of copper cash” (*yiwēn qián* 一文錢).<sup>67</sup> While the story of Lü Dongbin establishes the theme of avarice, it features religious figures and concerns, and is hence discussed in detail in the fourth chapter (cf. subchapter 4.2). The prologue seems to reflect an earlier text or context, because the large amount of money is transported in the form of strings of copper cash rather than the commonly used silver currency in the late Ming context.<sup>68</sup> Whereas the story of “One Penny” appears to be more contemporary, the potential sources of both the prologue and narrative proper remain unclear.

As mentioned above, the main story is complicated. It is comprised of several episodes concerning loosely connected characters. In view of the conflicts underlain by the greed for currency, goods, or property, I divide the story into four cases. The first case recounts disputes within the neighborhood. In Jingdezhen 景德鎮, a busy town of porcelain production, a mother, née Yang 楊氏, gives one penny to her adolescent boy, Chang'er 長兒, to buy some prickly ash seeds. With the penny, Chang'er is tempted by the neighbor boy Zaiwang 再旺 to play a gambling game, which then results in a fight. Finding out about what has happened, née Yang and Zaiwang's mother Madam Sun 孫大娘, also get into a quarrel, in which the latter curses née Yang and yells out about her sexual affair. When Yang's husband Qiu 邱 hears it and realizes that his wife has been cheating on him, he returns home in a rage and forces née Yang to hang herself on Madam Sun's door. In panic, Yang kills herself with a rope, however, by mistake at another residence.

In the second case, the resident, a blacksmith discovers the corpse in the early morning and secretly dumps it at another household's door in fear. It turns out to be the house of a wineshop owner, Mr. Wang 王公. Being afraid of it, Mr. Wang and his assistant dump it into the river. Later, the assistant recalls that Mr. Wang owes him a favor and expects some benefits. Unfortunately, when his claim is rejected, he kills Mr. Wang by accident in a quarrel.

The third case relates how a landlord Zhu Chang 朱常 manipulates the corpse found in the river in a way as to fight for land with Zhao Wan 趙完 from a neighboring county. He contends that the corpse was his servant's wife, who has been killed by the Zhao family in a scuffle with Zhu's side, because Zhao's guilt could be to Zhu's advantage in their legal dispute over land. Conspiring to fight back, Zhao and his son murder an old cousin in Zhao's household and a female witness, contending that they were killed by the Zhu family in another fight. However, upon the autopsy of the magistrate, née Yang's corpse is found to have died from strangulation, while

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<sup>67</sup> This is the smallest unit of copper cash. One thousand pennies generally equal one tael of silver.

<sup>68</sup> According to Von Glahn, in the monetary system of Ming-Qing China, bronze coin was used primarily for petty retail marketing. Cf. Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 8.

the two murdered corpses are proved to have been beaten to death. Thus, only Zhu and his servant, who are proven to have lied, are sentenced to death.

The fourth case involves Zhao, and his clansman Zhao Yilang 趙一郎. Zhao once promised Yilang a portion of the family property when Yilang witnessed a murder and kept the secret. However, Zhao goes back on it and plans to poison Yilang. Once Yilang learns about it, he reports the whole crime to the magistrate. As a consequence, Yilang and Zhao's concubine who are convicted of adultery, and Zhao and his son, are all sentenced to death.<sup>69</sup>

The setting of the story in Jingdezhen, a town of industrial manufacturing, is worth noting. Anne Gerritsen has pointed out that “rather than farmers and agricultural laborers, Jingdezhen hosted large numbers of migrant workers.”<sup>70</sup> It is also because “the locality was also deprived of the usual family networks in the form of lineages that could have provided some security for the elderly and infirm once their laboring days were over.”<sup>71</sup> Due to the socioeconomic context where level of mobility of the population was higher, an early Qing prefect Huang Jialin 黃家遴 highlighted the unhealthy local customs in the early Qing.<sup>72</sup> The story “One Penny” indeed echoes such an unstable local society, where the tensions between the two worker-families in the first case, the wineshop keeper and his employee in the second case, and two competing lineages in the third case all reflect the particular anxieties over money, material possession, and everyday life.

In terms of the development of the plot, the series of conflicts in the four cases seem to be an example of the “Butterfly Effect”, seemingly all caused by the “one penny”. The narrator in his comments repeatedly emphasizes and reminds his readers of the exact reason of the death of totally thirteen people, saying, for instance, “Just because of one penny, another two lives have been taken”<sup>73</sup> (只因這一文錢上起，又送了兩條性命; HY 34.757). Elsewhere, the narrator stresses, “Lives are lost over the love of money, for money and life are rolled into one”<sup>74</sup> (總為惜財喪命，方知財命相連; HY 34.762). Shan Kunqin has noted that by linking the minute value of one penny to the significant value of a person's life, the author shows what an important

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<sup>69</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 782-813.

<sup>70</sup> Anne Gerritsen, “Ceramics for Local and Global Markets: Jingdezhen's Agora of Technologies,” *Cultures of Knowledge* 1 (2012): 162.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>72</sup> Anne Gerritsen, “Fragments of a Global Past: Ceramics Manufacture in Song-Yuan-Ming Jingdezhen,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52 (2009): 139f.; Huang Jialin, “Fuliang xianzhi xu” 浮梁縣志序, in Wang Linyuan 王臨元, comp., *Fuliang xianzhi* 浮梁縣志 (1682; repr. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1992): *shou*.2a-3a.

<sup>73</sup> My translation. This pattern of sentence has appeared for six times, with the number of lives different.

<sup>74</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 804.

role coins can play, and they sometimes even compare to human life.<sup>75</sup> Similar to the metaphor in “San xiaolian”, where family property is equated with the kinship life, money here is equated with the human body and life. Yet in another sense, given the strong edifying tone of the narrative and the comments, the close association of money with human life could supposedly have been a kind of purposeful exaggeration and intimidation of the readers.

Nevertheless, in imagination, the copper cash which symbolizes both Heaven and Earth,<sup>76</sup> seems to be an agent between life and death in the first case, and extends its influence symbolically to the latter three cases. Instead of the one penny of copper cash, the human corpses then turn into the direct causes of the disputes at the center of the subsequent episodes. From the view of a character, such as the wineshop assistant, the linkage of a corpse to an opponent should do damage to the latter’s wealth, and helping him to get rid of the corpse should be a good reason for receiving a payment. The other two cases also bespeak how corpses could be used in exchange for property. In this sense, the detrimental power of death, which is believed to harm human life, is also thought to impair one’s wealth. Wealth is therefore thought to be able to pay for human life, or to protect human beings from larger-scale disasters. The cosmological view underlying all these cases is consistent with the narrator’s comment that wealth and life are bound together.

### *Moving Conflicts*

In the first three cases, the conflicts over money are represented by a variety of social relations, from a relatively close relationship between neighbor adolescents to occupational relationships between the shop owner and his assistant, further on to an adverse relationship between two competing landlords from two neighboring counties. The types of conflicts also range from an arrangement over gambling to extortion and even to a land dispute. The configuration and development of the narrative are generally in accord with the metaphor put forward by Fei Xiaotong in describing the structure of the Chinese society, that “it is like the circles that appear on the surface of a lake when a rock is thrown into it.”<sup>77</sup> As the money involved increases from one penny of copper cash to a moderate amount of money finally to about thirty *mu* 畝<sup>78</sup> of farmland, the violence generated by money also escalates from suicide to manslaughter and finally to two murders and also several executions. It is evident that the family and its neighborhood is positioned at the core of the whole incident. Once

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<sup>75</sup> Shan Kunqin, “Copper Cash in Chinese Short Stories Compiled by Feng Menglong (1574-1646),” in *Money in Asia (1200-1900): Small Currencies in Social and Political Contexts* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 233.

<sup>76</sup> Lu Bao, “Qianshen lun,” 110.

<sup>77</sup> Fei Hsiao-tung, *From the Soil*, 62.

<sup>78</sup> *Mu* is a unit of area that equals to one fifteenth of a hectare.

the fundamental order is shaken due to petty money, the larger community is at risk, which is consistent with the Confucian logic of “cultivating the moral self, regulating the family, ordering well the state, and making the world peaceful” (*xiushen, qijia, zhiguo, pingtianxia* 修身，齊家，治國，平天下).<sup>79</sup> When the family and neighborhood realm is in disorder, there is a fear of more distant relationships also being disrupted, for the conflicts become ever more serious and more violent.

On the one hand, throughout the text, the conflicts, money desired, corpses, and characters and narrative focus are in tension and are constantly moving, with more and more people drawn into the storm, which indicates anxiety and mistrust of different kinds of social relations. On the other hand, a strong effort is put into restoring order. Apart from the death as mentioned earlier, the other nine people die due to retribution (*bao* 報), either through legal punishment by the local *yamen* 衙門 (i.e. the administrative office of a local bureaucrat) or due to illness. The retribution also basically follows the Confucian morality of social hierarchical order. An example is that women are subjected to their husbands. In the first case, two female neighbors, née Yang and Madam Sun, are judged as deserving death because the former has an affair and the latter has been mean to her neighbors. However, there is no criticism of née Yang’s husband Qiu, who directly urges his wife to kill herself, let alone any legal punishment is considered. Moreover, a mysterious element is once involved through the agency of karmic retribution. Zhu Chang plans to bribe the coroner to lie about the death of née Yang’s corpse, but the corpses, even months later, are still “so well preserved that they looked as if still alive” (一毫不變，宛然如生).<sup>80</sup> As the only episode concerning the power of mystery in this story, it introduces a supernatural intervention of Heaven of social order to the realistically fashioned narrative.

### *Disastrous Miserliness*

Since the story is developed with a palpable edifying purpose, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes that the evils of greed, miserliness, and grudge are what directly causes the conflicts. The core message is conveyed at the end, which is to “advise people not to begrudge their money and to control their tempers” (奉勸世人，捨財忍氣為上).<sup>81</sup> It seems that if the characters give up a certain amount of money and be tolerant, they could have been able to prevent conflicts and tragedies. In all four cases, the narrator gives no clear judgment about which side has the rightful claim on the money or property in the dispute. Instead, what actually matters is how people react to it. As the

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<sup>79</sup> See “Daxue” 大學, in Dai Sheng 戴聖, *Liji yijie* 禮記譯解, trans. and comm. Wang Wenjin 王文錦 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 805f.

<sup>80</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 806.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 813.

comment in the text suggests, “patience does one good; willfulness brings one disaster” (含容終有益，任意定生災).<sup>82</sup>

Similar to willfulness, miserliness also very likely brings about disaster in the representation of the *Sanyan* stories. In the second case, Mr. Wang is described as “a miser who hung on to every penny. Asking money from him was like demanding flesh from his body.”<sup>83</sup> (舍不得一文錢的慳吝老兒，說着要他的錢，恰像割他身上的肉；HY 34.761) In such a metaphor, money is again associated with the human body, and the miserliness indicates the impossibility of using money in exchange for human body and life.

The miserliness not only harms the miser himself but is also potentially detrimental to his family. The prologue to the fifth story, “Lü Dalang,” in *Jingshi tongyan* recounts a family tragedy of an extremely stingy rich man, Jin Zhong 金鐘. Jin has a strong fondness of money and has been mean to himself, his parents, his relatives, and especially monks. From his point of view, monks are always “at the receiving end of alms” (單會佈施俗家的東西).<sup>84</sup> However, his wife, née Shan 單氏, is much given to good deeds. Since she is without child beyond forty years of age, she donates jewelry to a temple in her neighborhood and preys for children. Fortunately, the Buddha is responsive, and she gives birth to two boys in succession. Therefore, she still usually donates to the temple and supports the old monk there, without Jin’s knowledge. However, one day Jin notices her deeds. Being irritated, Jin plans to poison the old monk with cakes containing arsenic. At this time, Jin’s two boys are at the age of schooling and usually play at the temple after school. To serve the two lovely kids, the old monk offers them the cakes, which makes the two boys die by accident. When née Shan learns what Jin has done, she hangs herself out of anger and grief. When seeing her dead, Jin also falls ill and dies soon. In this story, it appears that the lives of née Shan’s children are received in exchange for her jewelry, which is worth more than twenty taels of silver. The long-term charity accumulates merits for her, which leads to the reward of two sons. The increasing association of merits (*gongde* 功德) with money in the late Ming context will be discussed closely in the fourth chapter.

If we leave out the apparent religious elements for the moment, the extreme miserliness could still easily bring evil crime and disaster to a family. The death of the boys appears to be a punishment not only for Jin’s intended murder but also for his constant stingy behavior that is problematic to the order of society. On the one hand, he hates the requirement of money in paying for clothes, dwelling, food, socializing,

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<sup>82</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 798.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 803.

<sup>84</sup> Feng Menglong, *Stories to Caution the World: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 67.

and tax. However, as a rich man, Jin's mentality and behavior appear to be rather paradoxical, for he actually negates the function of exchange of money and the penetration of money and commerce of the society. Instead of using money to satisfy his desires, Jin is miserly even to himself, since he "literally counted the grains of rice before cooking and weighed the sticks of firewood on his scales before lighting the kitchen fire" (數米而炊，稱柴而爨).<sup>85</sup> As McMahon has pointed out, "the miser reduces everything in life to the quantitative proportions of money and in so doing pretends to be able to control all containers and contain all things."<sup>86</sup> However, trying to control money by hoarding and opposing monetized economy is apparently satirized in the story.

On the other hand, he wishes to gain "Deng Tong's copper hill" (*Dengjia tongshan* 鄧家銅山), "Guo Huang's gold vault" (*Guojia jinxue* 郭家金穴), "Shi Chong's treasures" (*Shi Chong de jubaopen* 石崇的聚寶盆), and "Patriarch Lü Chunyang's finger that could change stone into gold" (*Lü Chunyang zushi dianshi weijin zhege shouzhitou* 呂純陽祖師點石為金這個手指頭).<sup>87</sup> Except for Lü Dongbin (Chunyang), the other three are all historical figures who are famous for their excessive wealth. However, the tragedies of Deng Tong and Shi Chong were more or less associated with their attitude to money. The intertextual reference to these figures suggests that wealth tends to bring about disaster, which is evidenced by a story about Shi Chong as indicated in *Gujin xiaoshuo*. In the prologue of the thirty-sixth story, "Song Sigong danao jinhun Zhang" 宋四公大鬧禁魂張 (Song the fourth Greatly Torments Tightwad Zhang), Shi Chong is sentenced to death as a consequence of the terrible jealousy of an aristocrat. Before his execution, Shi sighs, saying that it was all because others coveted his wealth. In response, the executioner says, "Since you knew that too much money would bring you trouble, why didn't you give it away before it was too late?" (你既知財多害己，何不早散之；GJ 36.526)<sup>88</sup> Compared with the records about Shi Chong in *Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語 (A New Account of the Tales of the World),<sup>89</sup> the attribution of the fundamental reason of his death to "too much

<sup>85</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 67.

<sup>86</sup> Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham and London: 1995), 82.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Deng Tong 鄧通 was a favorite of Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BC) of Han dynasty, who was given the permission to mint copper coins, but starved to die in the reign of Emperor Jing; Guo Kuang 郭況 (9-59) was a favorite of Emperor Guangwu of Eastern Han dynasty, who received a huge amount of gifts from the emperor; Shi Chong 石崇 (249-300) was a wealthy minister in Jin dynasty, well-known for his extravagant lifestyle.

<sup>88</sup> Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, trans. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 620.

<sup>89</sup> According to *Shi shuo xin yu*, Shi was killed because he refused to offer his beautiful concubine to Sun Xiu 孫秀 (?-301); see Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, ed., *Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 938-940. For the English translation see Liu Yiqing, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 2nd ed. trans. Richard B. Mather (Ann Arbor, Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), 526-528.

money” is probably a late Ming invention by the editor/author. In the Ming-Qing period, there was a tendency for merchants to contribute to philanthropy for the community or the clan.<sup>90</sup> For rich clans and families, contribution to charity is a good way to improve socio-economic environment, thus to maintain the local prosperity and their own fame. In contrast, in the story of the miser Jin, he is hated by his clansmen and is given two nicknames, “Cold Water Jin” (*Jin lengshui* 金冷水) and “Skinflint Jin” (*Jin bopi* 金剥皮). Rich men like him are naturally expected to donate money. The miserly behavior is obviously contrary to his social responsibility and tends to result in disorder.

### *Priceable Human Beings*

While miserly behavior and the hoarding of money would beget disasters, the abandonment of certain amounts of money would bring about good luck. In the narrative proper of “Lü Dalang,” the good fortune of the male protagonist is his reunion with several family members. As described in the text, it seems that each of them, including his son, brother, and wife, is implicitly labeled with a particular price.

The story recounts the experience of a Changzhou 常州 merchant named Lü Yu 呂玉. When he did business in Shanxi Province, he was trapped there for three years due to an illness. When he is finally on his way back home, he finds a shoulder bag containing about two hundred taels of silver. Coincidentally, in another inn, he meets a Huizhou merchant who runs a shop in Yangzhou. During their chatting, the merchant says that he has accidentally lost his bag of two hundred taels of silver. Thinking he might be the owner, Lü Yu accompanies the merchant to his house in Yangzhou and returns the bag of silver to him. He also finds that the page boy the merchant bought for three taels of silver, several years ago, is actually his lost son. To thank Lü Yu for his kindness, the merchant gives him twenty taels of silver as a gift. On Lü Yu and his son’s leaving, they see a boat sinking and the passengers drowning and crying for help. Seeing other boatmen clamoring for a reward, Lü Yu offers the twenty taels of silver for the rescue. When the people are saved, it turns out that one of the passengers is his youngest brother Lü Zhen 呂珍, who comes out to seek Lü Yu because someone said that he had died in Shanxi. Also, because of the rumored death, the other younger brother Lü Bao 呂寶 urges Lü Yu’s wife, née Wang, to remarry a guest, so that Lü Bao could gain the betrothal gift of thirty taels of silver. However, by accident, it is Bao’s wife who is taken away by the guest. Soon, Lü Yu, his son, and Lü Zhen arrive home, and Lü Bao is so ashamed that he runs away.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Wang Rigen, *Ming Qing minjian shehui de zhixu*, 493.

<sup>91</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 70-78.

The terms *jin* 金 (money) and *gurou* 骨肉 (bones and flesh), as appearing in the title, already indicate the connection between money and human bodies. The patriarch of the family, Lü Yu, is positioned at the center. His son, brothers, and wife seem to be extended from him, but they could also be regarded as part of his “bones and flesh.” It is intriguing that they are respectively linked with prices of two hundred taels, twenty taels, and thirty taels of silver.<sup>92</sup> As indicated, the value of a son ranks first, while a wife and a brother are valued similarly.

A parallel of the vernacular story is found in a Ming *biji* collection, titled *Huizhu xintan* 揮塵新譚 (New Conversations While Brandishing the Fly Whisk), and attributed to Wang Zhaoyun 王兆雲 (ca.1549-?, *zi* Yuanzhen 元禎).<sup>93</sup> The entry is titled “Huanyin dezi” 還銀得子 (Returning the Silver and Getting One’s Son Back). Although there is no evidence that this classical text and Feng’s vernacular version shared the same source material or that Feng’s text was derived from it, such a motif presumably generated from a Ming context because of the title of the degree held by the protagonist and the everyday use of silver.<sup>94</sup> A comparison between the two texts shows several noticeable differences. First, the classical text only concerns the protagonist and his son, without the episodes concerning the brothers and wife. Second, the amounts of the money in the two texts diverge largely. In “Huanyin dezi,” the money paid for buying the son is three hundred *qian* 錢 (ca. thirty taels) of silver, and the money returned is eight *qian*. However, the amounts are respectively three taels and two hundred taels of silver in the vernacular text.<sup>95</sup> It seems that in the vernacular story, the value of a son is believed to be much higher. Compared with the classical tale, the vernacular story seems to elevate the significance of the favor, as measured by the larger amount of lost money.

With more characters brought into the story, the vernacular story further underlines the prominence of money and its close connection with the value of human beings. At the end of the story, the cause and effect regarding money and family members are further emphasized by Lü Yu’s words as follows:

「我若貪了這二百兩非意之財，怎能勾父子相見？若惜了那二十兩銀子，不去撈救覆舟之人，怎能勾兄弟相逢？若不遇兄弟時，怎知家中信息？今日夫妻重會，一家骨肉團圓，皆天使之然也。」 (TY 5.63)

<sup>92</sup> Here are some data that can reflect the purchasing power of silver in the late Ming: The monthly salary of the lowest official is about 3.5 taels of silver; the prices of small residence range from ten 10 to 70 taels. See Peng Xinwei, *Zhongguo huobi shi*, 504-506.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Yuan Yuan 袁媛, “Wan Ming xiaoshuojia Wang Zhaoyun shengping zhushu kao” 晚明小說家王兆雲生平著述考, *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 4 (2017): 188-202.

<sup>94</sup> The title of *jiansheng* 監生 (student of the Imperial Academy) was used in the Ming-Qing period.

<sup>95</sup> *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu biancuan weiyuanhui* 四庫全書存目叢書編纂委員會, ed., *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu: zibu* 四庫全書存目叢書: 子部, 261 vols. (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1995), vol. 248, 138.



“Had I greedily kept those two hundred taels of silver that I had never even expected to have, how would I have been reunited with my son? Had I begrudged those twenty taels of silver and held back from rescuing some drowning people, how would I have been reunited with my brother? Had I not met my brother, how was I to know what was happening at home? It’s by the will of heaven that I’m reunited with my wife and the rest of the family.”<sup>96</sup>

According to his remarks, it is his abandonment of money that leads him to the family reunion step by step. Including the exchange of jewelry worth twenty taels of silver for two sons in the prologue, the whole narrative “Lü Dalang” illustrates the pricing of human beings with four examples as it repeatedly attaches certain amounts of money to certain family members.

The prices and money involved implicitly reveal a ranking of different relationships. In “Lü Dalang,” which links money to the gain of human life, the largest amount of money is attributed to the most important member. However, in the other narrative, “Yiwen qian,” which discusses the loss of human life, the amounts of money or property as causes of the death increase from the central relations to the peripheral relations accordingly. It seems that the evil side of money is extremely detrimental and easily causes disorder to escalate. In “Yiwen qian,” the series of tragedies are attributed to the one penny of copper cash, as stated at the end, “That one little penny led to thirteen deaths in all” (總為這一文錢，共害了十三條性命).<sup>97</sup> The conflicts and anxieties follow the flowing money from one place to another and from one social relation to another. While the destructive power of money lies even in the smallest measuring and social units, its constructive power requires the largest amount abandoned in exchange for the most valuable relationship.

### 2.3 Evil of Luxury and Gambling

As discussed in the first chapter, both in Chinese and European societies, as Berry notes, “‘luxury’ was a stock ingredient in the moral vocabulary of the ‘pre-modern’ period.”<sup>98</sup> Although in the commercialized late Ming society, some scholars like Lu Ji recognized the beneficial function of luxury for economic well-being, such as providing job opportunities and income for common people, China was different from Europe in the way that the latter witnessed the de-moralization of luxury. On the contrary, as Clunas contends, in China, the level of complaint about luxury, waste and

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<sup>96</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 77f.

<sup>97</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 812.

<sup>98</sup> Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 101.

excess rose to become a flood from the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>99</sup> While these complaints tend to betray an anxiety over the blurring of social status distinctions due to unrestrained consumption,<sup>100</sup> the criticism of extravagant lifestyle represented in vernacular stories usually points to undesirable social relations, habits, and the incapability of managing property appropriately. A typical pattern of plot is found in four different vernacular stories, “Du Zichun” in *Xingshi hengyan*, “Chi gongzi” in *Erke pai’an jingqi*, “Baiqiang” in *Xing shi yan*, and “Gui shuqian” in *Wusheng xi*. In all of these narratives, a prodigal protagonist, who is so rich that he has no idea of managing money, is allured by some tricky friends in wasting his family wealth. While these friends benefit from him, the protagonist usually falls into poverty first but finally awakens.

### *Luxurious and Dangerous Lifestyle*

Among these stories, the most typical one is “Chi gongzi.” Although both its prologue story and the main story generally follow the pattern described above, the focal points are different to some extent. In the prologue, the protagonist Guo’s desires and needs for a luxurious life are elaborated. He has high demands for the decoration of the rooms, extreme cleanliness, new and perfectly-fitting clothes, superior quality silk, etc. The reason for his falling into poverty is then attributed to his wasteful behavior and ignorance about money and money-making.<sup>101</sup>

The vernacular story “Du Zichun”, which is derived from a religious motif circulated in the Tang (cf. subchapter 4.2), also devotes a long passage to the description of the extravagant life of the wastrel Du Zichun in Yangzhou. Different from the complaining tone in the other stories, the portrayal here reveals the following descriptions of a Yangzhou salt merchant’s luxury life:

宅後造起一座園亭，重價構取名花異卉，巧石奇峰，粧成景致。曲房深院中，置買歌兒舞女，豔妾妖姬，居於其內。每日開宴園中，廣召賓客。你想那揚州乃是花錦地面... (HY 37.820)

Behind his house [in Yangzhou] he built a garden with pavilions, to adorn which he bought prized flowers and exquisite porous rocks. And he purchased singing and dancing girls and bewitching women as concubines and put them in the secluded boudoirs. Every day he set out banquets in the garden to entertain guests. Won’t you agree that Yangzhou is a glamorous place...

<sup>99</sup> Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Ling Mengchu, *Erke*, 389-391.

輕車怒馬，春陌遊行；走狗擎鷹，秋田較獵。青樓買笑，纏頭那惜千緡；博局呼盧，一擲常輸十萬。畫船簫管，恣意逍遙；選勝探奇，任情散誕。風月場中都總管，烟花寨內大主盟。(HY 37.820)

With strong horses pulling light carriages, They took to the roads for their spring outings. Taking dogs, holding falcons on their arms, They went on hunting trips, tramping through autumn fields. They sought laughter in the pleasure quarters, Sparing no expense on lavish gifts. In gambling games they lost tons of money; on painted boats they enjoyed the music of the flute. Touring scenic spots, they wallowed in delight, And they were masters of the houses of ill repute.<sup>102</sup>

Although being adapted from the classical tale written in the Tang, the portrayal above evidently reflects the contemporary context of late Ming Yangzhou. Due to the reformation and development of the salt industry in Yangzhou after the mid-Ming, salt merchants, their wealth and extravagant lifestyles became typical features of the city to some extent.<sup>103</sup> The luxury described here mainly involves leisure activities, including banquets, performance, traveling, gambling, visiting pleasure quarters, enjoying music, etc. In spite of employment in the service industry brought along by the extravagance, the beautiful scenes are contrasted by Du's later poverty and the apparent encouragement of a detachment from money by the narrator's commentary, which betrays anxiety over the unreliability of the transient prosperity.

Another peril of the prodigals' luxurious lifestyle lies in their attachment to silver and abandonment of land property. In "Du Zichun," "Gui shuqian," and both prologue and narrative proper of "Chi gongzi," the disconnection between the protagonist and their farming land is represented as the most serious point that determines their tragic poverty.

Unlike landed property, silver currency is seen as inferior and dangerous even in its own nature. Though based on the agricultural economy, money is lacking ties to the earth is viewed in a skeptical way. Von Glahn has noted that, Xu Dunqiu 許敦侗 (b. 1541), a native near Hangzhou noticed "a significant shift in investment: away from arable land and toward intensive cash-crop cultivation, moneylending, and processing industries," which Xu sees as a potential cause of the decay of social customs.<sup>104</sup> Apparently, the turn from farmland to metal currency is rather corruptive to social orders for people like Xu. The solid landed property even exhibits masculine

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<sup>102</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 862f. The word *yanhua zhai* 烟花寨 (houses of ill repute) refers to courtesan houses.

<sup>103</sup> Wang Zhenzhong 王振忠, "Liang Huai yanye yu Ming-Qing Yangzhou chengshi wenhua" 兩淮鹽業與明清揚州城市文化, *Yanye shi yanjiu* 鹽業史研究 3 (1995): 20.

<sup>104</sup> Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, 173f.

traits, such as commitment and firmness, whereas metal currency is feminine due to its mobility.<sup>105</sup>

In the story “Du Zichun” in *Xingshi hengyan* (cf. subchapter 4.2), there is an explicit description of the danger inherent in the fluidity of silver currency: “Du Zichun felt that the ingots of silver were without root, squandering them as so many clods of earth.”<sup>106</sup> (杜子春將那銀子認做沒根的，如土塊一般揮霍；HY 37.821). It betrays a critical tone to silver since its lack of any “root” facilitates Du to waste all his money recklessly. The fluidity of metal currency is thus regarded as a disadvantage, which could lead to negative thriftless behaviors and miserable situations, in which Du has to ask for help from his kin due to his poverty and is rejected and scorned. Therefore, the stories discussed above more or less betray anxieties and uncertainty driven by metal currency, for they tend to cause economic failure and corruption of mores.

#### *Despicable Relationships Drawn by Luxury*

The source text for the narrative proper of “Chi gongzi” is found in an entry entitled “Yao gongzi zhuan” 姚公子傳 (Story of Mr. Yao) in *Mideng yinhua* 覓燈因話 (Stories Told While Searching for the Lamp), attributed to Shao Jingzhan 邵景詹 (no life dates known).<sup>107</sup> The classical tale recounts the luxurious life of young Mr. Yao and its tragic consequences. Yao, from a wealthy and dignitary family, does not engage in any proper work but hangs out with hundred of hangers-on. He soon squanders all his wealth and gives away the contracts of his landed properties in several years. While those good-for-nothings benefit from him, Yao falls into poverty and intends to remarry his wife for betrothal gifts. Once his father-in-law learns about it, he brings his daughter back, pretending to remarry her to a powerful family, and sends the betrothal gift to Yao. When Yao uses up the money again, the father-in-law asks his employee to hire Yao as a worker. However, Yao cannot bear the hardships and escapes, becoming a beggar. Finally, the father-in-law hires him as a doorkeeper of the residence of his daughter. Not knowing that his wife did not remarry, Yao dares not to see her until he dies at old age.<sup>108</sup>

A comparison between this classical tale and the vernacular version by Ling Mengchu shows that the latter’s narrative elaboration and expansion basically follow

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 120f.

<sup>106</sup> This is my translation.

<sup>107</sup> The book of eight entries written in classical Chinese was soon republished and circulated with another two books, *Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話, and *Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話, as a collection entitled *Jiandeng conghua* 剪燈叢話. For a discussion of *Mideng yinhua* and its date, see Qiao Guanghui 喬光輝, “Wan Ming wenyan xiaoshuo *Mideng yinhua* fawei” 晚明文言小說《覓燈因話》發微, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 2 (2006): 144-155.

<sup>108</sup> For the full text of “Yao gongzi zhuan” see Hu Shiyong, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun*, 743.

the plot of its model quite closely. Nevertheless, several differences and divergent focal points are worth noting. First, in the classical tale, the motivation of Mr. Yao to squander money only refers to hedonism, whereas Ling's version stresses the negative influence of the hangers-on. Convinced by these so-called friends, Mr. Yao pursues to become a "hero" (*yingxiong haojie* 英雄豪傑) and "chivalrous and generous person" (*xialie zhishi* 俠烈之士), and enjoys to get along well with "articulate and funny people" (*jieji huaji zhiren* 捷給滑稽之人) and "brave and fierce people who call themselves good fellows" (猛勇驍悍之輩 [...] 自稱好漢; EK 22.391).<sup>109</sup> However, different from the highly appreciated and solid male-male bond in *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 (The Water Margin Saga), the relationship between Yao and his friends is represented cynically. Instead of keeping the righteousness and indifference to personal wealth, they actually scheme against Yao in order to satisfy their individual desires, as illustrated by the following example. When the horses of Mr. Yao, who loves horse riding and hunting, tread on crops in others' fields, the hangers-on largely overstate the damage to the crops to Mr. Yao. As a result, Yao compensates the field owners with more money, which is then divided equally by the hangers-on and the owners.

This weak relationship merely based on material interests is criticized by multiple voices. When Yao becomes a beggar, he awakens and writes a popular song, in which he expresses his regret with two sentences: "The friends left my group, and the hunting dog was cooked" (朋友離群獵狗烹); and "I regret that I made friends with demons" (悔教當日結妖魔; EK 22.401). At the end of the story, the narrator then persuades young rich men: "As for the hangers-on in your house, you should be especially careful about them" (至於門下往來的人, 尤不可不慎也; EK 22.405). In another similar story, "Baiqiang" in *Xing shi yan*, the young protagonist Zhu Kai from a well-off family is also allured by several evil friends in squandering his money and in gambling and is finally killed by one of them because of his money. The danger of a despicable friend and the fragile friendship is repeatedly emphasized in verses, such as: "Don't say that a friendship is like that of Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya."<sup>110</sup> The disputes appear when it comes to money." (謾言管鮑共交情, 一到臨財便起爭; XSY 23.390); and "It is distressing enough that people tend to forget about righteousness when they see interest." (堪傷見利多忘義; XSY 23.385). Such remarks are not only found in short vernacular stories but also in the prologue part of the full-length novel *Jin ping mei*.<sup>111</sup> In these narratives in the late Ming, friendship

<sup>109</sup> For a close discussion of these terms and male ideals see subchapter 3.1.

<sup>110</sup> Guan Zhong 管仲 (c. 723-645 BC) and Bao Shuya 鮑叔牙 (?-644 BC) are famous for their steady friendship. Bao supported Guan spiritually and materially when the latter was poor.

<sup>111</sup> Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng, *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin ping mei*, 2.

based on money and interest rather than righteousness indeed brought about instability to both family wealth and social orders and aroused anxieties accordingly.

Second, some notable discussions added by Ling are relevant to the concepts of *yi* 義 (righteousness) and *li* 利 (interest). In particular, there is Yao's strong admiration of generosity. Following the values of the *haohan* 好漢 (good fellow) type, Mr. Yao despises people who are concerned with money and calculates interest, expenditure, and income carefully. The following persuading remarks that one of his relatives, Zhang, makes to him is rather interesting:

「宅上家業豐厚，先尚書也不純仗做官得來的官橐，多半是算計做人家來的。老漢曾親眼見先尚書早起晏眠，算盤天平、文書簿籍不離于手。別人少他分毫，也要算將出來，變面變孔，費唇費舌。略有些小便宜，即便喜動顏色。如此掙來的家私，非同容易。今郎君十分慷慨撒漫，與先尚書苦掙之意，太不相同了。」  
(EK 22.395)

“There are affluent family properties in your family. Your late father, the minister, did not build up the family fortune solely from his official earnings; most of it came from sound, thrifty management of his finances. I have seen him myself, working from early in the morning until late at night, his abacus, scales, deeds, and account books always at hand. If anyone was short by so little as a penny, it would show up in his figures, and then his face would darken and he would give the man a frightful tongue-lashing. But if he got even a modest bargain, he would fairly beam with delight.”<sup>112</sup>

Even though the passage serves as one of Ling Mengchu's satires, as illustrated by Hanan, it still suggests a positive attitude to an almost mean way of pursuing selfish interest, while the aforementioned stories in Feng Menglong's *Sanyan* encourage the abandoning of certain profit in order to exchange it for human lives and family stability. As portrayed in the passage, the mercantile manner of Yao's high official father in dealing with money seems to diverge largely from the traditional Confucian ideals of *yi* and *li*. As argued by Yu Ying-shih (1930-2021), from Confucius to Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), Confucianists believed that *yi* and *li* were incompatible with each other and that people could choose either *yi* or *li*. While the former is about public benefit, which is the concern of the *junzi* 君子 (nobleman), the latter is the private interest sought after by the *xiaoren* 小人 (despicable man). However, from the sixteenth century on, literati started to recognize that *yi* could also be achieved by merchants in commercial activities.<sup>113</sup> In the text, Zhang evidently praises the effort made by Yao's father in accumulating the private wealth but looks down upon Yao's self-proclaimed chivalrous and heroic behavior.

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<sup>112</sup> Translation from Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, 159.

<sup>113</sup> Yu Ying-shih, *Shangren jingshen*, 219-223.

Minister Yao's actions also betray some features of the spirit of capitalism as described by Max Weber (1864-1920). In analyzing the advice given by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and his morality, Weber has argued that, as the ethic revealed, "the earning of more and more money, was combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life."<sup>114</sup> Minister Yao's constant effort in making money is appreciated similarly to such a capitalistic value. As discussed before, the introductory story preceding the narrative proper of Mr. Yao clearly expresses the protagonist Guo's negative attitude to luxurious life and hedonism. However, different from the capitalistic ethic that making money is one of the ultimate purposes of one's life, the justification of earning money in Yao's story seems to be more about securing a stable life and social status in an unstable society of increasing social mobility.

Third, different from the classical tale, the vernacular version provides a happy ending for Yao, where he finally reunites with his wife, economizes on family expenses, and works so assiduously that he leads a well-off life. Moreover, he keeps distance from the former friends, those idle hangers-on, thus staying away from the two largest threats, the luxurious lifestyle and the ruinous social relations brought about by it. It seems that with the newly added ending, Ling Mengchu tried to restore the disorder caused by these threats.

### *Evil of Gambling*

Among the four stories discussed in this subchapter, three refer to gambling to various degrees. The story "Gui shuqian" in *Wusheng xi* recounts a family tragedy exactly because of gambling. The story is set in the Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1566) period, in the city of Suzhou. A rich old man named Wang Jixuan 王繼軒 has earned his family property by hard working. When he once leaves home for business, his seventeen-year-old son, Zhusheng 竺生, who seldom goes out, is unfortunately tempted by an organizer of gambling games named Xiaoshan 小山 into gambling. Having won some money at first, Zhusheng then loses so much and even mortgages residences and farmland properties to Xiaoshan and his guests due to their cheating. Deeply hurt thereby, Wang Jixuan and Mrs. Wang soon die from sickness in succession. Fortunately, Zhusheng is still able to marry his fiancée and finally awakens. Speaking of Xiaoshan, one day, a guest from Fengdu 鄆都, who claims his family origin to be Suzhou, comes to gamble with him. Seeing the high-quality silver carried by the guest, four thousand taels in total, Xiaoshan invites his former accomplice guests to gamble together and to maneuver until the Fengdu guest loses four thousand and five hundred

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<sup>114</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.

taels of silver. Out of money, the guest signs a credit note for the five hundred tael and leaves. Trying to divide the money with the helping guests, Xiaoshan just finds that the silver is made of paper. It turns out that the guest is the ghost of Jixuan, and the silver is presented and burned for him by his son. Being extremely terrified, Xiaoshan and the guests all die of illness in the subsequent years.<sup>115</sup>

The narrator places an explicit warning against gambling at the end of the story, saying, “I would give advice to people in the world. You could make money in all kinds of business except for gambling. You’d better not take money from it.” (奉勸世人，三十六行的生意，樁樁做得，只除了這項錢財，不趁也好; WSX 8.171) As discussed in subchapter 2.2, the one penny that causes a series of death is exactly used for gambling among youngsters at the very beginning. This activity was evidently seen as dangerous and disastrous, and literati were concerned about its ubiquity during the late Ming. As Clunas points out, Tian Yiheng 田藝衡 (1524-1591) “frets about the growth in gambling in the cities of Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Changzhou.”<sup>116</sup> Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) wrote that the number of beggars in Beijing was over ten thousand, and most of them were “migrant workers and gamblers” (*youshou dubo zhibei* 遊手賭博之輩) and did not work.<sup>117</sup> Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) also included an entry “Gambling” (*dubo* 賭博) in his *Ri zhilu* (Record of Daily Knowledge), where he noted that the activity of gambling started to be popular from the end of Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) period among scholar-officials and were still rather prevalent among them in Jiangnan and Shandong in Gu’s time. Some officials were even ashamed of their weak skills in gambling.<sup>118</sup> While Gu contended that there should have been severe official punishment for officials’ gambling, common people adopted various measures at the local level to discourage gambling. The warning against the destructive power of gambling were explained in detail in household instructions (*jiaxun* 家訓), village agreements (*xiangyue* 鄉約), encyclopedia books (*leishu* 類書), etc.<sup>119</sup> For example, in an agreement about a ban on gambling, the troubles generated by it were elaborated as follows:

傷風敗俗，蕩產傾家，皆基於此。[...] 終日忘餐，徹夜失寐，仰事父母之無賴，俯育妻子之無依，盜心從此而漸生，奸謀由是而輒起。小則穿穴逾牆，無所不至；大則鳴火持刀，靡所不為。

<sup>115</sup> Li Yu, *Wusheng xi*, 148-172.

<sup>116</sup> Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 155. For Tian Yiheng’s entry on gambling see Tian Yiheng 田藝衡, *Liuqing rizha* 留青日札, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), vol. 1, 158f.

<sup>117</sup> See Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Wu za zu* 五雜俎, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), vol. 1, 139.

<sup>118</sup> See Gu Yanwu, *Ri zhi lu*, 1608-1611.

<sup>119</sup> Chen Xuewen 陳學文, “Ming Qing yilai minjian jindu de zilü cuoshi” 明清以來民間禁賭的自律措施, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 2 (2017): 131-135.



The corruption of public mores and the loss of family fortunes are all based on this. [...] [The gamblers] forget to eat whole days and cannot sleep entire nights. They have nothing to support their parents or to take care of their wives and children, which is the starting point of the ideas of stealing and scheming. Small cases involve passing through a hole and climbing over the wall, by which they could reach anywhere; serious issues include starting fires and holding knives, by which they could do anything.<sup>120</sup>

Such severe criminal acts due to gambling are also echoed in vernacular literature. In “Baiqiang,” it is because a friend of the protagonist Zhu Kai has lost too much money in gambling that he tries to rob Zhu Kai but accidentally kills him. Apparently, in various genres, gambling was regarded as an extremely detrimental activity to social order and individuals in both higher and lower classes.

While gambling was seen as an evil threatening mores and social stability, the symbolic meanings associated with it are also intriguing. In Gu Yanwu’s discussion of gambling, he concluded that it was an “ominous object” (*buxiang zhi wu* 不祥之物) which tended to incur misfortune.<sup>121</sup> Li Yu, at the beginning of “Gui shuqian,” provides the following detailed explanation for the “guilt of the dice” as a synecdoche of gambling :

雖是無知之物，卻象個妖孽一般，你若不去惹他，他不過是幾塊枯骨...你若被他一纏上了，這幾塊枯骨就是幾條冤魂，六面鑽眼就是六條鐵索，三十六枚點數就是三十六個天罡，把人網縛住了，要你死你就死，要你活你就活。(WSX 8.148)

Although [the dice] are objects without consciousness, actually it is like a monster. If you leave them alone, it is no more than several dry bones... If you are entangled with them, the several dry bones are several ghosts with a grievance. The six faces of dots correspond to six iron chains. The thirty-six dots are thirty-six celestial stars. They tie people up and decide on your death and life at will.

Since bones could also be used to produce dice, the reference of dice to dry bones is not merely a metaphor, and its intimate connection to death can be easily imagined. Nevertheless, it still indicates its close association to the supernatural world and an intense fear towards the power which could be transferred from the netherworld to the human world through it. The destructive power of gambling is then clearly represented in the narrative proper, for it not only brings disaster to Zhusheng, the one who loses, but also to the winners, including Xiaoshan and his helping guests. The huge grievance caused by gambling even brings the dead person back to the human world to take a vengeance on the evildoers as is implied. What comes back with Jixuan’s ghost is his fake silver and a set of dice. As Ariel Fox notes, “value could be

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 133. The English translation is mine.

<sup>121</sup> Gu Yanwu, *Ri zhi lu*, 1611.

transferred from the living to the dead through the burning of spirit paper money,” but it could also be transferred from the supernatural realm to the human world in the reverse direction.<sup>122</sup> The spirit money and the dice themselves from the netherworld could apparently also transfer damaging power to the gamblers as a form of karmic punishment.

## 2.4 An Avaricious Official and Merchant Victims

### *Avaricious Official*

While the above stories narrate conflicts generated by money among commoners, “Tanlan han,” the eighth story from *Shi diantou*, provides a rather interesting case about an avaricious official and the conflicts between him and commoners. The story relates how the male protagonist, the local magistrate Wu Aitao, loves money so much that he taxes people in his jurisdiction very harshly. He stipulates that every person passing by on a boat should pay certain amounts of money as tax and that merchant ships pay one-tenth of the value of the commodities they transport. To secure the soldiers’ services for himself, he permits them to extort extra payment from the people. Furthermore, during an legal investigation, Wu Aitao orders officers to beat several innocent members of a rich family until they die, for he covets their wealth. Due to this case which is then reported to a higher official, Wu is removed from his position. He then changes his name and escapes to Nanjing, where he runs a brothel. One day, Wu suddenly speaks and acts as if he is avenged and tortured by the ghosts of the wealthy family that he tormented. He dies after suffering for three days. Before long, his only daughter becomes a courtesan, while his only son dies in exile.

Although the story is set in the Song dynasty, it was probably based on contemporary characters and events. Ji Dejun identifies its sources as anecdotes about an official Zhu Shuxun 朱術珣 (no life dates) with a noble origin.<sup>123</sup> The episodes about ruthless taxation and punishment of people are shared by the classical entries and in Langxian’s vernacular story, whereas the latter’s second half, describing the running of a brothel and the mystical death, is possibly Langxian’s own creation. Moreover, since the case of Zhu Shuxun is also recorded in another source,<sup>124</sup> the representation of these conflicts between the official and ordinary people probably

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<sup>122</sup> Fox, “Money Transformation Stories,” 47.

<sup>123</sup> These anecdotes are recorded by Xu Shupi 徐樹丕 (no life dates) in *Shixiao lu* 識小錄 (Records of Triviality). For two cited classical entries about the similar episodes see Ji Dejun, “You *Shi diantou* de yize benshi tuice qi chengshu shijian,” 188f.

<sup>124</sup> The source is titled *Qizhen jiwen lu* 啓禎記聞錄 (Records of the Tianqi and Chongzhen Periods) written by Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589-1648).

were authentic.<sup>125</sup> Both Xu and Ye note that Zhu Shuxun's jurisdiction is at Xushu [Hushu] 滸墅 near Suzhou. Although in "Tanlan han," the protagonist's official post is explicitly set in Jingzhou 荊州 in Hubei Province, merchants particularly refer to the official of Xushu, saying that Wu Aitao was even more relentless than him. Therefore, Langxian's story presumably reflected real contemporary anxieties and conflicts to a great extent.

Apart from the elaborated narrative about the avaricious nature of Wu Aitao and the harsh regime of taxation and punishment, the narrator's voice also explicitly expresses his indignation in the introductory discourse on money and avarice at the beginning of the story. In the first place, he quotes a poem composed by a Tang scholar Luo Yin 羅隱 (833-910, *zi* Zhaojian 昭諫) on the topic of money.<sup>126</sup> Despite the attitudes towards money and the power of money described in the first three couplets, its last couplet is particularly relevant, "Half of the greedy and cruel nature of noble and wealthy families can be soothed by you [money]" (朱門狼虎性，一半逐君回). The storyteller particularly points out that it portrays how officials in the law court can be bribed by money and continues to discuss the corruption in officialdom as follows:

故俗諺說：「大官不要錢，不如早歸田。小官不索錢，兒女無姻緣。」可見貪婪的，落得富貴。清廉的，枉受貧窮。因有這些榜樣，所以見了錢財，性命不顧。總然被人恥笑鄙薄，也略無慚色。(SDT 8.154)

Therefore, as the popular saying goes, "If high officials do not want money, they had better return to the farmland early; if low officials do not demand money, their sons and daughters have no good marriage." Thus, greedy people gain wealth and nobility, while uncorrupted people suffer from poverty in vain. Because of these role models, when seeing money, they do not care about their lives. Even though they are sneered at and looked down upon by others, they are not ashamed at all.

This comment not only mirrors the common circumstances of officials but also ironically insinuates the dreadful actions and miserable endings of Wu Aitao and his children. By providing the bad endings as retribution to Wu's evil, the narrator apparently attempts to symbolically restore the social order eroded by cruel and avaricious officials.

The narrator then puts forward his own compromising viewpoint for such a situation, acknowledging the necessity of money by admitting that "money is the source of supporting life, which is just dispensable" (財乃養命之源，原不可少; SDT 8.154). According to him, greed and cruelty are not necessarily prohibited, so

<sup>125</sup> Ji Dejun, "You *Shi diantou* de yize benshi tuice qi chengshu shijian," 189.

<sup>126</sup> For the full text of the poem, see Luo Yin 羅隱, *Luo Yin shixuan* 羅隱詩選, ed. Jiang Zuyi 蔣祖怡 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1987), 94.

long as people “take it in an appropriate way, without losing the sense of honor and shame” (取之有道，莫要喪了廉恥), and “as long as they beat with a proper method, without harming the heavenly rule” (打之有方，莫要傷了天理; SDT 8.155). He even concludes, in the ending verses of the introductory part, that “money is what everyone loves” (財帛人人所愛). It seems that avarice could well be tolerated as long as it was not excessive, which coincides with the ideas as revealed in the Tang tract, “Qian bencao” (cf. subchapter 2.1). What matters most in the process of acquiring money is the maintenance of “propriety” (*li* 禮) in the Tang text and “honor and shame” (*lianchi* 廉恥) in the late Ming story.

### *Shifting Identities*

In the conflicts between the official and commoners, the representations of various occupations and their changing identities in the vernacular story are rather intriguing. The confrontations and anxieties between official and merchant are most strikingly positioned at the center of the narrative. The two cases involve respectively a Huizhou merchant named Wang 汪商 and a local butcher and winemaker name Wang Dalang 王大郎. Both merchants are wealthy and positively characterized. The butcher’s case is tragic but simple. He is wronged by Wu as a thief and beaten to death along with several of family members. In the end, their ghosts retaliate Wu Aitao. Besides, the relation between merchants and the cruel and avaricious official is generally in tension due to the severe taxation.

The characterization of Merchant Wang is particularly worth noting. Preceding the case of the butcher, he passes through Wu’s jurisdiction but refuses to pay the extra ten taels of silver extorted by Wu’s soldiers. As a consequence, due to Wu’s investigation, Wang’s entire merchandise worth thousands of taels of silver is ruined. After leaving the place, Wang swears not to be a merchant anymore due to the suffering he experienced. He “purchases an Imperial Academy studentship” (*na ge shangshe* 納個上舍)<sup>127</sup> to get an official post in order to retaliate against Wu. However, the former official Wu now becomes a merchant managing a brothel featuring six beautiful courtesans.

The reversal of their identities is apparently seen as retribution for the innocence of Merchant Wang and the guilt of Wu. As Ho Ping-ti notes, “wealth itself might not be an ultimate source of power in Ming-Qing [Ming-Ch’ing] China.”<sup>128</sup> Although Wang and the butcher are wealthy merchants, who possess properties worth thousands of taels of silver, an official post is required to attain the actual power. When visiting

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<sup>127</sup> *Shangshe* (上舍) refers to *jiansheng* 監生 (student of the Imperial Academy) during the Ming-Qing period.

<sup>128</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success*, 43.

the brothel and discovering that the manager is Wu, Merchant Wang is much delighted and says, “His life is already getting worse day by day” (「他已一日不如一日」) (SDT 8.174). As a vengeance, he sleeps with all the six beautiful courtesans in a row, which for him “compares to behead this ... [hateful] thing [i.e. Wu Aitao] with a sword” (勝似斬這...東西一刀). Wang’s demonstration of his power through sexuality is followed by the death of Wu and his son’s final loss of control over the courtesans.

That Wu Aitao seeks money and sex at the same time is reminiscent of the world of *Jin ping mei*. As Satyendra points out, “the twin dangers of the pursuit of sex and money are often grouped together in the narrator’s comments” in this novel.<sup>129</sup> In Wu’s case, the description of his idea of running such a business is full of scorn and satire. His children are even unable to marry exactly due to the negative reputation of this business. Although it does not directly cause his death, as what happens to the male protagonist Ximen Qing in *Jin ping mei*, Wu’s indulgence in sexuality parallels his intense desire for money. Interestingly, in Europe, money, trade, and avarice as moral perils experienced a transformation from the later Middle Ages on thanks to a different theory, according to which one ‘passion’ can be set to tame another. Therefore, greed, avarice, or love of lucre could be employed to oppose and bridle other passions, such as sexual lust.<sup>130</sup> However, in narratives in late Imperial China, the vices of greed and sexual licentiousness were believed to reinforce each other. In both “Tanlan han” and *Jin ping mei*, the excessive desire for sex and money reflects that the protagonists have lost control over both their body and economy, which is dangerous and disastrous.

Similar to Wu’s death, his social downward mobility and merchant Wang’s upward mobility indicate how the narrator tries to restore the proper order. While merchants are portrayed with sympathy, they nevertheless are apparently inferior to officials. The power of their money can only be achieved through the agency of a purchased official post. Interestingly, compared with “Qianshen lun,” in which Lu Bao satirizes and despises the use of money for advancement in the officialdom, the idea of achieving social mobility through buying a post would seem to be already well accepted in “Tanlan han.” As Ho states, “during the latter half of the Ming and the entire Ch’ing [Qing] period men of above average economic means almost invariably purchased at least an Imperial Academy studentship, if not higher title or rank,” although the sale of it was suspended several times.<sup>131</sup> For the writers/editors of the vernacular stories, who struggled in the imperial examination, acknowledging the

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<sup>129</sup> Indira Satyendra, “Metaphors of the Body: The Sexual Economy of the Chin P’ing Mei Tz’u-hua [Jin Ping Mei Cihua],” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 15 (1993): 93.

<sup>130</sup> Parry and Bloch, “Introduction,” 18f.

<sup>131</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success*, 104.

employment of money in entering officialdom might serve as a way to fulfill their own dreams.

In the above fictionalized narrative representations, money plays rather significant roles in different social relations, ranging from brotherhood, neighborhood, and friendship to tensions between competing families and between officials and commoners. On the one hand, appropriate treatment of money can help keep the family stable and complete; on the other hand, the improper use of money, including greed, luxurious lifestyle, gambling, and severe taxation, tend to engender terrible disaster, especially in relatively distant social relations.

### 3. Money and Gender Ideals

#### 3.1 Inversion of the *Haohan* Model

##### *Money and Models of the Hero*

In the stories discussed in the present study, there are multiple representations of characters and their attitudes towards money. Since most of the protagonists involved are men, it is interesting to consider their perception of the ideal masculinity, and this is commented on. Like the concepts of *yi* and *li* discussed in subchapter 2.3, the gendered ideals also experienced a significant shifting in the late Ming, under the influence of a different social context. Vernacular fiction, such as *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), also played an important role in shaping the notions of a masculine hero in the popular imagination.<sup>132</sup> In addition to the *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero) model of masculinity in this novel, *Shuihu zhuan* provided an alternative model of masculinity, especially the *haohan* 好漢 (good fellow; stalwarts) type of hero.<sup>133</sup> The story “Chi gongzi” (introduced in subchapter 2.3) makes reference to such images of the hero, but demonstrates a rather cynical attitude towards these models.

As indicated in the title, the wastrel protagonist, Mr. Yao, is quite foolish and is coaxed by his so-called friends. These men, intending to make use of the rich young master, deliberately encourage him to imitate the heroic role model. The following passage shows how these people try to convince him:

「自古豪傑英雄，必然不事生產，手段慷慨，不以財物爲心，居食爲志，方是俠烈之士。」公子少年心性，道此等是好言語，切切于心。見到人家算計利息，較量出入、孳孳作家的，便道齷齪小人，不足指數的。(EK 22.391)

“From ancient times, the heroes must not work on profitable undertakings, but act generously. Only those who don’t take wealth and possession to heart and don’t regard residence and food as their aims are chivalrous and upright men.” With an adolescent nature, the young master believed that these words were good and kept them deeply in mind. When he saw others calculating the interest, considering the expenditure and income, or taking care of the family assiduously, he regarded them as despicable and nasty people, who were not worth mentioning.

The text then introduces a kind of people that are close to Mr. Yao, including brave and fierce men who call themselves “good fellows.” Although the model indicated

<sup>132</sup> Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 89.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

generally refers to hero, it is necessary to distinguish among the concepts of *yingxiong* (hero), *xialie zhishi* 俠烈之士 (chivalrous and upright man), and *haohan* (good fellow).

First appearing during the Warring States period (403-221 BC), the knight-errant (*xia* 俠) has the longest tradition if compared with the other two concepts of heroic behavior. It was in this time of political instability and social unrest that the knight-errant took justice into their hands to redress wrongs and help the poor and the distressed.<sup>134</sup> Even in modern China, the term *xia* still basically conveys such implications. In addition, as James J. Y. Liu has noted, knightly behaviors are also based on more specific features, including altruism, justice, individual freedom, personal loyalty, courage, honor and fame, generosity, contempt for wealth, etc. Among these, the last ones are particularly relevant to Mr. Yao's case.<sup>135</sup>

The prominence of the concept of *yingxiong* was achieved centuries later in various cultural discourses during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280).<sup>136</sup> According to literati in this period, "an ideal hero was both *ying* [英] and *xiong* [雄] (outstanding in both wisdom and courage/physical prowess)."<sup>137</sup> This indicates the Chinese paradigm of masculinity, comprising the binary opposition of *wen* 文 (civil) and *wu* 武 (martial or physical).<sup>138</sup> However, the ideal image of *yingxiong* is evidently largely reduced in the words of Yao's friends, for there is no mention of its original requirements of political concern and aristocratic background. Moreover, Yao gives up studying for the imperial examination and dislikes men of letters, totally abandoning *wen* masculinity. The association of *yingxiong* to the treatment of wealth actually seems to be closer to the concept of *haohan*.

The popular novel *Shuihu zhuan* renders *haohan* models usually with plebeian backgrounds. In this novel, the qualities of such heroes transform to skill in the martial arts and a strong sense of honor (*yi* or *yiqi* 義氣),<sup>139</sup> and the handling of money and material goods is closely attached to the latter.<sup>140</sup> In order to manifest *yi*, a *haohan* potentially needs to pay his life, family, job, property, and respectability, be indifferent to wealth and always ready to help other men like the protagonist Song Jiang.<sup>141</sup> This means that he gives up his former social life and joints the bandits life on the road. Although the above passage refers to *yingxiong* and *xia*, it seems that Mr.

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<sup>134</sup> James J. Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967), 1.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

<sup>136</sup> Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities*, 89.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>138</sup> Louise Edwards and Kam Louie, "Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*." *East Asian History* 8 (1994): 139.

<sup>139</sup> W. J. F. Jenner, "Tough Guys, Mateship and Honour: Another Chinese Tradition," *East Asian History* 12 (1996): 10.

<sup>140</sup> Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities*, 104.

<sup>141</sup> Song Geng, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 162.



Yao's behavior is more influenced by the *haohan* model, when considering the whole story. While lacking *wen* masculinity, Yao's love for hunting and horse riding reveals that his pursuit of *wu* masculinity is largely consistent with the *haohan* model.

### *Criticism and Satire of the Haohan Model*

While the source text of Ling's vernacular story emphasizes the danger of luxury per se, the references to and emphasis on gendered ideals in the vernacular story are all newly added. Various signals in the text all suggest a satire and repudiation to the *haohan* model. As indicated in the story, Yao's generous behavior generally serves two functions, to "gain a temporal thrill" (*zao piwei* 噪脾胃)<sup>142</sup> and to maintain his fame and honor. When the relative, Zhang, takes the example of Yao's father, who values private interest and works assiduously (cf. subchapter 2.3), to persuade Yao, Yao's friends again manipulate the hero models to advocate Yao's indifference to wealth. They contradict the behavior of "pursuing interest assiduously" (*zizi weili* 孜孜為利) to Yao's "unconventionality" (*chaoqun chuzhong* 超群出眾) and "unfetteredness" (*buji* 不羈), thus seemingly acknowledging Yao's self-image of fame and honor. However, such honor then proves to be fake since no one actually respects him once he has fallen into poverty. When Mr. Yao finally awakens after suffering from destitution, he denies the model explicitly by saying, "Money is hard to come by [...] I will never be the idle good fellow anymore." (錢財是難得的 [...] 這樣閒好漢再不做了; EK 22.403)

Largely different from the masculinity ideals as demonstrated in *Shuihu zhuan*, which represents the indifference to money and material values and the male-male bonds supported by generosity, the friendship between Mr. Yao and his hangers-on proves to be totally invalid in this vernacular story. As Song Geng points out, "For a Liangshan hero, achieving fame in this homosocial community is a means to affirm his masculinity."<sup>143</sup> However, in Mr. Yao's story, achieving fame and receiving praise from others are portrayed as a joke because such a friendship is far less reliable than family wealth possessed on one's own. Such fake friendship is also repudiated in Li Yu's "Gui shuqian," which features contrasting models of the miser father and the wastrel son. When Jixuan dies, a lot of Zhusheng's gambler friends come to offer condolence. Zhusheng's mother thought that no one would care about it because her husband had been unwilling to make friends. Seeing so many people visiting, she is very delighted. However, these friends have schemed to cheat them of all of their family wealth. Moreover, the narrator clearly offers a high evaluation of Jixuan's character by saying, "The husband and wife are free and easy, truly a couple of

<sup>142</sup> This phrase appears three times in the text, most prominently in the title.

<sup>143</sup> Song Geng, *The Fragile Scholar*, 173.

immortals in the human realm” (夫妻兩口逍遙自在，真是一對煙火神仙；WSX 8.151). In both Ling Mengchu’s and Li Yu’s stories, the misogyny concomitant in a homosocial community of *haohan* is absent, while the hypocritical male-male bond is satirized. Ling Mengchu reversed the tragic ending in the source classical tale of “Chi gongzi” and provides a happy ending in his vernacular version, in which the couple reunited. This further indicates his appreciation of the husband-wife relationship.

By representing a story in which fake male friendship is only based on money interest, and the role model of masculine hero is manipulated for wicked schemes, Ling Mengchu implies strong doubt about the validity of the *haohan* type as well as the alleged reputation it could provide. For Ling Mengchu and Li Yu, such gender ideals and relationships are detrimental to both individual happiness and family stability. Instead, they speak highly of the model that makes a huge effort in pursuing private wealth and property legitimately and taking care of the husband-wife relationship. Such values seem to diverge from the attitudes as indicated in several stories discussed above in *Sanyan*, in which miserly behavior tends to lead to disaster.

### 3.2 The Powerful and Sensible Female

#### *Virtuous Women*

Some stories in *Sanyan* also recognize and appreciate the capability of managing money and property. In many cases, female characters exhibit their superiority to males in dealing with money and property. These women demonstrate their rationality in the monetized world, which is construed as a virtue in these stories. Such a typical virtuous courtesan is portrayed in the thirty-first story from *Jingshi tongyan*, “Zhao Chun’er.” In the prologue, the theme of the superiority and prominence of women, especially of courtesans, is placed at the center when the narrator refers to the saying, “Worthy women are superior to men” (有志婦人，勝如男子). He continues to comment, “Among woman, no one is lowlier than a prostitute, and yet, even a good many prostitutes stand out as women of great merit”<sup>144</sup> (且如婦人中，只有娼流最賤，其中出色的盡多；TY 31.471). The narrative proper then recounts the story of a virtuous courtesan. According to Hu Shiyong, a potential parallel of it, entitled

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<sup>144</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 534. The narrator then refers to Lady Liang 梁夫人 and Li Yaxian 李亞仙, the former being Liang Hongyu, a former courtesan who married the famous general Han Shizhong 韓世忠 (1089-1151), the latter being the female protagonist of the Kun drama *Xiuru ji* 繡襦記 (Story of An Embroidered Vest), who is loyal to the male protagonist and supports him to achieve great success in imperial examination.

“Loujiang ji” 婁江妓 (The Courtesan from Loujiang), is found in another compilation, *Qingshi* 情史 (History of Passion), by Feng Menglong.<sup>145</sup>

The story recounts how a prostitute manages money to help her wastrel husband towards both economic and official success. The male protagonist, Cao Kecheng 曹可成, a young master from a wealthy family near Yangzhou, is poor at both studying and managing finances. Behind his father's back, he squanders all the family wealth, including silver and farmland property, and redeems his courtesan partner, Zhao Chun'er 趙春兒, from the brothel with five hundred taels of silver. When Kecheng's father and wife die from illness, he falls into poverty and relies on Chun'er for material support for three years. Later, she quits as a courtesan and marries him as a wife. However, Kecheng is still neither able to run a business nor willing to correct his thriftless habits. When Zhao's money runs out, they only live on Chun'er's work as a weaver and Kecheng's employment as a tutor. Fifteen years later, Kecheng starts to think about taking an official post by using his title as a “student of the Imperial Academy” (*jiansheng* 監生), though it would cost one thousand taels of silver to get a good assignment. After Chun'er tests Kecheng's determination, it is revealed that she has buried in their yard wealth worth more than one thousand taels of silver that she saved from Kecheng's wasting behavior fifteen years ago. With the money, Kecheng receives a good post, and with his wife's help, he is promoted soon. One day, Kecheng realizes that an incident in reality once appeared in his dream when he was a tutor. Learning about it, Chun'er believes that it is a sign for Kecheng to resign. Following her advice, they finally return to their hometown with several thousand taels of silver that they accumulated and restore the splendor of the Cao Farmstead.

As stated in the prologue to this story, the virtue and merit of the former courtesan, Zhao Chun'er, is represented and appreciated clearly. Both the character Kecheng and the narrator repeatedly reinforce this point since every decision Chun'er makes for Kecheng is reasonable. When Kecheng fails to run a business and seeks advice from Chun'er, he calls her a “wise wife” (*xianqi* 賢妻) for the first time. When she suggests that he should become a tutor, he quotes the saying, “Wise women are superior to men,”<sup>146</sup> echoing the narrator's words in the prologue. Throughout the text, Kecheng employs the word *xianqi* for nine times in total. In the later revelation of the buried treasure, the narrator speaks highly of her, for she has such foresight and determination, praising that, “She is truly an outstanding character among women”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Hu Shiyong, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun*, 704. The main plots of the vernacular version and the classical tale are almost completely same, so it is hard to decide which one has served as the source material for which one. A small but noteworthy point is that the story is set in the Jiajing period in the classical version, while the historical time is not mentioned in the vernacular story. For the entry “Loujiang ji” see Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Qingshi* 情史, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), vol. 1, 301f.

<sup>146</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 541.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

(真女中丈夫也; TY 31.480-481). Since *zhangfu* 丈夫 means admirable man, the narrator compares Chun'er to outstanding male characters. Her virtue is again reflected in Kecheng's words when he is moved to tears and says, "My wise wife, you've been working so hard for the last fifteen years, eating nothing but vegetables and dressing only in coarse cloth. Who would have guessed that you had taken such painstaking precautions! It is Cao Kecheng, my unworthy self, who has brought you all this suffering! Now, my good wife, please accept a bow from me!"<sup>148</sup> (「想著賢妻一十五年，勤勞辛苦，布衣蔬食。誰知留下這一片心機。都因我曹可成不肖，以至連累受苦！今日賢妻當受我一拜！」; TY 31.481) Although Chun'er is formerly a courtesan who receives money and materials in everyday life, she does not have a strong desire for extravagant and leisure life but manages these objects well as a courtesan, as an ordinary wife, and as a lady, in striking contrast to her husband.

Intriguingly, such a model diverges from not only the conventional obedient image of women but also the new ideal of womanhood of talent-virtue-beauty forged in the late Ming, when male scholars started to emphasize and praise women's talent.<sup>149</sup> On the one hand, while in this new ideal, talent refers to skills of reading and writing poems, there is no mention of such skills about Chun'er. The focal points are apparently her wisdom, steadfast spirit, and ability to make good decisions about money at various points. As indicated at the beginning of the story, what Chun'er shows is also regarded as some kind of "talent" (*cai* 才), when the narrator says, "although she cannot compare to Li Yaxian and Lady Liang who has great talent, she endured all manner of hardships and helped her husband establish a career"<sup>150</sup> (雖比不得李亞仙、梁夫人恁般大才，却也在千辛百苦中熬煉過來，助夫成家; TY 34.471). On the other hand, the beauty and loyalty of Chun'er are both mentioned by the narrator. Therefore, she has virtue and beauty that are usually important for the ideal womanhood, whereas the different definitions of talent in her story suggest a divergent focal point of the significant capability of managing money for a woman.

Like many female characters in *Sanyan* stories, Chun'er is portrayed clearly as being superior to the male protagonist Kecheng. However, different from other well-known courtesans who are characterized with great sympathy in *Sanyan*, such as Du Shiniang 杜十娘 in "Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang" 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱 (Du Shiniang Sinks the Jewel Box) and Meiniang 美娘 in "Maiyoulang duzhan huakui"

<sup>148</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 545.

<sup>149</sup> For new ideals in the late Ming see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 160.

<sup>150</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 534. The original translation does not mention *cai* 才 (talent) directly, so I modified it. Li Yaxian 李亞仙, a courtesan, is the female protagonist of the Kun drama *Xiuru ji*, who helps the male protagonist to finally succeed in the imperial examination; Lady Liang 梁夫人 is the wife of the famous general Han Shizhong 韓世忠 in the Southern Song dynasty, who supported her husband to repulse the enemy on the battlefield.

賣油郎獨占花魁 (The Oil Peddler Courts the Courtesan), Chun'er is so strong and respectable that there is no need for the narrator to show her any sympathy.<sup>151</sup> Except for the redemption of her by Kecheng for the price of five hundred taels of silver, she is rather independent before and after her marriage. In contrast, Kecheng is inferior to her in terms of both material and psychology since he relies on Chun'er's money for a long time and has to take her advice at every turning point. His inferiority is also well elaborated through their conversations and gestures. When Kecheng wants to take an official post but lacks money, he keeps crying in front of his wife and even tries to kill himself. Once he realizes that Chun'er has a plan, he immediately kneels down to her and says, "Mother! What idea do you have? Please save my life, quick!"<sup>152</sup> (「我的娘, 你有甚麼計較? 早些救我性命!」; TY 31.479). Later, when he has to ask money from her again, his gestures are again pathetic and obedient.

It seems that in their relationship, Chun'er is dominant but markedly different from the widespread image of the shrew in the Ming and Qing.<sup>153</sup> If we apply the *yin-yang* 陰陽 dichotomy to this couple, the woman can be evidently regarded as performing a *yang* role in various aspects, including economy, intelligence, and authority within the family.<sup>154</sup> According to the narrator's description that "[in both of the posts] his wife assisted him in the performance of his duties" (都是老婆幫他做官),<sup>155</sup> she even makes a direct contribution to Kecheng's official career. In fact, the loyalty, management of money, hardwork, and wisdom of Chun'er can perfectly serve as the demonstration of her masculinity. Moreover, such a powerful and virtuous woman with a talent of handling money is not only an ideal female but can also be a male projection onto female characters, which reflects the characteristics of an ideal self of the narrator. In his discussion of the narrator's strategy of creating female characters in *Sanyan*, Yang contends that the women characters in the *Sanyan* stories can be seen as "created selves" of the storyteller-narrator.<sup>156</sup> In this sense, I interpret Chun'er as a female character that contains the narrator's self-expression.

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<sup>151</sup> The female protagonist Du Shiniang is betrayed by her lover; the female protagonist Meiniang in "Maiyou lang" is from a good family but is sold to a brothel by accident. For the text of "Du Shiniang" see Feng Menglong, *Jingshi tongyan*, 483-499; for the text "Maiyou lang" see Feng Menglong, *Xingshi hengyan*, 31-70. Cf. Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 547-565; Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 38-77.

<sup>152</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 543. I modified the translation.

<sup>153</sup> A shrew is usually childless, jealous, and murderously violent. For a discussion of the theme of the shrew, see Yang Shuhui, *Appropriation and Representation: Feng Menglong and the Chinese Vernacular Story* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 103. Cf. Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995).

<sup>154</sup> According to the *yin-yang* philosophy, male and female, femininity and masculinity are in a dichotomous relationship, where *yin* is usually female and *yang* male; both essences are in constant interaction and can shift. For a detailed discussion of the *yin-yang* concept, see Edwards and Louie, "Chinese Masculinity," 139.

<sup>155</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 545. I modified the translation.

<sup>156</sup> Yang, *Appropriation and Representation*, 99f.

### *Dual Roles of Courtesan*

Except for the story of Zhao Chun'er, there are other stories about courtesans in *Sanyan*, especially the aforementioned “Du Shiniang” and “Maiyou lang” being among the most famous courtesan stories celebrated. The dual role of these courtesans is fairly interesting, for they are the property of the owner of the brothel, on the one hand, and autonomous females who possess their own property, on the other. Different from some stories in *Sanyan* with motif existed from an early time, the stories discussed in this section are based on relatively contemporary events as indicated in their source texts.<sup>157</sup> While the written source of “Maiyou lang” remains unclear and the story is set in the Song, Feng Menglong in *Qing shi* indicates storytelling as the oral source; thus, it also reflects the contemporary late Ming context to a large extent.<sup>158</sup>

As mentioned above, courtesans in *Sanyan* are usually portrayed with much sympathy since they are owned by procuresses and often cannot receive actual respect due to their social status. In this sense, they are usually likened by the procuress to a piece of landed property that can further increase in value. When a madam persuades the female protagonist Meiniang in “Maiyou lang” to accept her occupation, she argues in the following terms: “If we get a nice girl by a stroke of luck, it’s as if a large family has acquired a piece of fertile land or valuable property”<sup>159</sup> (僥倖討得一個像樣的，分明是大戶人家，置了一所良田美產; HY 3.38). In “Tanlan han,” the insatiable protagonist Wu Aitao, after being discharged from his official position because of his crucial maltreatment of an ordinary rich family for appropriating their land, moves to Nanjing and runs a brothel as a sojourning merchant. In his instruction to his son, Wu Aitao describes the lucrative business as follows:

「我僑居於此，並沒田產，全虧這六院生長利息。這是個搖錢樹，[...] 其實勝置南莊田，北莊地。你日後若得上進，不消說起。如無出身日子，只守着這項生涯，一生喫着不盡了。」(SDT 8.176)

“I sojourn here and don’t have farmland and property, entirely relying on the six courtesans for the accrual of interest. [This business] is a money tree, [...] actually better than farmland and land anywhere. If you pursue achievement through the imperial

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<sup>157</sup> “Loujiang ji” is set in the Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1566) period; “Du Shiniang” is set in the Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) period; “Tanlan han” is set in the Chongzhen 崇禎 (1628-1644) period. For the source text of “Du Shiniang” see Song Maocheng 宋懋澄, “Fuqing nong zhuan” 負情儂傳, in *Wenshi yinghua*—*xiaoshuo juan* 文史英華——小說卷, ed. Bai Shouyi 白壽彝 et al. (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1993), 173-180.

<sup>158</sup> See Feng Menglong, *Qing shi*, 421f.

<sup>159</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 46.

examinations in the future, there is no need to say more. If you cannot succeed in it, just stick to this career, it will provide you with inexhaustible income for a lifetime.”<sup>160</sup>

In Wu Aitao’s words, he compares the courtesans he has bought to farmland property that can continuously generate interests and regards this business as only second to being an official. From this perspective, courtesans are only pathetic victims who are owned and exploited by the procurer.

While being property themselves, courtesans in these vernacular stories nevertheless are also able to accumulate their own property. In Patricia Ebrey’s discussion of ideas and practices with regard to authority and property in the premodern Chinese family, she notes that girls had few legal rights to property and received property from their natal families only at the marriage in the form of the dowry.<sup>161</sup> In these stories, quite on the contrary, the courtesans in these stories are beyond the control of their natal family’s patriarchy. Although they are taken advantage of by the procuress, they are still able to manage and accumulate wealth, though usually secretly. Du Shiniang famously possesses a box of treasures worth at least several thousand taels of silver, according to the classical source text, “Fuqing nong zhuan” 負情儂傳 (The Tale of the Faithless Lover), written by Song Maocheng 宋懋澄 (1570-1622). The courtesan Chun’er supports the male protagonist Kecheng financially with her own money before and after their marriage. That a courtesan is believed to be rich is also evidenced by the description in the text when Kecheng’s idle friends are confident that his marriage with Chun’er must have brought enough money for him.<sup>162</sup> In “Maiyou lang,” the courtesan’s practice of managing wealth is portrayed and commented on in greater detail. In the revelation of Meiniang’s secret accumulation of a huge amount of wealth, both her owner, the procuress Madam Wang, and Wang’s friend, the eloquent procuress Madam Liu, are astonished. While Liu is amazed by Meiniang’s capability of managing her money so rationally, Madam Wang is annoyed because she thinks that she has the rightful claim on Meiniang’s private wealth. However, Madam Liu persuades her with the following words:

「這些東西，就是姪女自家積下的，也不是你本分之錢。他若肯花費時，也花費了。或是他不長進，把來津貼了得意的孤老，你也那裡知道？這還是他做家的好處。」 (HY 3.65)

“Those are her private savings. They didn’t rightfully belong to you anyway. If she’d spent them, they’d be all gone now. Or, she might have been stupid enough

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<sup>160</sup> This is my translation.

<sup>161</sup> Patricia Ebrey, “Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History,” in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press: 1990), 208.

<sup>162</sup> See Feng Menglong, *Jingshi tongyan*, 476.

to subsidize a patron who strikes her fancy, for all you know! It's a good thing that she has been frugal."<sup>163</sup>

Although Liu is apparently trying to convince Wang of the legitimacy of the way Meiniang redeems herself with her own savings, her words reflect how courtesans deal with their money to some extent. Presumably, except for money directly paid to the procuress, there are still many opportunities for courtesans to accumulate or spend their wealth, which actually endows them with an autonomy and independence that ordinary girls do not have. When Meiniang sends 20 taels of silver to the male protagonist Qin Zhong who takes good care of her when she was drunk, she says that money comes easy to her.<sup>164</sup> In an everyday-encyclopedia (*riyong leishu* 日用類書), advice for visitors of courtesan house includes an entry of gift giving as a way to pursue courtesans.<sup>165</sup> While a girl's marriage was generally ordered by their father, courtesans seem to be able to prepare a dowry and choose a husband of their own choice.<sup>166</sup> Whether they marry a good man and save a good fortune depends largely on themselves. In contrast to the capable courtesans as represented in these vernacular stories, women from wealthy families are often characterized as innocent girls who cannot manage any finances at all.<sup>167</sup> For the courtesans, the ability to save money is crucial to their future marriage and life and is usually evaluated by the narrator in a fairly positive tone. Ariel Fox has noted that the anxieties of the "monetized body" frequently appear in such stories, referring to their body's being situated at the nexus of market relations, including "Du Shiniang" and "Maiyou lang."<sup>168</sup> Indeed, the female protagonists make considerable efforts to break away from such monetization, but at the same time, they actively utilize their monetized bodies in order to prepare for an ordinary and ideal domestic life.

The identity of the courtesan also enables her to live in a relatively "outer" sphere according to the *nei* 內 / *wai* 外 (inside/outside) spatial dichotomy enforced by Confucianism for men and women.<sup>169</sup> Unlike domestic wives and daughters, celebrated courtesans are busy attending various activities and socializing with men and women outside. All of the three stories mention the female protagonists' connections with male and female acquaintances and friends. In Meiniang's case, she

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<sup>163</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 74.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>165</sup> Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo wenhuashi 中國社會科學院歷史研究所文化室, ed., *Mingdai tongshu riyong leishu jikan* 明代通俗日用類書集刊, 16 vols. (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011), vol. 6, 296.

<sup>166</sup> See Ebery, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 197-223.

<sup>167</sup> In "Chi gongzi" and "Du Zichun," the wives from rich families keep a distance from financial affairs.

<sup>168</sup> Fox, "Money Transformation Stories," 84.

<sup>169</sup> See Roland Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle: The Female Knight-Errant (Xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2009), 32-34.



secretly stores boxes of money and treasures in the houses of her helpers, which later serve her as the capital to purchase landed property for her husband. Chun'er once mentions that she had eighteen sworn sisters when she was a courtesan, who could lend her some money. Shiniang also reveals that the treasures were, in fact, her own savings that were stored at her sworn sisters' places. In the representations of these stories, courtesans' association with people beyond the domestic sphere indeed brings them more opportunities for gaining access to money, which further guarantees them a certain degree of autonomy.

Furthermore, courtesans tended to be associated with the image of the knight-errant in the late Ming. Many famous scholars and their courtesan partners represented themselves as knights-errant, particularly in regard to their independence of spirit.<sup>170</sup> Both the stories of "Zhao Chun'er" and "Du Shiniang" are linked to *xia* values in some ways, for the parallel text "Loujiang ji" is put under the category of "Qingxia" 情俠 (Chivalry of Emotion) in *Qing shi* and the author Song Maocheng of "Fuqing nong zhuan" was an admirer of heroic exploits throughout his life.<sup>171</sup> These female protagonists are in accord with most of the *xia* ideals, except for the contempt for wealth (cf. subchapter 3.1). Although they are generous to offer their male partners large amounts of wealth, money features indispensably and positively in their images.

However, such cases were potentially inapplicable for most of the courtesans in the late Ming. Feng Menglong himself was heartbroken because he could not afford to redeem his lover, Hou Huiqing 侯慧卿, who then was bought by a wealthy merchant instead. He also paid to bury a courtesan who died alone in poverty.<sup>172</sup> The rewriting of these anecdotes and storytelling circulated contemporarily seems to reflect his taste for such an idealized situation, in which courtesans are able to choose their husbands without other impediments. Nevertheless, the dual role of the courtesans as represented in vernacular stories, being property and possessing property, and their appreciated independence, as well as their superiority in managing money, do reflect a new ideal image of the woman in a monetized society.

### *Helping Goddess*

A helping goddess who provides the male protagonist with material support and love is another rather interesting image occurring among the superior female characters in late Ming vernacular stories. Such a goddess is found in the thirty-seventh story of

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<sup>170</sup> See Li Wai-ye, "The Late-Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and K'ang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 66.

<sup>171</sup> Allan H. Barr, "The Wanli Context of the 'Courtesan's Jewel Box' Story," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57.1 (1997): 115.

<sup>172</sup> Fu Chengzhou, *Feng Menglong wenxue yanjiu*, 33.

*Erke pai'an jingqi*, "Cheng ke." Unlike most of the stories in *Sanyan*, the narrator in the prologue directly refers the source text to a classical tale entitled "Liaoyang haishen zhuan" 遼陽海神傳 (The Story of the Sea Goddess in Liaoyang), written by Cai Yu 蔡羽 (?-1541, hao Linwu shanren 林屋山人) in the Jiajing period. At the end of the original tale, Cai Yu addresses the authenticity of the story by referring to two informants who had told the same story as well as his personal contact with the male protagonist, Cheng Zai. Ling Mengchu further reinforces the credibility in the prologue by claiming that the story "is absolutely authentic" (乃是千真萬真的; EK 37.609). A comparison between the two texts shows that Ling's version follows the original one rather closely, even for detail information. It is almost a faithful translation of it except for an excision of a conversation between Cheng and the sea goddess.

Cai Yu's version tells the story of the Huizhou merchant Cheng Zai, who sojourns in Liaoyang 遼陽 (in present-day Liaoning Province) with his elder brother due to their business failure. On a cold, windy, and rainy night, Cheng's room suddenly turns bright and luxurious, where he encounters a beauty who claims herself to be the sea goddess, and she sleeps with him in this dreamlike world. The sea goddess then visits Cheng and has sexual intercourse with him every night, bringing fortune to him and giving instructions for his business. Thus, in several years, Cheng accumulates around ten times of his lost original capital. Seven years later, when Cheng hopes to return to his hometown, the sea goddess is sad, but when taking farewells from him, she warns him of three upcoming misadventures. With her help, Cheng averts the danger and meets the author Cai Yu in his sixties.

Cheng Zai's experience is well reminiscent of famous texts in the tradition of men's adventure with goddesses, including "Luoshen fu" 洛神賦 (Rhapsody on the Goddess of Luo River) written by Cao Zhi 曹植 (*zi* Zijian 子建, 192-232), "Han Wudi gushi" 漢武帝故事 (Tales of Emperor Wu of the Han), and the episode of Song Jiang's 宋江 dream encounters with Jiutian xuannü 九天玄女 (Mystic Goddess of the Ninth Heaven) in *Shuihu zhuan*.<sup>173</sup> On the one hand, both Cai Yu and Ling Mengchu elaborate on the beauty of the goddess and the romantic relationship between the protagonist and her, which resembles the romantic and poetic portrayal of the River Luo by Cao Zhi. Moreover, in Cheng's first encounter, the sea goddess is

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<sup>173</sup> See "Luo shen fu" 洛神賦 in Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤 ed., *Zhongguo lidai wenxue zuopin xuan* 中國歷代文學作品選, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), vol. 1:2, 189-196; cf. Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in Tang Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1973), 54f.; for the story "Han Wudi gushi" see Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi lue* 中國小說史略 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1952), 38-42; and for Song Jiang's story see Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1975), 553-565.

accompanied by two beauties. Interestingly, when Cao Zhi encounters Luo River, she also has two companions, Ehuang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英.<sup>174</sup>

On the other hand, the sea goddess is represented as a savior and authority to the male protagonist. First, the way that Cai Yu and Ling Mengchu emphasize much on the magnificent sceneries and atmosphere upon the goddess' arrival is similar to the arrival of Xi Wang Mu 西王母 (The Mother Queen of the West) in "Han Wudi gushi." Second, as Song Jiang dreams of the encounter with Jiutian xuannü when he is hiding from great danger, Cheng Zai is also suffering from coldness and sadness on a rainy night when the sea goddess appears.<sup>175</sup> The goddesses provide them with protection, a peaceful and luxurious environment, and crucial instructions. In Cheng's case, it is the sea goddess' guidance that brings him wealth, and she also saves him from emergency three times. Besides, Jiutian xuannü, Xi Wang Mu, and the sea goddess all demonstrate their full authority toward the male protagonists and perform the role of a savior and helper, while the men betray their ignorance, which is even criticized or satirized explicitly. Despite the erotic relationship between Cheng and the sea goddess, Cheng always treats her with great respect. With similarities to the aforementioned texts, the sea goddess in Cai Yu's and Ling Mengchu's stories exhibits two roles, acting as both an ideal of romance and a maternal authority, guiding the male protagonist's life and business.

In Cheng's story, the sea goddess is particularly independent and powerful if compared to sea goddesses in medieval literature. As Schafer states, when goddesses of large bodies of water turn up, "they normally appear subjected to the authority of male divinities."<sup>176</sup> Even in Song Jiang's dream, Jiutian xuannü mentions that he has been banished from heaven by the male divine Yü Di 玉帝 (Jade Emperor), which indicates the latter's authority. However, the sea goddess here is not associated with any divine figure. In Cai's tale, there is a relatively long discourse on religion, mystery and the identity of the sea goddess between Cheng and her, which is then cut by Ling Mengchu probably because it is quite irrelevant to the development of the plots and might reduce the story's function of entertainment.<sup>177</sup> The discourse is basically made up of Cheng's questions and the goddess' answers. Her mystical identity and entire independence are clearly suggested by the following conversation:

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<sup>174</sup> They are the Xiang goddesses, daughters of Emperor Yao. They were both married to his successor, Emperor Shun.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Wu Yenna, "Outlaws' Dreams of Power and Position in *Shuihu zhuan*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 18 (1996): 45-67.

<sup>176</sup> Schafer, *The Divine Woman*, 126.

<sup>177</sup> For the function of entertainment of *Erpai* stories see Alastair Ewan Macdonald, "Reimagining the Vernacular Story: Textual Roles, Didacticism, and Entertainment in *Erpai*," Ph.D. diss., (University of London, 2016), 256-342.

問美人姓氏為何。曰：「吾既海神，有何姓氏。多則天下人皆我同姓，否則一姓亦無也。」「有父母親戚乎？」曰：「既無姓氏。豈有親戚。多則天下人盡吾同胞，少則全無瓜葛也。」「年歲何矣？」曰：「既無所生，有何年歲。多則千歲不止，少則一歲全無。」

Cheng asked: “What is your family name?” She answered: “Since I am the sea goddess, how could I have a family name? From a broad perspective, all people under heaven share my family name, or I don’t have a single family name.” He asked: “Do you have parents and relatives?” She answered: “Since I don’t have a family name, how could I have relatives. Broadly speaking, people under heaven are all my siblings. Narrowly speaking, no one is associated with me at all.” He asked: “What is your age?” She answered: “Since no one gave birth to me, how could I have an age? Broadly speaking, I am more than a thousand years old. Narrowly speaking, I don’t have a single year of age at all.”<sup>178</sup>

Earlier in the text, she also distinguishes herself as a goddess (*shen* 神) from an immortal (*xian* 仙). The answers of the goddess reveal that the patriarchal power and hierarchy are totally absent from her image because she denies her particular association with any divinity and human being. By invalidating a family name and an age, it seems that she is the only authority and is always transcendent throughout time.

The benevolent goddess not only provides Cheng with romance but also acts as a guardian to the merchant. In addition to rendering small benefits possible for him, she delivers a rather important discourse on money to Cheng. One night, when Cheng talks about a precious stone he saw in a market, the goddess laughs at his vulgarity and shows him piles of gold and silver. When seeing how much Cheng covets them, she employs an interesting metaphor, asking him whether a piece of meat on their dishes could be attached to his face. When he denies it, she explains to him as follows:

「此亦是他物，豈可取為己有？若目前取了些，也無不可。只是非分之物，得了反要生禍。世人為取了不該得的東西，後來加倍喪去的，或連身子不保的，何止一人一事？<sup>179</sup>我豈忍以此耽誤你？你若要金銀，你可自去經營，吾黨指點路徑，暗暗助你，這便使得。」 (EK 37.615)

“These things [gold and silver] do not belong to you, either. How can you take it as your own? If you have already taken some, it is also tolerable. However, if you possess ill-gotten objects, they will result in misfortune. By taking things they don’t deserve, people of our time lose many times as many of them or can’t even protect their lives. Is

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<sup>178</sup> See “Liaoyang haishen zhuan” 遼陽海神傳, in Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 ed., *Zhongguo duanpian xiaoshuo ji* 中國短篇小說集, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1926), vol. 2:2, 43-55. The translation is mine.

<sup>179</sup> Ling Mengchu basically translates the discourse in Cai Yu’s version sentence by sentence, while this sentence is the only information added by him here.

it about only one person or one case? How do I could I bear to hinder you from doing it! If you want gold and silver, you can run a business by yourself. I will point out the ways for you, assisting you secretly. This will then be feasible.”

The metaphor of the goddess evidently associates money with human flesh, which also implies that the value of money compares to the human body. While she finds small benefits as gifts to Cheng is unproblematic, to make a huge fortune by doing nothing obviously would be disastrous to him. However, it is quite ambivalent that on the one hand, she considers Cheng’s experience of running a business as a “vulgar affair” (*sushi* 俗事), but on the other hand, by offering secret support for his business, she actually acknowledges the meaning of such merchant activities. The way Cheng buys certain commodities at low prices and later sells them at higher prices, due to fluctuating demands on the market by following the goddess’ advice is, in fact, speculation, yet it is still regarded as a rather appropriate way of making a fortune.

In both versions of Cheng’s story, in her role as a goddess of wealth to the merchant to some extent, the image of the sea goddess stands in marked contrast to some other gods of wealth popular in late Ming Jiangnan, such as the cult of the diabolic Wutong 五通 deity.<sup>180</sup> In his discussion on this cult, Von Glahn states that “money was believed to be under the control of malicious and notoriously unreliable supernatural forces.”<sup>181</sup> The benevolent and loving sea goddess apparently invalidates the temporal and undeserved wealth but at the same time endows the merchant with money in a rather blissful way, both offering him erotic happiness and preventing him from disaster potentially brought by ill-gotten wealth. Widely different from the contemporary capricious Wutong deity, the sea goddess is not only powerful and reliable but also rational with regard to money.

The authoritative and perfect image of the sea goddess also reflects the elevation of the merchant’s status in the contemporary perception. It is well believed that in the Ming-Qing period, the social status of the merchant approximated that of the scholar-official.<sup>182</sup> A merchant’s intimate relationship with an authoritative goddess appears to be a good demonstration of his privilege since in the past such a mystical encounter tended to happen to emperors, literati, and prominent leaders. At the end of the vernacular version, the narrator adds his own comments to the story: “But I don’t know. Since Cheng Zai was merely a vulgar merchant, why was he predestined to have such a mystical encounter?” (但不知程宰無過是個經商俗人，有何緣分，得有此一段奇遇; EK 37.620). The sentence reveals a quite ambivalent attitude towards the merchant. On the one hand, he appreciates the marvelous experience, implying

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<sup>180</sup> See Von Glahn, “The Enchantment of Wealth.”

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 711.

<sup>182</sup> For a discussion of the merchant class in late imperial China, see Yu Ying-shih, *Shangren jingshen*, 355-412.

that it must be a reward for an outstanding character; on the other hand, it is implied that he doubts whether Cheng deserves it due to his merchant identity. In fact, Cai Yu's tale already indicated that Cheng was not vulgar but "originally from a Confucian family and once had studied the books when young" (*gu rujiazi, shao chang dushu* 故儒家子，少尝读书). This, however, seems to be not convincing enough for the narrator in "Cheng Zai". A potential explanation for this dilemma might be underscoring Cheng's Huizhou merchant identity and Huizhou local custom, which "takes business running as the best occupation, but the imperial examination is only second to it" (以商賈爲第一等生業，科第反在次着; EK 37.609).

An ordinary merchant's access to a perfect goddess and the power transferred to the former through an appropriate way of making money seems to have led to a certain degree of anxiety for men of letters, especially the lower elite. Both Cai Yu and Ling Mengchu struggled for decades to enter officialdom through the imperial examination.<sup>183</sup> The merchant Cheng's suffering and being ashamed for years seems to parallel their own life experience. Money, in this case, represents both blessing and power, which they appear to recognize and admire.

In these late Ming stories, notions of money increasingly become integrated into gender ideals. Idealized images of both males and females entail the capability of managing and employing money sensibly. While the *haohan* model is satirized, female characters, including virtuous courtesans and guiding goddesses, serve as idealized male projections, exhibiting the abilities that literati needed and providing imaginary paths to success. Even, some outstanding courtesans also gain new opportunities to make decisions for themselves independently through private ownership to a certain degree.

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Wen Zhengming 文徵明 et al., *Futian ji deng wuzhong* 甫田集等五種 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 260b-261a; Xu Yongbin 徐永斌, *Ling Mengchu kaozheng* 凌濛初考證 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2010), 21.

## 4. Money and Religion

### 4.1 Money and Retribution

One of the salient features of many stories in the present corpus is the way the concept of retribution is incorporated and underscored. The plots of these stories, such as “Yiwen qian,” “Lü Dalang,” “Gui shuqian,” and “Chi gongzi,” all embody this concept in a fairly explicit way, as the narrators highlight in their verses and commentaries. Fu Chengzhou has noted that about thirty percent of the 120 *Sanyan* stories contain content about retribution.<sup>184</sup> He also points out that the editor/writer Feng Menglong himself explains the logic of emphasizing the concept of retribution clearly: “If merit did not bring reciprocity, who would persuade people to establish merit; If demerit did not bring reciprocity, who would punish those who make demerit?” (德而無報，誰相勸於樹德；怨而不報，誰相懲於造怨。)<sup>185</sup> In the late Ming, the concept of retribution was increasingly linked to the accumulation of merit and demerit. Therefore, it is necessary to explore this concept and related ideas first.

The belief of merit and demerit has long existed in Chinese society. It is found as early as the oracle bones of the Shang (1766-1025 BC?).<sup>186</sup> However, it was the morality books (*shanshu* 善書) in the late Ming that incorporated and applied this concept systematically to everyday life and deeds. The organized system of merit accumulation can be traced back to the fourth century Daoist work *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Master Who Embraces Simplicity), written by Ge Hong 葛洪 (c. 283-343).<sup>187</sup> In the Northern Song (960-1127), a famous moral book *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Tract of Taishang on Action and Response) and the earliest extant “ledger of merit and demerit” (*gongguoge* 功過格), entitled *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* 太微仙君功過格 (Ledger of Merit and Demerit of the Taiwei Immortal) absorbed Ge Hong’s ideas and developed the calculation of merit and demerit in an even more systematic way. In the late Ming, the use of ledger of merit and demerit became widespread largely thanks to the well-accepted work, *Liaofan sixun* 了凡四訓 (Liaofan’s Four Lessons), written by the scholar-official Yuan Huang 袁黃 (1533-1606, *hao* Liaofan 了凡).

While the earlier text *Baopuzi* primarily discusses religious values and practices, such as the procedures and requirements of transcendence, the ledgers of merit and demerit and moral books address the evaluation of everyday life, following the

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<sup>184</sup> Fu Chengzhou, *Feng Menglong wenxue yanjiu*, 140.

<sup>185</sup> Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Mohan zhai dingben chuanqi* 墨憨齋定本傳奇, 2 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), vol. 2, 1275.

<sup>186</sup> Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 28.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 31f.

Confucian orders and morality to a large extent, and they acknowledge that people can influence their this-worldly fate through such merit accumulation. In *Baopuzi*, doing virtuous deeds is regarded as one of the two major prerequisites for achieving immortality, the other one being taking the elixir.<sup>188</sup> The merit can only exempt one from sudden death without taking the alchemistic pill. By comparison, in Yuan Huang's text, both inner cultivation and outer fame and wealth can be achieved in one's life by accumulating merit, and he takes his own life experience of success as an example.<sup>189</sup> As compared to earlier religious tracts, supernatural elements such as Daoist transcendence and Buddhist reincarnation are much reduced in it, whereas one's life situation is believed to be caused rationally and instantly by one's this-worldly actions.

The attitude towards money, such an indispensable object in late Ming society, is intriguingly ambivalent in these texts. On the one hand, the expenditure of money tends to play an important role in helping others and accumulating merits; on the other hand, the pursuit of money is much acknowledged and encouraged, and the attainment of wealth is seen as a reward for one's virtuous deeds. In the third chapter of *Liaofan sixun*, entitled "Jishan zhifang" 積善之方 (The Way of Accumulating Merit), Yuan Huang tells ten stories of good deeds that have led to the success of different people and their families. About half of these involve the donation of money or indifference toward money. In almost all of these stories, the ultimate retribution for good deeds comes in the form of success in the imperial examinations and the rise into officialdom. Although Yuan Huang emphasizes that the wholeheartedly benevolent intention is more valuable than the actual amounts of money spent, there are specific quantifications of money spent for good deeds in various ledgers of merit and demerit. For instance, in *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge*, one of the twelve items in "Jiuji men" 救濟門 (Category of Helping and Charity) states as follows:

賑濟鰥寡、孤獨、窮民，百錢為一功，貫錢為十功。如一錢散施，積至百錢為一功。米麥、幣帛、衣物，以錢數論功。饒潤窮民債負，亦同此論。

In terms of aiding widowers, widows, orphans, and the childless, one hundred copper cash makes one merit point, and one string of [one thousand copper] cash makes ten points. If you give one copper cash at one time, it makes one point when it accumulates to one hundred. The points that the donation of rice, wheat,

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<sup>188</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇, ed. Zhang Songhui 張松輝 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 103-105.

<sup>189</sup> Yuan Liaofan 袁了凡, *Liaofan sixun* 了凡四訓, ed. Shang Rong 尚榮 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), chap. 1, 1-68.



gifts, clothes, and other things makes depend on their value and amount. Remitting the debt of poor people also follows the same logic.<sup>190</sup>

Besides the above discussion of merits, the criteria also apply to demerit for ill-gotten money. The detailed illustrations also reveal a rather clear and rational quantification of merits and demerits in actual practice, in which one hundred copper cash or its equivalent generally makes one point.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, by associating the abandonment and obtainment of money to merit and demerit respectively, such a system would seem to betray a negative moral implication of money. Some authors of moral books even consider wealth as the cause of ten thousand wrongs, and both the attainment and holding of money are potentially against morality.<sup>192</sup>

However, at the same time, wealth is seen as one of the best rewards for one's accumulated merits. In Yuan Huang's discussion with the Buddhist monk Yungu 雲谷 on whether one's fate is determined by a fixed destiny or by oneself, Yuan juxtaposes the pursuit of "fame, wealth, and honor" (*gongming fugui* 功名富貴) with the self-cultivation of "virtue, humanity, and righteousness" (*daode renyi* 道德仁義). Yungu's reply not only approves such pursuits but also underscores the agency of human beings: "All good deeds are associated with the heart; If one seeks for it from one's heart, then all senses are connected. The aspiration depends on the self, by which one does not only get virtue, humanity, and righteousness but also attains fame, wealth, and honor." (一切福田，不離方寸；從心而覓，感無不通。求在我，不獨得道德仁義，亦得功名富貴。) <sup>193</sup> Yungu further affirms the legitimacy of possessing large amounts of wealth, arguing that the person who enjoys a certain value of property is the one who deserves that exact amount.<sup>194</sup> In this discourse, he draws parallels between wealth possession and success in officialdom and the birth of a male heir. Since the latter two are precisely what Yuan Huang has demanded most in the text and are commonly significant life goals according to Confucian ethics, considerable importance is also attached to money, although Yuan does not articulate the anxiety over money as he voices his longing for official success and progeny.

In such a context, the concept that retribution is rationally determined through one's agency of merit and demerit accumulation was widely accepted. At the same time, money was playing an increasingly significant role and was closely associated with "merit of virtuous deeds" (*gongde* 功德) or merit (*de* 德). In the late seventeenth

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<sup>190</sup> Yuan Xiaobo 袁嘯波, ed., *Minjian quanshan shu* 民間勸善書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 175. The English translation is mine.

<sup>191</sup> This measure is found in different ledgers of merit and demerit, including "Taiwei xianjun gongguoge," Yuan Huang's "Yungu chanshi gongguoge" 雲谷禪師功過格, and "Wenchang dijun gongguoge" 文昌帝君功過格. See Yuan Xiaobo, *Minjian quanshan shu*, 202f.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, 209.

<sup>193</sup> Yuan Liaofan, *Liaofan sixun*, 25.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

century, there was even a tract entitled “Bu feiqian gongde li” 不費錢功德例 (Merits That Do Not Require Spending Money).<sup>195</sup> The appearance of such a text indicates the importance of spending money in merit accumulation. While it is hard to tell to what extent the author/editors like Feng Menglong and their vernacular stories were under the influence of the ideas put forward in moral books and ledgers of merit and demerit, these stories do reflect overlaps, similarities, and also other implications embedded in the narrative frame of retribution.

### *Literary Representations*

In the corpus of the present study, the treatment of money as the cause of good or bad results varies widely. The concept of retribution plays an important role in conveying moral values. Basically, the acts giving money away or returning others' lost money are described as accumulations of virtue (*de* 德), especially secret virtue (*yinde* 陰德), whereas actions harming others for one's personal benefit are regarded as doing damage to one's virtue. While these ideas usually underlie the narrative frame, embedded episodes sometimes betray ambivalent anxieties.

In most of these vernacular stories, the narrators usually make comments on the stories at the beginning or in the end, in which they explicitly highlight how retribution works. Typical examples of such comments in the different stories are listed here as follows:

世人盡說天高遠，誰識陰功暗裏來。(TY 5.53)

They all say that heaven is far away; none sees that good deeds quietly gain you merit.<sup>196</sup>

六金還取事雖微，感德天心早鑒知。灘闕巧逢恩義報，好人到底得便宜。(HY 18.371)

However trivial the return of lost money, heaven acknowledges the good deed. At the chance meeting at Tanque, good was returned for good; virtue pays in the end, when all is said and done.<sup>197</sup>

悖入必然悖出，天道一理循環。(EK 22.389)

Ill-gotten money will certainly be squandered; the way of heaven as the only principle functions in a cycle.

可見賭博一事是極不好的。[...] 就是送去了人家，也有損於陰德。(WSX 8.171)

As is obvious, gambling is extremely negative. [...] Even though the won money is sent to others, it reduces one's secret virtue.

這便是貪酷的下梢結果。[...] 善惡到頭終有報，只爭來早與來遲。(SDT 8.178-179)

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 241; Yuan Xiaobo, *Minjian quanshan shu*, 158-170.

<sup>196</sup> Feng Menglong, *Caution*, 66.

<sup>197</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 395.

This is the worst consequence of being avaricious and ruthless. [...] There is finally retribution for virtue and evil; it only differs in whether it arrives earlier or later.

These comments echo the ideas found in morality books in terms of the accumulation of merit and demerit and this-worldly retribution. Abandoning money kind-heartedly usually brings about good fortune, and making money by harming the social order tends to result in tragedy. Like morality books, although some comments mention that the retribution sometimes appears later, the cases of retribution underscored in these stories are quite immediate; the longest delay is only several years. Similarly, while some comments refer to the order and power of heaven, the stories actually emphasize more on the agency of human beings by highlighting the cause and effect in plots. It seems that the outcome of people is not determined by heaven but depends on themselves.

Besides the general belief of retribution, detailed information in some stories also echoes the measuring standard in the ledgers of merit and demerit. According to the assigned points for merit in this system, the highest level, one hundred points at once, concerns human life, which refers to saving someone from death or giving an heir to someone.<sup>198</sup> It is fairly clear that in such a system, the value of human life generally equals one hundred points, with one hundred copper cash being worth one point. In this manner, it can be calculated that human life is generally equivalent to ten taels of silver. This is not much different from the monetization of ordinary people in the vernacular story “Lü Dalang,” in which a person is generally worth ten to thirty taels of silver (cf. subchapter 2.2). While other stories also involve the lives of people and certain relevant amounts of money, “Lü Dalang” clearly relates even in its title the abandonment of money for bringing family members back. Although the quantification of human life does not necessarily follow the same standard, such a tendency of quantification in late Ming society is evidently recognizable.

Apart from the ordinary stories of retribution, an interesting and noteworthy motif is found in the eighteenth story of *Xingshi hengyan*, “Shi Runze”. While the narrative frame concerns a typical case of retribution, in which the deed of returning lost money to its owner prevents the protagonist Shi Runze from probable disaster and brings him fortune, the embedded episode is about money transforming into human form, and money is explicitly personified as family members, especially sons. In this episode, an old man accumulates several silver ingots. One day, the ingots transform into men in his dream and tell him that they would leave for another person. In reality, the old man finds his money gone and that the other person unexpectedly gains the ingots. When the latter wants to repay him, the old man refuses and leaves. The ingot recipient hides some ingots into food and gives them to the protagonist as a gift.

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<sup>198</sup> Yuan Xiaobo, *Minjian quanshan shu*, 174.

Although the protagonist takes them, the ingots later still come back to the receiver by a series of coincidences. Several almost contemporary stories share the same motif, including “Zhangsheng shijin” 張生失金 (Mr. Zhang Loses His Money) from *Gujin tangai* 古今譚概 (The Survey of Talk), “Yinzou” 銀走 (Silver Ingots Run Away) found in *Jinling suoshi* 金陵瑣事 (Hearsay in Jinling) written by Zhou Hui 周暉 (no life dates known), and the introductory part of Ling Mengchu’s first story from *Chuke pai’an jingqi* “Zhuanyun han yuqiao Dongtinghong boshi hu zhi po tuolong ke” 轉運漢遇巧洞庭紅，波斯胡指破鼉龍殼 (The Man Whose Luck Has Turned Chances upon Dongting Tangerines; The Merchant from Persia Reveals the Secrets of a Turtle Shell).<sup>199</sup> Although the parallels diverge in various settings, including basic information about the protagonists, involved characters, the number of ingots, and the contents of later coincidences, they generally share the same logic of the main plot. Since the episode in “Shi Runze” is most elaborated, it shall serve here as the main focus.<sup>200</sup>

Several implicit messages conveyed in the text are worth noting. First, in both vernacular stories, silver ingots become a metaphor for a son. Especially in the episode in “Shi Runze,” the protagonist Bo Youshou is introduced as an old man living with his wife, without heirs. Bo not only tells Shi Runze that he has accumulated the eight silver ingots for his own and his wife’s burial expenses but also explicitly expresses the intention of taking the transformed ingots as his sons in his dream, as in the following words:

心中止掛欠無子，見其清秀，欲要他做個乾兒，又對他道：「既承你們到此，何不住在這裏，父子相看，幫我做個人家？怎麼又要往別處去？」八個小廝笑道：「你要我們做兒子，不過要送終之意。但我們該旺處去的，你這老官兒消受不起。」 (HY 18.367)

Without a son of my own, I liked their fresh-faced looks so much that I wanted to adopt them. So I said to them, “Since you’re already here, why don’t you stay on as my sons and help me out? Why go elsewhere?” All eight of them burst out laughing and said, “You want to adopt us just so that we can take care of your burial expenses, but we’re destined for a more prosperous place. Too bad you are not meant to enjoy us.”<sup>201</sup>

Since in imperial China, one of the important roles of a son is to take care of the burial expenses for his parents, when Bo compares silver ingots to sons, this is both

<sup>199</sup> See “Zhang sheng shijin” in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed., *Gujin tangai* 古今譚概 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 759; see “Yin zou” in Zhou Hui 周暉, *Jinling suoshi* 金陵瑣事, 2 vols. (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1955), vol. 1, 1b-2a; see “Zhuanyun han” in Ling Mengchu, *Chuke pai’an jingqi*, 3-6.

<sup>200</sup> For a discussion on the story in “Zhuanyun han” and the story “Yin zou” see Fox, “Money Transformation Stories,” 66-74.

<sup>201</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 392.

implied and revealed in the ingots' words. As mentioned before, the Buddhist monk Yungu juxtaposes the possession of wealth and the births of sons, by which it seems that the two hopes are almost equally valued. Bo's story further renders it vividly. By comparing money to sons, the close and significant bond between money and human beings is thus continued, once again.

Second, different from the representation in most stories that money is closely linked to merit accumulation, money in this motif moves according to other principles. Fox points out that in Ling Mengchu's story, the ingots identify themselves as the vehicle of karma.<sup>202</sup> However, their arrival and departure are more likely to be predestined by heaven than human actions. In "Shi Runze," although the episode serves as another manifestation of Shi Runze's kindness and its money retribution, the details betray the contrary. For Bo Youshou, the only cause of the ingots' leaving claimed by them is that they are "supposed to go to a prosperous place" (*gai wangchu qu* 該旺處去), whereas they dislike being stored as burial expenses. An earlier conversation among silver ingots is more illustrative: "At the first light this morning, pillars and beams will be installed in Mr. Shi's house in Shengze. All those relatives of ours who should be at his house by now are already there. It's time we join them."<sup>203</sup> (今日卯時，盛澤施家豎柱安梁，親族中應去的都已到齊了。我們也該去矣; HY 18.367) The "relatives" (*qinzu* 親族) here actually refers to a large amount of money surprisingly found by Shi Runze in that day. In this sense, money is not an instrument for the merit accumulation of human beings but is an agent itself who moves actively to its kind. From the perspective of a human, such personification implies the autonomy, spontaneity, and uncertainty of wealth as well as a message that money is supposed to be in circulation rather than being stored.

As discussed in chapter one, Lu Bao's "Qianshen lun" also includes a personification of metal currency. A comparison between these two texts shows interesting implications. In Lu Bao's text, the copper cash claims that gold is his father, that silver is his mother, that lead is his eldest son, and that tin is his daughter-in-law. Similarly, the silver ingots of Bo also refer to other silver ingots as relatively. However, although the various metals are closely inter-connected, Lu Bao's text betrays a distance between human beings and metals, whereas characters in late Ming stories tend to build an intimate relationship with silver.

In this section, the belief in retribution and its association with money is well represented and emphasized in late Ming vernacular stories. At the same time, the monetary quantification of certain deeds more or less echoes the standards listed in contemporary popular ledgers of merit and demerit. However, some embedded motif also reflects anxieties over the uncertainty of money, for there are cases of people

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<sup>202</sup> Fox, "Money Transformation Stories," 73.

<sup>203</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 391.

who cannot control it with their efforts. Under the well-accepted concept of retribution, the attitude of contemporary people towards money is, in fact, complex and ambiguous.

## 4.2 Detachment From Money

As discussed in subchapter 4.1, in the belief of retribution reflected in morality books and vernacular stories, money is actually viewed as both an instrument of a blessing future and a reward for accumulated merit. In this manner, money plays a rather significant role for people and is quite indispensable. However, two stories in *Xingshi hengyan* with strong religious features exhibit a fairly different attitude towards money, that is the radical detachment from it. In these two stories, money is regarded as the largest barrier for human beings to their self-cultivation as well as the potential immortality.

### *Stories about Lü Dongbin*

The first story is the introductory part of “Yiwen qian,” which concerns a renowned Daoist immortal, Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓. While the narrative proper represents a series of death cases caused by conflicts over money (cf. subchapter 2.2), its preceding story is relatively peaceful but satiric. The story relates how Lü Dongbin, enlightened by his master Zhongli 鍾離, travels in the world in order to deliver all humans from suffering. Once, he wanders in Changsha 長沙 and puts humans to the test by claiming that whoever donates enough money to fill his small can will get his formula for longevity. Seeing that no one could make the can full, a Buddhist monk playfully asks to fill it with a cart of cash. However, when both his cart and cash have disappeared in the can, and Lü Dongbin does not return them immediately, the monk becomes angry and breaks the can only to find nothing in it. On his way home, the monk encounters Lü Dongbin again, who returns the cart of cash to him and laments the pathetic nature of human beings.

As one of the most popular deities in imperial China, Lü Dongbin has appeared in a multitude of texts since the Northern Song. In early texts, Lü Dongbin’s master is frequently identified as the Daoist immortal Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, who teaches Lü the techniques of interior alchemy. Lü Dongbin then usually travels in the human world in various disguises, in order to help and deliver people.<sup>204</sup> The early images of

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<sup>204</sup> For a discussion on the transformation of the images of Lü Dongbin see Ou Mingjun 歐明俊, “Shenxian Lü Dongbin xingxiang de yanbian guocheng” 神仙呂洞賓形象的演變過程, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 2 (2002): 59-65.

him in various sources diverge. He is associated with several typical themes and abilities, especially healing power, alchemistic technique, longevity, calligraphy, soothsaying, patronizing the wine trade, flying sword, etc.<sup>205</sup> The twenty-second story in *Xingshi hengyan* just tells how Lü Dongbin tries to kill a Buddhist monk named Yellow Dragon with his flying sword.<sup>206</sup> However, in the introductory story of “Yiwen qian,” there is no mention of any of the above frequent motifs. Instead, another important motif about Lü Dongbin is highlighted, which is his ability to transform stone into gold.

Although this motif is only relatively marginal in early texts, it does appear once in one of the tales about Lü Dongbin in *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (*Record of the Listener and Recorder*). In the tale “Huating daoren” 華亭道人 (The Daoist Priest in Huating), a Daoist priest rewards a merchant for the latter’s ride and leaves his writing. Once the merchant discovers the artistic Chinese characters of the script, he knows that the priest must be Lü Dongbin. Therefore, when the merchant encounters the priest the next day, he asks the latter to give him more gold because he believes that Lü Dongbin must be able to change things into gold. As a result, he is played a trick by Lü Dongbin.<sup>207</sup> While Lü Dongbin is renowned for his ability to produce *jindan* 金丹 (golden elixir), which mainly serves as a medicine of healing or longevity, the gold requested in this tale apparently refers to money. Moreover, as Valerie Hansen points out, the author Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202) makes fun of the greedy merchant by calling him an “idiot” (*yongren* 庸人).<sup>208</sup> In comparison, in other stories about Lü Dongbin in *Yijian zhi*, the best benefit for human beings encountering this immortal seems to be the attainment of longevity.<sup>209</sup> Probably, the merchant is seen as stupid because, from his point of view, money is superior to the true benefit, longevity.

This motif is then elevated to the main concern in two late Ming texts, the introductory story of “Yiwen qian” and a story in *Liaofan sixun*. The latter appears in the chapter “Jishan zhifang,” where it is meant to demonstrate that one’s virtue depends on true benevolence from one’s mind rather than from the amount of money one donates. The motif is represented in the following short conversation between master Zhongli and Lü Dongbin:

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<sup>205</sup> See Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal*, 52-93.

<sup>206</sup> See “Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong” 呂洞賓飛劍斬黃龍 (With His Flying Sword Lü Dongbin Attempts to Kill the Yellow Dragon) in Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 456-470.

<sup>207</sup> For the story “Huating daoren” see Hong Mai 洪邁, *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), vol. 4, 1655f.; cf. Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 77f.

<sup>208</sup> Hansen, *Changing Gods*, 78.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. “Shi shi nü” 石氏女, “Du jia yuan daoren” 杜家園道人 and “Fu daoren” 傅道人在 Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, 7f., 1656f., 1654f.

鍾離授丹於呂祖，點鐵為金，可以濟世。呂問曰：「終變否？」曰：「五百年後，黨復本質。」呂曰：「如此則害五百年後人矣，吾不願為也。」曰：「修仙要積三千功行，汝此一言，三千功行已滿矣。」

Zhongli gives Master Lü instructions on producing alchemistic pill, so that he can change iron into gold, which he can use to help and benefit the world. Master Lü asks, “Will it finally change?” Zhongli answers, “It will return to its nature in five hundred years.” Master Lü says, “This would harm people who live five hundred years later. I don’t want to do this.” Zhongli says, “To become an immortal, one needs to accumulate three thousand points of merit. Because of your above words, your three thousand points of merit are already complete.”<sup>210</sup>

While the source text of the introductory story of “Yiwen qian” remains unclear, the above episode is fully quoted in the vernacular text, which, however, serves to contrast Lü Dongbin’s kindness with ordinary people’s strong attachment to money. As a slight difference, the instruction of *dan* 丹 (alchemistic pill) is referred to as “gold and silver” (*huangbai* 黃白) in the vernacular text. In a discourse on alchemy, in the chapter “Huang bai” in *Baopuzi*, the dual functions of gold and silver are indicated as follows:

至於真人作金，自欲餌服之致神仙，不以致富也。故經曰：「金可作也，世可度也。」銀亦可餌服，但不及金耳。

As for Daoist masters who produce gold, they hope to take it in order to become immortals, but not to become rich. Therefore the scripture says, “Gold can be produced, and the world can be transcended.” Silver can also be taken, but it does not compare to gold.<sup>211</sup>

Thus, in the early Daoist text, precious metals are much valued in the practice of pursuing immortality. At the same time, the produced precious metals’ monetary function is acknowledged, too. However, it also indicates that only masters know its true transcendent nature, whereas ordinary people are only trapped in the pursuit of its inferior function of circulation. The vernacular story can be read as a narrative representation of this discourse. Moreover, that transformed gold finally returns to base materials, such as iron and stone, in the Lü Dongbin episode strongly implies mistrust in the stability and durability of money. It further reflects the futility of the attachment to money in the world.

In the episode of Lü Dongbin and the Buddhist monk, in “Yiwen qian,” the attachment to money is clearly represented as an obstacle to becoming an immortal. Lü Dongbin’s small can, which can never be filled, is used as a test for humans, by

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<sup>210</sup> Yuan Liaofan, *Liaofan sixun*, 153. The English translation is mine.

<sup>211</sup> Ge Hong, *Baopuzi neipian*, 516. The English translation is mine.



which he chooses whom he would deliver. Ironically, even a Buddhist monk fails the test. Lü Dongbin then laments, “Even a monk loves money so much. How can there be anyone who doesn’t? There is no one for me to deliver throughout this world. How sad! How lamentable!”<sup>212</sup> (「出家之人，尚且惜錢如此，更有何人不愛錢者？普天下無一人可度，可憐哉！可痛哉」；HY 34.743) The storyteller further emphasizes this point by commenting, “It is easier to meet a divine being than to see a generous donor in this world.” (天上神仙容易遇，世間難得捨財人。)<sup>213</sup> While early texts of encountering Lü Dongbin, in *Yijian zhi*, often involve how he helps people who show him kindness, this vernacular story elevates the attitude towards money to the determinant quality of people regarding the attainment of immortality. In contrast, the narrative proper of “Yiwen qian” is set in a mundane world with few supernatural elements. Although the storyteller contends that the idea of abandoning a penny of cash is extended from abandoning a cart of cash, and money is portrayed as a rather evil and dangerous object in the narrative proper, it is more close to a representation of retribution in an everyday context influenced by Confucian ethics and values. In comparison, the surprisingly radical detachment from money and the world, betrayed in the introductory part, is reminiscent of another vernacular story, “Du Zichun,” in the same collection, *Xingshi hengyan*.

### *Stories of Du Zichun*

Compared with other stories in the present corpus, the thirty-seventh story of *Xingshi hengyan*, “Du Zichun”, has a more complex textual and thematic history, which is worth discussing. The vernacular version is derived from a Tang tale entitled “Du Zichun,” originally from either *Xuanguai lu* 玄怪錄 (The Record of Dark Mysteries), by Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (780-848), or its alleged sequel *Xu Xuanguai lu* 續玄怪錄 (Sequel to the Record of Dark Mysteries), by Li Fuyan 李復言 (no life dates known).<sup>214</sup> The tale was later included in several anthologies, among which *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Comprehensive Records [compiled] in the Taiping Era, 981) is the most famous one.<sup>215</sup>

The Tang tale tells the story of a wastrel named Du Zichun in Chang’an during the Northern Zhou dynasty (557-581) or the Sui dynasty (581-618). When Du has

<sup>212</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 784.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 785.

<sup>214</sup> According to Cheng Yizhong, Li Fuyan is probably a contemporary of Niu Sengru. See Cheng Yizhong 程毅中, “*Xuanguai lu*, *Xu xuanguai lu* de banben he zuozhe” 《玄怪錄》、《續玄怪錄》的版本和作者, *Shehui kexue* 社會科學 2 (1983):75-82.

<sup>215</sup> The classical tale of “Du Zichun” is also included in Song anthology *Lei shuo* 類說 under the title “Pin zai gaohuang” 貧在膏肓 and is entitled “Du Zichun zhuan” 杜子春傳 in the Ming anthology *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海. See Zeng Cao 曾慥, ed., *Lei shuo* 類說 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 186b-187a; and Lu Ji 陸楫, ed., *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988), 257-260.

squandered all his assets, and his relatives refuse to help him, he encounters a strange old man, in the street, who offers him a huge amount of money. However, when Du spends the fortune soon, he receives more money from the old man. At the third time, Du is determined to abandon his old lifestyle and to help people in need with the money. To repay the old man, Du then travels to Mount Hua 華山 to meet him. The old man, who turns out to be a Daoist alchemist, asks Du to assist him in an alchemical process and to keep silent even if he would see horrible scenes and suffer from torments. In visions, after a series of torture, Du is brought to King Yama and is punished and reincarnated as a woman. The woman marries and gives birth to a child. However, she never speaks, which enrages her husband, who then kills her child, whereupon she cannot help but utter a cry. Du awakes from the illusion, seeing the alchemical hall ruined and burning. The Daoist alchemist reveals that Du would have been able to become an immortal if he had not spoken, but since he still cannot forget the emotion of love, he is not capable. Du regrets it and is dismissed.

It is generally accepted that the written source of the Tang tale “Du Zichun” can be traced to the story “Lieshi chi” 烈士池 (Pool of the Hero), an Indian anecdote, in *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions), by the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664).<sup>216</sup> In this anecdote, a hermit who seeks immortality needs a helper to keep silent throughout a ritual process. He finds a suitable poor hero and offers him food, clothes, and money. During the process, the hero is killed and reborn as a man in his visions. When his wife threatens to kill his son, he cries out to prevent it, which leads to the failure of the hermit’s quest for immortality. Apart from “Lieshi chi,” there are two variations found in two collections, which basically follow the plotline of “Lieshi chi” on the alchemist or hermit’s quest for immortality.<sup>217</sup> In all these four tales, the alchemistic process and the helpers’ suffering in a dreamlike world are much emphasized, and the failure to produce the alchemistic pill and become immortals is caused by the love for the child.

Compared with the Tang tale “Du Zichun,” the vernacular rewriting of it diverges in several regards. First, the first part of the narrative about Du’s wasteful behavior (cf. subchapter 2.3) and anxieties over money is much expanded and elaborated, whereas his experiences in the alchemical process occupy only a small portion of the whole text. While the first part of the Tang tale is set in Chang’an, Du Zichun, in the vernacular version, is introduced as a salt merchant living in Yangzhou, who then goes to Chang’an three times to ask for help from his relatives. The conflicts

<sup>216</sup> For the story “Pool of the Hero” see Xuanzang 玄奘 and Bianji 辯機, *Da Tang xiyu ji jiaozhu* 大唐西域記校注, ed. Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 576-578. For a translation see Li Rongxi, trans., *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), 202-205.

<sup>217</sup> These are “Xiao Dongxuan” 蕭洞玄, in *He dong ji* 河東記, by Xue Yusi 薛漁思 (fl. 859), and “Gu Xuanji” 顧玄績, in *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (ca. 800-863).

and anxieties over money are well represented in both cities. On the one hand, in Yangzhou, which is highly commercialized and full of leisure activities, Du Zichun's relationships with other people are all based on money. Although he patronizes hundreds of frivolous and dissipated young men, once he has fallen in poverty, "All his friends went to dig other gold mines. Who would come to fawn on him again?"<sup>218</sup> (那班朋友, 見他財產已完, 又向旺處去了, 誰個再來趨奉; HY 37.821)

On the other hand, in Chang'an, the relationship based on blood is also unreliable. In the Tang version, his conflicts with his relatives are merely simply described in two sentences, whereas the late Ming version renders it vividly, with detailed description and conversation. His relatives not only refuse to support him but also see him with scorn. Even when Du is determined to change his bad habits, at the third time in Chang'an, his relatives only plan to make more profit from him. Du Zichun's attitude towards blood relationships is also ambivalent. Even though he is disappointed by their apathy, and he shows off in front of them once he gets money from the old man, he still sees going to Chang'an as a potential solution for his poverty once he is poor again. When his wife, née Wei, mentions the old man, Du even says with a scornful smile, "How can I expect more money from him! But my relatives are flesh and blood, after all. Those ties can't be cut. As they say, it's better to lean on someone who knows you than on a stranger."<sup>219</sup> (怎麼還望他贈銀子。只是我那親眷, 都是肺腑骨肉, 到底割不斷的。常言: 「傍生不如傍熟。」; HY 37.826) Such conflicts and mistrust about relationships in the mundane world presumably serve as premises of Du Zichun's later pursuit of immortality.

Second, Du's wife, who is only mentioned once in the Tang tale, is characterized rather positively in the vernacular version. Like the female characters discussed in chapter three (cf. subchapter 3.2), the wife, née Wei, also exhibits her superiority. However, in contrast to the model of the virtuous wife Zhao Chun'er, née Wei completely lacks the ability to manage the money of her family, who at first "cared about nothing else but having the finest food and clothes" (只曉得穿好吃好, 不管閒帳).<sup>220</sup> Her superiority is more associated with her morality and the pursuit of Daoism. When Du carries the silver offered by the old man away without considering to repay him, née Wei asks him about the old man's name and expresses her willingness to return his kindness in her next life. When Du fails in the alchemistic process and decides to leave for Mount Hua again three years later, née Wei totally understands his decision and did not have the slightest wish to keep him.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, the wife is rather determined on her own religious pursuit. In the newly added ending,

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<sup>218</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 863.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 868.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 863.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 881.

she described as having a “predestined bond with Daoism” (*genqi* 根器). After Du’s departure, she “devoted herself to the cultivation of the Dao and relinquished her luxurious style of living. She donated all of the family wealth and spent her days in a Daoist nunnery, living on alms.”<sup>222</sup> (一心修道，屏去繁華，將所遺家私，盡行布施，只在一個女道士觀中，投齋度日; HY 37.841)

Third, a positive new ending is added in the vernacular text, where Du Zichun touches Taishang laojun 太上老君 (Supreme Laozi) by living on Mount Hua for three years. Supreme Laozi then gives him three alchemistic pills for transcendence. He comes back to Chang’an, ascending to heaven together with his wife in public, witnessed by an audience. This ending drastically reverses the ideas of the Tang tale, in which emotional attachment is the largest barrier to immortality. In the vernacular text, Supreme Laozi finally provides Du with elixir pills and tells Du that his wife is supposed to ascend with him, too. As Li Wai-ye points out, “here attachment is redeemable, vindicated, perhaps even rewarded, in a more worldly and humanized immortality.”<sup>223</sup>

At the same time, the anxiety over money is promoted to the main concern in the Ming version. In the Tang tale “Du Zichun,” as Chiang notes, “the gifts of money represent freedom from want,” and the final test is about freeing himself from all human desires.<sup>224</sup> It is his self-development, including self-discipline and responsibility, that brings him the opportunity of the final test. His human desires then determine his failure. In remarkable contrast, money rather than desire becomes the crucial factor in the late Ming version. The editor/writer not only renders the plot lines related to money in detail but also addresses this issue in the newly added ending. After taking the alchemistic pills with his wife, Du casts a golden statue for Supreme Laozi and ascends to heaven. To the audience, he makes his valedictory as follows:

「橫眼凡民，只知愛惜錢財，焉知大道！但恐三災橫至，四大崩摧，積下家私，拋於何處，可不省哉！可不惜哉！」 (HY 37.843)

“Mortals love money too much to know anything about the great Dao. But when the three disasters of war, famine, and plagues strike and the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind wreak havoc, where are they going to dispose of their family fortune? Do not be miserly! Do not begrudge donations!”<sup>225</sup>

The ending verse further summarizes Du’s quest and his attainment of immortality:

<sup>222</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 883.

<sup>223</sup> Li Wai-ye, “On Becoming a Fish: Paradoxes of Immortality and Enlightenment in Chinese Literature,” in *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. David Shulman and Guy Stroumsa (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>224</sup> Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, “Daoist Transcendence and Tang Literati Identities in ‘Records of Mysterious Anomalies’ by Niu Sengru (780-848),” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 29 (2007): 18.

<sup>225</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 885.

千金散盡貧何惜，一念皈依死不移。慷慨丈夫終得道，白雲朵朵上天梯。(HY 37.843)

His fortune gone, he was poor but he cared not; unflinchingly he set his heart on the Dao. A selfless man will attain the Dao in the end; and climb the heavenly ladder on white clouds.<sup>226</sup>

In the concluding speech and verse, the love for money and wealth is pointed out as a crucial obstacle to knowing the great Dao, and Du's achievement of immortality is primarily attributed to his generosity and charity. That he goes to Mount Hua again and lives there for three years is more represented as an abandonment of luxury in the world rather than a pure religious pursuit. The narrator particularly points out that he lives on the products of the forest. In his final prayer at Mount Hua that touches Supreme Laozi, he confesses that he chased profit and indulged in pleasures (奔逐貨利之場，迷戀聲色之內; HY 37. 840). Although he also attributes not achieving the Dao to the "failure of purging himself of the emotion of love" (*wei duan aiqing* 未斷愛情), the final results show that emotion does not necessarily matter, for he even transcends together with his wife.

Even his wife, née Wei, consciously donates the family wealth, for which she is rewarded with an elixir pill. In this sense, a radical detachment from money instead of emotions is established as the central concern. Although in the vernacular "Du Zichun," the narrator does not explicitly point out the theme of retribution, his transcendence is represented as retribution for his abandonment of money, which is consistent with ideas advocated in late Ming morality books (cf. subchapter 4.1). Furthermore, the detachment from money in the vernacular "Du Zichun" also implies disappointment and anxieties towards the effects of money, especially the negative consequences on various relationships. The persistent pursuit of immortality seems to be an escape from the monetized, luxurious, and cold world.

From a study of the traditions of Lü Dongbin and "Du Zichun," it becomes apparent that late Ming stories related to transcendence and immortality differed from earlier texts. While early tales were concerned with mystical power, alchemistic pill per se, self-cultivation, and detachment from human desires, late Ming stories elevate money-related issues to major barriers and anxieties in both the world and the pursuit of immortality.

### *A Different Voice*

The detachment from money, which is praised in the vernacular "Du Zichun," is represented rather differently in another story, "Chi gongzi," in the present corpus. Du Zichun and the protagonist Yao in "Chi gongzi" (cf. subchapter 3.1), both being

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<sup>226</sup> Feng Menglong, *Awaken*, 885.

wastrels and associated with the model of hero at first, diverge drastically in their lives. Before Yao has squandered all his wealth, he promotes the generosity of the hero model to a detachment from money and property, which culminates in Yao's verse when he is converting all his real estate to silver. He chants as follows:

「千年田土八百翁，何須苦苦較雌雄？古今富貴知誰在，唐宋山河總是空。去時却似來時易，無他還與有他同。若人笑我亡先業，我笑他人夢中。」 (EK 22.379)

“The farmland changes hands to eight hundred men in a thousand years./ Why should we strive to become a winner?/ Who among the rich from the past to the present still exists?/ The states owned by the Tang and the Song have been all in vain!/ It goes as easily as it comes;/ [life] without it is just the same as [life] with it./ If others laugh at me for losing inherited property,/ I laugh at them because they are in a dream.”

The logic of the ideal treatment of landed property described in this verse seems to convey a strong sense of detachment. However, such a detachment is rendered in a rather ironic way. Instigated by his two so-called friends, Yao not only imprudently exchanges his farmland properties for silver but is so delighted to carve the contract and to have it printed for convenience. He even comes up with the above verse as a slogan, which he demands to be carved below the contract in order to manifest his “broad mind” (*xinshi kaikuo* 心事開闊), in contrast to others’ “triviality” (*weisuo* 猥瑣). The fact that he leads an impoverished and miserable life soon there after, however, evidently invalidates his seeming detachment and free will.

However, both the detachment in Du's story and the sensible economy in Yao's story could be interpreted as different solutions in coping with similar conflicts and anxieties over money, of which one is detaching and escaping from the mundane world to some extent, while the other is actively accommodating the new socio-economic context.

From morality books and vernacular stories involving religious elements discussed in this chapter, I have argued that religious ideas and stories have experienced a transformation in the late Ming context. While actual mystical elements are reduced, retribution and transcendence are increasingly associated with money, and their rules are even fairly rational. No matter whether money is detached or attached, it becomes a central concern and a somewhat familiar and intimate object in various conflicts and anxieties in late Ming vernacular stories.

## Conclusion

In the present study on perceptions of and attitudes toward money, vernacular stories written or rewritten, around the first half of the seventeenth century, have been contextualized in the late Ming socio-economic context and compared with their potential textual sources and any parallel texts. These vernacular stories of different motifs all represent conflicts and anxieties over money in a highly commercialized and monetized society. Money, especially silver and copper cash, became rather indispensable to humans in everyday life. How money and money-related issues are perceived also depends on different situations and perspectives, but the similar or shared anxiety underlying it can also be perceived.

The discussion of historical concepts and discourses about money of Lu Bao and Zhang Yue showed that early treatises on money tended to assume a political view concerning mainly the upper class, and there actually was a distance between metal currencies and human beings. Even in the late Ming and the early Qing, discourses of outstanding scholars, such as Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu, on luxury and the extensive use of metal currencies primarily concern economic policies. At the same time, in vernacular literature, such as the novel *Jin ping mei*, money and luxury embody disastrous powers, which may lead human beings astray and even to death.

Vernacular stories about social relations range from family to neighbors and friends and to different classes. In stories, including “Yiwen qian,” “Lü Dalang,” and “Tanlan han,” money and violence linked to these relations also vary according to different degrees of importance. Regarding disasters, the more distant the relation is, the more money and violence is involved, while for positive retribution, the largest amount of money is expected to be spent for the closest relationship. Different symbolic meanings and implications are also attached to money. While the family property is seen as a root tying family members in “San xiaolian,” metal currencies are regarded as morally inferior due to their fluidity in “Du Zichun.” Moreover, although the pursuit of money is generally acceptable, luxurious lifestyles, gambling, and severe taxation are harshly criticized because they all usually lead to social disorders and unstable relationships, as represented in “Gui shuqian,” “Chi gongzi,” “Du Zichun,” and “Baiqiang”.

Money also starts to play an essential role in both male and female gender ideals. In these stories, the sensible treatment of money, which is the ability to control and manage it, serves as a crucial factor. Courtesans, such as the protagonist in “Zhao Chun'er,” who could relatively easily get access to money and own it independently in the late Ming, offer new possibilities for their ideal images. In a more idealized

female image of an authoritative goddess, in “Cheng ke,” the power and rationality about money are also underscored.

The religious ideas of retribution and merit accumulation underlying most of these stories are traced to the prevalence of moral books and ledgers of merit and demerit, especially these written by Yuan Huang. These texts have further elevated the significance of money, both as a means of merit accumulation and a reward of accumulated merit. Stories concerning religious transcendence about Lü Dongbin and Du Zichun also diverge from earlier texts with shared motifs, which promote the detachment from money to a determinant factor in the pursuit of immortality. It also betrays a disillusionment of the social relations in the confusion driven by money to a degree. However, there are also voices different from the typical literary representations of retribution and the detachment from money. These episodes indicate alternative anxieties and solutions for cases that did not fit into the logic of merit and retribution.

Multiple voices and various viewpoints in these narratives, sometimes even in the same text, actually reflect similar fundamental anxieties over money, which is human beings’ struggles in taming and dominating this increasingly familiar and essential object in everyday life. Throughout this process, money and property are more and more attached to or symbolized as human bodies and are even compared to family members. When people cannot control money properly, there is a fear of the detrimental power of it to humans and social relations within and beyond families, for wealth and human life are believed to be interconnected. As long as people resist the evil temptation of money and treat it sensibly, human life can also be a reward. The logic behind these ideas is the reasonable way to control one’s own fate by accumulating merit as provided by the system of ledgers of merit and demerit. In this sense, leisure activities, luxury, and gambling are generally criticized since they are excessive and uncontrollable, even if the pursuit of money per se is much encouraged.

Characters, who are able to control money, are praised as gender ideals. Although the rational ways these female characters cope with money differ from the logic of retribution, they exhibit similar dominance over money and their fate. The story of the authoritative sea goddess serves as imagination that the divine power over money could be transferred to humans as blessing. In contrast to the active management of money in gender ideals, religious stories adopt a seemingly radical detaching way according to the logic of retribution, by which the ultimate reward becomes immortality rather than wealth. However, the betrayed sense of powerlessness in the monetized world in confusion, compared with earlier texts’ relatively pure religious concerns, makes the pursuit of transcendence appear to be an alternative way to escape from disorders. Such anxiety as shown in “Du Zichun,” an



admiration of the merchant's encounter with the sea goddess as conveyed in "Cheng Ke," and the shifting social identities in "Tanlan han" all reflect the editors-writers' struggles in a society of changing social orders and their different attempts to restore these orders. Their attitudes are ambivalent: on the one hand, they accept and admire the power brought to merchants by money; on the other hand, they still see an official post as the ideal way for attaining the highest and most potent social status.

The conflicts and anxieties over money are represented in various aspects in late Ming vernacular stories, when money became increasingly familiar and dispensable to people. Since the stories were written or edited by members of the lower elite according to their own morality, they cannot be misunderstood as the "reality" of the time. However, the multiple voices and perspectives included in these stories do offer an opportunity to have a glimpse of money-related issues in this changing and fascinating society.

However, the limitation of the present study is that it covers a relatively small corpus. There are other contemporary vernacular stories and novels, which put money at a crucial position, cannot be discussed in detail. Moreover, other genres such as drama and classical tales also provide narratives about money itself, which would be important and complementary to the present topic. What's more, texts about money before the Ming dynasty are limited here. A chronological and more comprehensive future study of this topic would bring more significant insight.

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