REFORMER, SAINT, AND SAVIOR:
VISIONS OF THE GREAT MOTHER IN THE NOVEL
XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN
AND ITS SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE
CONTEXT*

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Abstract

The theme of the Great Mother emerges as a leitmotif in the seventeenth-century vernacular Chinese novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*. This paper analyzes the portrayal of the protagonist Mme. Chao as a mother-figure, her transformation from a virtuous widow to a local leader, and her posthumous apotheosis, while placing her representation within the literary and historical context of the novel. The characterization of Mme. Chao as a reformer, saint, and savior in times of disaster dramatizes a millenarian ambience that appears to have prevailed during the last years of the Ming dynasty, reflecting the apprehension of the apocalypse and the search for a new kind of moral leadership.

On the eve of her ascension to heaven, Mme. Chao 晁夫人 (née Zheng 鄭氏) takes a bath, dons her robes, and sits down to wait. Some female relatives keep vigil by her side. At night a sweet scent and music fill the air. Mme. Chao, aged 104, closes her eyes. Undergoing transformation in the manner of holy people, she attains immortality.¹ These events in Chapter 90 of the seventeenth-century Chinese novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (hereafter: *Yinyuan zhuan*) form the climax to the story of the heroine Mme. Chao, which spans almost the entire novel.

The story of Mme. Chao can teach us—both modern literary critics and historians—several things about seventeenth-century China.

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¹ Xi Zhou sheng 西周生 (pseud.), *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (hereafter, *YYZ*), 3 vols. (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1985), 90.1288.

When looking at Mme. Chao as a literary construct and trying to reconstruct the historical background, we encounter voices and visions from the world of seventeenth-century China. These voices and visions provide us with rare and precious insights into the world as seventeenth-century Chinese minds may have perceived it. They give us access to the dreams and nightmares of an era through the eyes of contemporary observers. We shall attempt to read fiction as historical source material shedding light on the informal and unofficial aspects of traditional Chinese society, the vernacular culture as opposed to the imperially ordained culture of China.² This analytical approach aims to explore the intersection of history and fiction, to understand how the literary text communicates its perception of the world out of which it emerged. We shall try to identify the voices and trace the visions that Mme. Chao's story can provide through critical comparison with its reconstructed literary and historical context.³ These voices and visions may allow us to witness the mood and ambience of an era in the long lost past.

The *Yinyuan zhuan* ranks among the longest traditional Chinese vernacular novels ever written. The sagas of two families from Shandong 山東 province, one called Chao 晁, the other Di 狄, are played out over one hundred chapters. The two main plot strands—the 'Chao plot' dealing with the rise and fall of the Chao family and the 'Di plot' dramatizing the fate of the Di family—divide the novel into two uneven parts which are structurally linked through the theme of reincarnation and karmic retribution. Crime and debauchery put an early end to the life of the first hero, Chao Yuan 晁源, the son of Mme. Chao, but he is later reincarnated as the second hero, Di Xichen 狄希陳 who has to atone for Chao Yuan's sins. A brief interlude in Chapters 23 and 24 marks the first transition from the Chao plot to the Di plot, depicting a small village in Shandong as a utopian paradise of the past and an image of the ideal world in stark contrast to the world of decadence, extravagance, expanding market towns, and booming commercial centers inhabited by the Chao and Di families.

All we know about the author is his pen name: Xi Zhou sheng

² On the concept of vernacular culture, see Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-i chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63-64 and 115.

³ The concept of the multivoiced or polyphonic novel also appears in Bakhtin's literary criticism. See M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. C. Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 5-46. On the sequence of voices in literary-historical analysis, see Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China*, 1-17.

西周生, Scholar of the Western Zhou, which has been interpreted as a nostalgic reference to the Confucian utopia of the legendary past, the golden age of the Western Zhou 西周 dynasty (ca. 1050-770 BCE).⁴ Internal and external evidence suggests that the novel must have been written between the years 1628 and 1681, the transition period from the Ming 明 (1368-1644) to the Qing 清 (1644-1911) dynasty.⁵ The earliest extant edition probably stems from 1648 or 1661.⁶ The text betrays the author's particular familiarity with life in Shandong province and the capital Beijing in the 1630s and 1640s. Because the novel also uses Shandong dialect, some modern scholars have proposed various famous seventeenth-century writers from Shandong as potential candidates for the authorship, but other scholars have refuted any such claims.⁷ So far, then, the true identity of the anonymous author remains a mystery.

Modern scholarship in East and West has long debated the question whether the text is a product of the Ming or the Qing dynasty without ever reaching a unanimous conclusion.⁸ The action takes place in the fifteenth century, but detail and rhetoric in the text refer to its time of composition in the seventeenth century. Textual references to two historic personages as contemporary figures also suggest that the "present" in narrative time corresponds to the years

⁴ See 117, 26.378; Yenna Wu, "Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World: A Literary Study of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1986), 40.

⁵ For the early limit, see Sun Kaidi 孫楷弟, 'Yifeng kaozheng *Xingshi yinyuan de xin*' 一封考證醒世姻緣的信 reprinted in 117, 3:1521-22; for the late limit (a reference to two copies of the novel circulating among literati in the Jiangnan 江南 area in 1681), see Yan Guangmin 顏光敏, *Yanshi jiacang chidu* 顏氏家藏尺牘 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1935), 3.128-29.

⁶ See Ōtsuka Hidetaka 大 秀高, *Ōho Chūgoku tsūzoku shōsetsu shomoku* 增補中國通俗小說書目 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1987), 124; Yenna Wu, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan de banben wenti" 醒世姻緣傳的版本問題, *Zhongwai wenxue* 中外文學 17.2 (1988): 97-107; Xu Fuling 徐復嶺, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun* 醒世姻緣傳作者和語言考論 (Jinan: Qilu, 1993), 21-31.

⁷ See Hu Shi 胡適, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan kaozheng" 醒世姻緣傳考證, reprinted in 117, 3:1448-95, who first proposed Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) as the author, but this and other attributions of the novel to Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (ca. 1599-1670) and Jia Fuxi 賈鳳西 (1589-1675) have all been refuted, see, e.g., Chen Bingzao 陳炳藻, "Pu Songling ye shi Xi Zhou sheng ma?" 蒲松齡也是西周生嗎, *Zhongbao yuekan* 中報月刊 69 (1985): 64-70 and 70 (1985): 45-48; Wu, "Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World," 19-58; Cao Dawei 曹大為, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuo yu Mingmo bian" 醒世姻緣傳作于明末辨, *Beijing shifan daxue xuebao* (shehui kexue) 北京師範大學學報 (社會科學) 4 (1988): 64-71; Zhang Qingji 張清吉, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan xinkao* 醒世姻緣傳新考 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), 1-32; Xu, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun*, 56-76; Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩, "Xu" 序, in Xu, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan zuozhe he yuyan kaolun*, 1-5.

⁸ See n. 7.

between 1628 and 1648,⁹ but the text lacks any explicit reference to the demise of the Ming dynasty in 1644 and the subsequent events. Whether it was written in the last years of the Ming or the early years of the Qing, the text reflects voices and visions steeped in the late Ming world, an era of turmoil and ferment that witnessed corruption in the imperial bureaucracy, rebellion from within the empire, and the invasion of foreign forces at the frontiers, heralding the collapse of the last native Chinese dynasty.

With its fierce scrutiny of provincial society, the *Yinyuan zhuan* appears as a novel of manners and has been called a "novel of social realism,"¹⁰ but the issue of realism proves problematic because the text explicitly erases the borders between fiction and truth, making the fictional and the historical coexist in the narrative as complementary parts rather than opposites.¹¹ The *Yinyuan zhuan* links its play on history and fiction, reality and illusion, with a positive/negative axis, as in good and bad, virtue and vice, the ideal and its antithesis. The contrast of positive and negative morality in the world becomes most clear-cut in the intersecting utopian Chapters 23 and 24. This sketch of a lost utopia in paradoxical antithesis to the narrative present depicted at length in the remaining ninety-eight chapters suggests the reading of the text as a satirical anti-utopia, juxtaposing the image of an ideal world with its satirical inversion: the grotesque nightmare of anti-utopia.¹² While the depiction of the utopian images remains brief, the bulk of the narrative explores in great detail, as if under the satirical magnifying glass, a topsy-turvy world of inverted norms and values, featuring the breakdown of Confucian morals and manners. The disintegration of

⁹ The fictional character Li Cuiran 李粹然 from Chapter 31 of the *Yinyuan zhuan* closely resembles the historical scholar-official Li Zhengxiu 李政修 (styled Cuiran 粹然) who held the post of Assistant Surveillance Commissioner and served as head of the General Surveillance Circuit of Jinan between 1628 and 1634; compare Sun Kaidi, in *YYZ*, 1521-22. The *Yinyuan zhuan* also refers to the late Ming woman leader Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (ca. 1574-1648) as a contemporary personage; see *YYZ*, 49.720.

¹⁰ Yenna Wu, "Repetition in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51.1 (1991): 55.

¹¹ See, e.g., *YYZ*, 9.127, and 1537. On the problem of realism, see also A. Plaks, "After the Fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2 (1985): 564.

¹² For a recent study of the concept of utopia in Chinese literature, see Wu Qingyun, *Female Rule in Chinese and English Literary Utopias* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995). On the genre of the satirical anti-utopia see W. von Koppenfels, "Mundus Alter et Idem. Utopiefiktion und mennipeische Satire," *Poetica* 17 (1982): 16-66.

the familiar old world is portrayed in vivid images of the burlesque, comic and grotesque and with heavy irony.

The identification of the narrative voice in the *Yinyuan zhuan* plays an important part in the present analysis. The voice of the narrator appears in many guises, parading as a moralist, preacher, satirist, humorist, and caricaturist. One striking feature of the narrative voice is its stressing the topicality of events in the story. By referring to "nowadays" (*jīn* 今), it fabricates the illusion of topical references linking the world in the narrative to the contemporary present time of narrating.¹³ It frequently juxtaposes the present of the story with the past while projecting past and present as antithetical images. Perceived past and present divide according to moral criteria. The present represents a fallen world in contrast to a morally intact past. Parodistic wordiness and satire relate to the dystopian mode which dominates the exploration of the present. By contrast, brevity in description and seriousness in the narrative voice relate to the utopian images which appear in Chapters 23 and 24 and in the brief reminders of the ideal interspersed throughout the entire narrative. The perceived present also embeds positive visions in a series of negative scenes, as in particular the story of Mme. Chao shows.

In the *Yinyuan zhuan*, the fear of impending doom for the dynasty and a millenarian atmosphere create utopian dreams of how to save the world amidst the nightmare of perceived reality. Mme. Chao, a widow from Wucheng county 武城縣 in Shandong, appears as one of the key figures. Although she takes part in the grotesque anti-utopian drama of the Chao plot, she appears as one of the very few positive and ideal characters. As the narrative progresses, Mme. Chao gains increasing importance as an ideal and serious character. A reformer, saint, and savior in a world threatened by the apocalypse, she emerges as the single most utopian character in the narrative. While criticizing the decadent world around her and painting a grotesque, and therefore comic, picture of society, the narrative voice advertises the norms and values Mme. Chao represents in a serious tone, with little recourse to irony or satire.

The narrative voice represents human follies and vices in carnivalesque imagery with warning and apocalyptic overtones. In deploring the current state of affairs and advertising a revival of Confucian norms and values, the narrative voice reveals itself as a Confucian conservative. As the fictional world succumbs to satirical inversion and hyperbolic perversion, the story appears as both

¹³ For example, *YYZ*, 20.304. There are numerous other references; Chapters 23 to 29 depict the most important contrast of "then" and "now."

didactic and entertaining. The declared and implied thematic patterns, however, frequently break down and open up glimpses of individuals, not rhetorical figures. The moral shock to a contemporary reader, then, may have consisted in recognizing anti-utopia as the world around him. As we, too, lose sight of rhetorical figures and frameworks, we gain a sharper view of perceived reality in seventeenth-century Chinese imagination.

Fictional and non-fictional sources may differ in their style and rhetoric, but fictional narrative and historical evidence both have an arbitrary relationship to historical reality as they are perceived and narrated by someone.¹⁴ Both therefore constitute forms of discourse that can be equally decoded and deconstructed. The reality of seventeenth-century China that we can know today exists only as a narrated or perceived reality, in the voices of various observers, in reconstructed images from surviving sources.

The concept of perception is thus of crucial importance to the present study. We can tackle the problem of perception in textual analysis by identifying the voices that communicate to us from the past by reconstructing their meaning in critical comparison with contextual (both literary and non-literary) sources. Chinese orthodox historiography, as, for example, in government records, represent the official version of history. Official sources leave us with a version of history that projects self-images in accordance with the current state ideology of the tendentious bias of their authors. Fictional accounts, too, represent versions of perceived history. But they speak out where other sources remain silent, focusing on people, actions, or situations that may not have merited the attention of other records. They deal with a subculture as opposed to the officially recognized culture, with vernacular history in contrast to the official version of history.

Seventeenth-century Chinese readers may not have built shrines for the character of Mme. Chao, but they and their contemporaries did venerate similar figures. Not only did they idolize and pray to female immortals, but even a literary heroine such as Du Liniang 杜麗娘 from Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) play *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (first published in 1589) also became the object of her readers' adoration and adulation.¹⁵ Such events were all part of the culture

¹⁴ See S. Gearhart, *The Open Boundaries of History and Fiction: A Critical Approach to the French Enlightenment Period* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 5-8, 204.

¹⁵ Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1978). See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 82.

that furnished the mind of the anonymous author as he sat down to compose the *Yinyuan zhuan*.

For the present purpose, it does not primarily matter how much of Mme. Chao's story really happened or whether seventeenth-century readers believed her story to be true or not. What matters is to hear the voices of the past speak out about their world and to reconstruct their emotional and moral universe. In the words of the French historian Fernand Braudel, history appears as "a song for many voices," although some voices will drown others, and reality will not always fit into a harmonized setting for solo and chorus.¹⁶ The following analysis presents an attempt to listen to some of these voices, aiming to gain access to the popular imagination of China's past.

Visions of Female Immortals in the Late Ming Context

Late Ming citizens witnessed events similar to the apotheosis of Mme. Chao in the *Yinyuan zhuan*—or so they claimed. According to two contemporary scholar-officials, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90) and Fan Shouji 范守己 (1542-ca. 1611), a hundred thousand people watched in Taicang 太倉, Nan Zhili 南直隸 province, on the Double Ninth festival (the ninth day of the ninth month on the Chinese calendar/October 17) of 1580 as the twenty-one-year-old widow Wang Daozhen 王燾貞, alias Tan Yangzi 曇陽子 (1558-80), underwent transformation and ascended to heaven as an immortal.¹⁷ Tan Yangzi, the daughter of the Grand Secretary Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534-1611), lost her fiancé when she was only seventeen

¹⁶ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London: Collins 1973) 2: 1238.

¹⁷ Wang Shizhen 王世貞, "Tanyang dashi zhuan" 曇陽大師傳, in his *Yanzhou shanren xugao* 弇州山人續稿, Chongzhen ed. (reprint, Taipei: Wenhai, 1970), 78.1a-31a, 78.24b; Fan Shouji 范守己, "Tanyang xianshi zhuan" 曇陽僊師傳, in *Chuijiancao* 吹劍草, in *Yulongzi ji* 御龍子集, 1590 ed., 32.1a-22b, 18a-19a. For biographical information on Wang and Fan, see L. Carrington Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1368-1644 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 425-27, 1399-1405. For Tan Yangzi, see also Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* 1425-27; Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, *Chūgoku zensho no kenkyū* 中国善書の研究 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1977), 258-63; Ann Waltner, "T'an-Yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen: Visionary and Bureaucrat in the Late Ming," *Late Imperial China* 8.1 (1987): 105-33; Miura Shūichi 三浦秀一, "Shinkō Yu Anki hon seiritsu no jidaiteki jōkyō - Banreki no chishikijin to dōkyō" 真話翁安期本成立の時代的情況 - 万暦の知識人と道教, in *Chūgoku kōdōyōshi kenkyū* 中国古道研究, ed. Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1992), 511-64.

years of age.¹⁸ Claiming the status of widowhood, she subsequently moved into rooms of her own. She had visions of conversing with female immortals and deities, among them the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wangmu 西王母) and the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音.¹⁹

Contemporary literati and officials became Tan Yangzi's disciples, among them her father Wang Xijue; her uncle, the vice-commissioner of education Wang Dingjue 王鼎爵 (1536-85); the writer Wang Shizhen and his younger brother, the poet and minister Wang Shimou 王世懋 (1536-88); the prefectural judge Fan Shouji; the scholar-official Shen Maoxue 沈懋學 (1539-82); the magistrate, poet and dramatist Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1602); the chancellor of Nanjing National University Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1546-1605); the scholar Qu Ruji 瞿汝稷 (1548-1610); the scholar-official Guan Zhidao 管志道 (1536-1608); and the Hanlin Academician and minister Zhao Yongxian 趙用賢 (1535-96), all holders of the highest academic degree (*jinsi* 進士).²⁰ She also had female followers.²¹ Modern historians have marvelled at her appeal to high and low.²² She must have offered something her contemporaries longed for. Her teachings center on morality, the return to simplicity, and serenity (*tian dan* 恬憺).²³ She preached salvation for the world and used her power to heal illnesses. Her hagiographers link moral reform to the image of healing the body. The *Yinyuan zhuan*, too, relates healing the body, curing the ills of the world, restoring morality in society, and re-establishing order in government.

¹⁸ On Wang Xijue, see Goodridge and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1376-79.

¹⁹ Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou shanren xugao*, 78.15a-18a. Xi Wangmu (alias Jinmu 金母) first appeared in the first century BCE as a benevolent deity. Later, popular Daoism transformed her into a Daoist immortal. See Homer H. Dubs, "An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult," *Harvard Theological Review* 35.4 (1942) 221-40. Guanyin appeared as a female manifestation of the male Indian bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in Chinese Buddhism around 1100; see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (London: Ithaca, 1978), 10-19. On Guanyin, see also Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 247-78; P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother,'" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9.1 (1983): 6-8.

²⁰ See Goodridge and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 138-40 (on Zhao), 343 (on Feng), 702 (on Qu), 740 (on Guan), 1192 (on Shen), 1324-27 (on Tu), 1376 (on Wang Dingjue), 1406-8 (on Wang Shimou).

²¹ For example, Tu Long's wife and mother; see Tu Long 屠隆, *Baiyu ji* 白榆集 (Taibei: Weiwen 1977), 8.16b-17a.

²² See Goodridge and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1427.

²³ *Yanzhou shanren xugao*, 78.14b. In Fang Shouji's "Tanyang xianshi zhuan" (32.16b, 19b), *dan* is rendered as 澹.

Tan Yangzi was not the only female to attain immortality in the late Ming minds. The scholar-official Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589-1648) and his wife, the poet and teacher Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590-1635), were convinced that their two daughters, the teenage poet and painter Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (1616-32) and her sister Ye Wanwan 葉紈紈 (1610-33), had undergone apotheosis after their early deaths at the ages of 16 and 22. Ye Shaoyuan affirms in his writings that he and his wife began to worship them as domestic goddesses.²⁴ Men were primarily responsible for creating such visions of goddesses by immortalizing their womenfolk in their writings, but gentry women like Shen Yixiu also believed in these goddesses and actively participated in the cult surrounding them. Ye Xiaoluan's legend lived on in public imagination as the fame of her poetry and paintings spread. In the seventeenth century, both male and female readers valorized Ye Xiaoluan, along with Tan Yangzi and the literary heroine Du Liniang from the play *Mudan ting*, as female deities.²⁵

Despite the grotesque and comic nature of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, the narrative voice describes Mme. Chao's apotheosis in a serious and solemn tone, rather like the rhetoric used by late Ming literati to report on the phenomenon of Tan Yangzi. The apotheosis of Mme. Chao thus represents more than just a figment of one author's imagination. It captures the ambience of an era while opening for us a window on the discourse and common currency among a wider circle of late Ming literati and their womenfolk.

The Goddess

After ascension to immortality, Mme. Chao becomes the Mother Goddess (*niangniang* 娘娘) of Mount Yi 嶧山. This range of hills southeast of Zou county 鄒縣 in southern Shandong is famous for the visit of the first emperor Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221-210 BCE) in 220 BCE.²⁶ Mme. Chao presides over a site of historic importance for state religion. In this respect, she resembles the mother goddess of Mount Tai 泰山 in Shandong. The cult of the mother goddess here too includes the imperial dimension. Recent

²⁴ See Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, "Ji zhangnü Zhaoqi wen" 祭長女昭齊文, in Ye Shaoyuan, ed., *Wumengtang quanji* 午夢堂全集 (preface 1636), 2 vols. (Shanghai: Beiyi shanfang, 1935), 1.35-36; Shen Yixiu 沈宜修, *Lichui ji* 鵲吹集, in *Wumengtang quanji*, 1.41; Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, "Ji wangnü Xiaoluan wen" 祭亡女小鸞文, in *Wumengtang quanji*, 1.59-62.

²⁵ See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 197-202.

²⁶ See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1972), 6.242.

scholarship has shown that the cult of goddess of Mount Tai as represented in the popular religious literature (*baojuan* 寶卷, "precious scrolls") in the late Ming—despite the connection with sectarian movements and rebellions—supported the ruler and the state.²⁷ The story of Mme. Chao, too, builds on imperial prestige and power.

A temporary assignment of the Goddess of Mount Yi as the regent deity of Mount Ni 尼山 in Qufu 曲阜, the birthplace of Confucius (Kongzi 孔子), emphasizes her association with the Confucian tradition.²⁸ Mme. Chao turns into a cult figure on both the elite and the popular levels. Magistrates and members of the gentry elite come to offer libations after her ascension to heaven.²⁹ The commoners of her native Wucheng erect a shrine in her memory. They make a pilgrimage to Mount Yi to pay homage and pray to the mother goddess.³⁰ Their trip echoes the pilgrimage to Mount Tai in the Di plot.³¹ The seventeenth-century precious scrolls *Taishan niangniang baojuan* 泰山娘娘寶卷 perceives the Mother Goddess of Mount Tai thus:

The empress on the mountain peak manifests her divine wisdom and power to protect the nation, aid the people and preserve peace and prosperity.³²

Like the seventeenth-century pilgrims to Mount Tai, the pilgrims to Mount Yi believe that their mother goddess will give protection and salvation. According to the sectarian scriptures, the Mother Goddess

in her control of Mount Tai shows no partiality, is not concerned with [distinctions between] those who are ignorant or wise, male or female, poor or rich, in high or humble positions: she looks upon them all as one.³³

²⁷ See Daniel L. Overmeyer, "Attitudes Toward the Ruler and State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature: Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century *Pao-chüan*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44.2 (1984): 363-64.

²⁸ *YYZ*, 93.1329. See *Shiji*, 47.1905.

²⁹ *YYZ*, 90.1288.

³⁰ *YYZ*, 93.1328-32.

³¹ *YYZ*, Chapters 68-69. For a detailed study of this episode, see Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-Century Fiction: T'ai shan and the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*," *T'oung Pao* 77.4-5 (1991): 226-52.

³² *Taishan niangniang baojuan*, 泰山娘娘寶卷 trans. in Overmeyer, "Attitudes Toward the Ruler and State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature," 362.

³³ *Taishan niangniang baojuan*, Chapter 1; adapted from Overmeyer, "Attitudes Toward the Ruler and State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature," 364.

Male and female pilgrims from commoners and scholar elite families swarm over Mount Yi ever after.³⁴ Mme. Chao's concern for the welfare of the people transcends all social distinctions. In this respect, Mme. Chao also resembles one of the most distinguished scholar-officials in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, the utopian figure of Chancellor Yang, an ideal representative of the Confucian elite.³⁵

Mme. Chao the Mother Goddess reminds one of Wusheng Laomu 無生老母, the "Eternal Venerable Mother," a deity emerging in the late sixteenth-century pantheon of popular religion.³⁶ The eternal Venerable Mother soon began to replace the male deity Maitreya (Milefo 彌勒佛) as the most popular object of worship.³⁷ Her image has been traced to Xi Wangmu and also to Guanyin as her antecedents.³⁸ Late Ming believers, however, craved an archetypal mother goddess that would precede all other deities. So they created Wusheng laomu as the mother of Xi Wangmu and Guanyin. The cult of the Eternal Venerable Mother reached a peak in the mid-Wanli 萬曆 period (1573-1620). At that time she appeared as an aged mother goddess who had created the world and now strove to bring salvation to its inhabitants, her straying children. She became the central deity in the White Lotus sectarian movement of the late Ming.³⁹ Seventeenth-century sectarian writings equate Wusheng laomu with the goddess of Mount Tai.⁴⁰ Modern scholarship has placed Tan Yangzi too into the context of Wusheng laomu.⁴¹ The *Yinyuan zhuan* does not express the connection with Wusheng laomu, but Mme. Chao embodies a similar archetype within a millenarian atmosphere. Sectarian believers held that the Eternal Venerable

³⁴ *YYZ*, 93.1330.

³⁵ See *YYZ*, 23.341-46.

³⁶ Cf. Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 9-18; Daniel L. Overmeyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 73-108, 135-45; on the worship of mother goddesses, see also Marjorie Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26 (1963): 389.

³⁷ Yu Songqing 喻松青, "Ming Qing shiqi minjian zongjiao jiaopai zhong de nüxing" 明清時期民間宗教教派中的女性, *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報 5 (1982): 29-33.

³⁸ Cf. Overmeyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, 139, 142.

³⁹ This movement frequently led to uprisings; one occurred in Shandong in 1622. See Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teaching in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1992), 227-38.

⁴⁰ *Taishan niangniang baojuan*, Chapter 24; quoted in Overmeyer, "Attitudes Toward the Ruler and State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature," 363.

⁴¹ Waltner, "T'an-Yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen," 125-26.

Mother would send a messenger deity when natural disasters and human wickedness had caused disorder and chaos at the end of one *kalpa*, or era:

The Three Powers [Heaven, Earth, and Man] will not be in harmony. When Heaven is not in harmony, the stars and planets will roll about chaotically. When Earth is not in harmony, the five grains will not grow. When Man is not in harmony, the people will be in great distress.⁴²

The followers of the sectarian movement imagined the apocalypse as a time of calamities such as flood, fire, or wind. But the Eternal Venerable Mother would protect and save her believers. As promised by the precious scroll of the Buddha of Medicine *Yaoshi rulai benyuan baojuan* 藥師如來本願寶卷, printed in 1543 by donations from one imperial concubine and five princesses, when the people of the mortal world “suddenly meet the Eternal Mother they will escape from their suffering and as children enter the Lotus Pool.”⁴³ She would show how to survive and return to paradise.⁴⁴

The *Yinyuan zhuan* presents a similar dystopia. A flood of almost biblical dimensions engulfing the depraved new market towns of Shandong also affects Mme. Chao's native Wucheng county and spills over the whole empire. The narrating voice notes that the days of prosperity and harmony (*taiping* 太平) have come to an end.⁴⁵ A series of natural disasters plagues Wucheng. During a drought, the magistrate summons a Daoist to induce rainfall.⁴⁶ But the evil practices of the Daoist merely exacerbate the situation. When the people of Wucheng pray for rain at Mme. Chao's shrine, the elements of nature respond at once. Rain starts falling and continues to fall in due season. A good harvest follows. Later, a monk confirms in trance that it was indeed the Goddess of Mount Yi who sent rain. Mme. Chao here functions like the ancient Chinese mother goddess Xi Wangmu in a popular cult in or near Shandong in 3 BCE: as the

⁴² *Gongzhong dang* 宮中檔, National Palace Museum, Taiwan (1815), trans. in Naquin *Millenarian Rebellion in China*, 12.

⁴³ Cited in Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中國俗文學史 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuju, 1984), 2:314.

⁴⁴ Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*, 12.

⁴⁵ *YYZ*, 32.463. *Taiping*, the realm of Supreme Harmony was first depicted in the *Liishu chunqiu* and *Zhuangzi*. See *Liishu chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 ed., Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin 1984), 1.44-45; *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1961), 13.471.

⁴⁶ *YYZ*, 93.1331-33.

Hanshu 漢書 by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) records, sacrifices to her help avert disaster when a drought threatens the existence of the people.⁴⁷

As the Goddess of Mount Yi, Mme. Chao also administers justice. When a thief steals a purse from one of the pilgrims, Mme. Chao's divine powers make him return it to its owner.⁴⁸ She here assumes the secular power of a magistrate on the model of the ideal world described in Chapter 23 in which a similar case of theft is justly resolved.⁴⁹ Mme. Chao is capable of restoring the dream of a just and lawful state within the Chao plot.

Mme. Chao is the only character in the *Yinyuan zhuan* to undergo apotheosis. She qualifies for this position by virtue of her characteristics as the most ideal figure in the novel. She distinguishes herself by her contributions to the welfare to society and by her morality. Mme. Chao succeeds in all the tasks at which other protagonists, in particular the male literati elite, fail.

Wife and Mother

The lifetime of Mme. Chao—in this world and hereafter—establishes a chronological framework within the novel. The dates of her birthday and her ascension to heaven run like a thread through the narrative. As her story spans the Chao plot from Chapter 1—across the utopian chapters and the Di plot—up to Chapter 93, it creates the illusion of stability in terms of narrative structure. The reader can sense how narrative time passes as she ages. No other character in the novel reaches her age. The narrating voice compares her life span to that of the legendary Emperor Shun 舜.⁵⁰ Mme. Chao dramatizes an ideal of leadership in provincial society that does honor to this Confucian model ruler.

At the outset of the Chao plot, Mme. Chao appears as the wife of the scholar-official and magistrate Chao Sixiao 晁思孝 and the mother of Chao Yuan. Her position is weak: within little authority over her husband and her son, she has to submit to their orders and whims.⁵¹ She exhorts them to morality without avail. To protest against their misconduct in private and public life, she attempts

⁴⁷ Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 11.342; 26.1311-12.

⁴⁸ *YYZ*, 93.1330-31.

⁴⁹ See *YYZ*, 23.349-51.

⁵⁰ *YYZ*, 90.1277, 1290.

⁵¹ Chao Yuan forbids Mme. Chao and Ms. Ji to visit temples while going on pilgrimages with Zhen'ge, *YYZ*, 2.19; 11.155.

suicide.⁵² But even this act—the ultimate means for women to make themselves heard in the Confusion family—has no effect. As long as the men in her family live, she cannot exert any influence.

Such was the position Confucian tradition assigned to women in the family.⁵³ The ancient classic *Yijing* defines *yin* 陰 as the female-maternal principle in the cosmic order, symbolized by earth and moon, as opposed to *yang* 陽, the male-paternal principle, heaven and sun.⁵⁴ The fifty-fourth hexagram of the *Yijing*, “The Marrying Maiden” (*guimei* 歸妹), presents the image of “thunder over the lake” (*ze shang you lei* 澤上有雷) as the ideal of female responsiveness.⁵⁵ As the modern scholar Guisso explains in his study of women as perceived in the *Five Classics*, “women follow[s] man just as the lake was seen to be stirred by the passage of thunder across its surface.”⁵⁶ Since the former Han dynasty, social hierarchies were perceived in terms of *yin* and *yang*. *Yang* stood for ruler, father, and husband, *yin* for subject, son, and wife. *Yang* denoted “noble”, *yin* “lowly.”⁵⁷ The *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-6 BCE), the first extant compilation of biographies of extraordinary women and a standard reference work for centuries to come, define female virtue as submissiveness: “A girl obeys her parents. A wife obeys her husband. A widow obeys her son.”⁵⁸ Mme. Chao’s husband and son silence her, accordingly—despite the fact that hers is the voice of virtue.

There was some scope for the voices of women to gain prominence in imperial China. Women had been playing the role of political counsellors since earliest times. The *Weishu* 魏書, written during the sixth century under the Northern Qi 北齊 dynasty (550-77), records examples of women who distinguished themselves by their

⁵² *YYZ*, 15.227.

⁵³ On the status of women in traditional China, see also Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵⁴ *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, Song edition, reprint in Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1816; reprint Kyoto, 1971), 1.1a-28a.

⁵⁵ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 5.33b.

⁵⁶ Richard W. Guisso, “Thunder Over the Lake: The Five Classics and the Perception of Women in Early China,” in *Women in China*, eds. R. W. Guisso and S. Johannesen (Youngstown, N.Y.: Philo Press, 1981), 50.

⁵⁷ See Cheng 稱 text to *Laozi* 老子, transcribed in “Changsha Mawangdui Hanmu chutu Laozi yiben juanqian gu yishu shiwen” 長沙馬王堆漢墓出土老子乙本卷前古佚書釋文, *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1974): 40-42. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, *Siku quanshu* ed., 11.13a.

⁵⁸ Liu Xiang 劉向, *Lienü zhuan yizhu* 列女傳譯注 (Jinan: Shandong daxue, 1990), 1.38-39.

intelligence, debating skills, and classical scholarship.⁵⁹ High ministers sought their advice on government affairs.⁶⁰ In his household instructions, *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓, the model for a genre of household instructions in later centuries, the Confucianist Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-91) assigned women to their place inside the house, but he nevertheless conceded:

If [a woman] has intelligence, talent, and a good grasp of ancient and modern literature, then she should assist her husband and make up for his shortcomings.⁶¹

In the late Ming, Tan Yangzi’s mother, Mme. Zhu 朱淑人 (1533-98),⁶² would counsel her husband, the Wanli emperor’s Grand Secretary Wang Xijue, about important affairs of state: “She would quote ancient and recent examples and ponder the problem from all aspects.”⁶³ Unlike such women, Mme. Chao lacks literacy and a classical education.⁶⁴ But she has an intuitive knowledge of morality, giving her wisdom and moral superiority. Both her husband and her son pay dearly (suffering demotion from scholar-elite status and premature death respectively) for not listening to her advice and for failing to reform.⁶⁵ Like the ideal patron of scholarship, Mr. Li 李大郎, in the utopian Chapter 23, Mme. Chao comes from a rich and illiterate commoner family, but she intuitively knows how to treat a scholar and teacher with respect.⁶⁶ In late Ming terms, her innate knowledge—the concept of *liangzhi* 良知 as Mencius (Mengzi 孟子) defined it—makes her one of Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472-1529) modern sages.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ On women in the *Weishu*, see Jennifer Holmgren, “Widow Chastity in the Northern Dynasties: The *Lieh-nü* Biographies in the *Weishu*,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 23 (1981): 165-86.

⁶⁰ Wei Shou 魏收, *Weishu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuji, 1974), 92.1978-83.

⁶¹ Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yanshi jiaxun jiyie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980), 1.59.

⁶² On Tan Yangzi and her family, see Ann Waltner, “The Grand Secretary’s Family: Three Generations of Women in the Family of Wang Hsi-chüeh,” in *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*. (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1992), 1:541-77.

⁶³ Wang Heng 王衡, *Goushan xiansheng ji* 緱山先生集, Wanli ed. (Taipei: Wenhai, 1970), 14.35a.

⁶⁴ *YYZ*, 15.228.

⁶⁵ *YYZ*, Chapters 17-19.

⁶⁶ *YYZ*, 16.235; for her treatment of Chao Yuan’s teacher, see 92.1307-8.

⁶⁷ *Mengzi yinde* 孟子引得, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series 17, ed. William Hung, et al. (Beijing: Hafu-Yanqing xueshe, 1941), 7A.15; on *liangzhi* in the thought of Wang Yangming, see Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, *Mingnu xue’an* 明儒學案 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 10.180-219.

Mme. Chao's wisdom and gentleness make her an ideal wife and mother from neo-Confucian point of view.⁶⁸ She lacks jealousy completely—like the exemplary Taisi 太姒 from the Zhou dynasty, wife of King Wen 文王 and mother of King Wu 武王, and in contrast to the shrewish spouses of the protagonists Chao Yuan and Di Xichen.⁶⁹ Mme. Chao consents readily when her husband Chao Sixiao wants to take a concubine.⁷⁰ Her model conduct is her good fortune: when both Chao Sixiao and her son Chao Yuan lie dead, the concubine presents her with a new male heir, Chao Sixiao's posthumous son Chao Liang 晁梁.

The Widow

After the deaths of Chao Sixiao and Chao Yuan, Mme. Chao begins to play a major part in the *Yinyuan zhuan*. Her status as Chao Sixiao's principal wife makes her Chao Liang's "formal mother" (*dimu* 嫡母). The formal mother often played a more important role in a boy's life than his biological mother. In a recent article on mothers and sons in late imperial China, Hsiung Ping-chen notes: "In the words and deeds of many Ming-Qing males, we find that the mother who came to mean the most was actually his *dimu*, or 'formal mother'."⁷¹ She could exert a strong influence on the moral and intellectual education of her "formal" son. In the seventeenth century, for example, Ms. Wang 王氏 (d. 1645), the formal mother of the thinker Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-82), would read classical literature and instruct Gu Yanwu in morality. After the death of her fiancé, she lived in chaste widowhood with the Gu family, performed *gegu* 割股 (cutting flesh off one's thigh to use for a medicinal broth) to express her devotion to her parents-in-law, pledged her life to the Ming dynasty, and starved herself to death when the Manchu army

⁶⁸ On the ideal woman as depicted in neo-Confucian texts, see Ann Waltner, "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," in *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, eds. R.W. Guisso and S. Johannesen (Youngstown, N.Y.: Philo Press, 1981), 124.

⁶⁹ On Taisi, see *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, Song edition, reprinted in Ruan Yuan, 阮元 ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1816; reprint Kyoto, 1971), 16:2.7a; 16:3.11b. The preface to the *Lienü zhuan* in *Mingshi* 明史, comp. by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 301.7689-90, also alludes to Taisi.

⁷⁰ *YYZ*, 18.265.

⁷¹ Hsiung Ping-chen, "Constructed Emotions: The Bond Between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 15.1 (1994): 88 (romanization adapted by the author).

approached in 1645. Her example made Gu Yanwu a Ming loyalist.⁷²

Mme. Chao likewise devotes herself to educating her formal son. She employs a teacher for Chao Yuan and encourages his Confucian studies.⁷³ She trains him in showing compassion for the people and makes him join in philanthropic activities.⁷⁴ Mme. Chao fulfils the task of guiding her son in true Confucian manner, following the classic example of Mencius's mother, Mengmu 孟母.⁷⁵ The Confucian tradition attributed great importance to mothers training their sons as the future elite.⁷⁶ Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 places mothers at the top of the list.⁷⁷ Yan Zhitui's household instructions emphasize the role of mothers in the molding of their sons' characters: "To put an end to quarreling and fighting among brothers, the exhortation of a widowed mother is more effective even than the doctrines of [the legendary emperors] Yao 堯 and Shun."⁷⁸ In the Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279), the Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) also attributed great importance to mothers in matters of education, for they could help to prepare their sons for success in the civil service.⁷⁹

While Mme. Chao is not successful in the education of her first son, Chao Yuan, she succeeds in turning her formal son Chao Liang into a Confucian scholar and a paragon of filial piety. Mme. Chao succeeds in educating Chao Liang because she has become a widow. She no longer has to submit to the authority of her husband or her first son—two of the most dystopian examples of the elite. As Chao Liang grows up, Mme. Chao reigns supreme in her household. As a widow she can play the role of mother to perfection.

In the eyes of Confucianists, Mme. Chao would personify a model widow. She never remarries, in accordance with the neo-Confucian ideal of chaste widowhood that gained prominence with the Song dynasty philosophers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-85) and Cheng Yi

⁷² See Zhang Mu 張穆, *Gu Tinglin xiansheng nianpu* 顧亭林先生年譜 (1843; reprint, Taipei: Guangwen, 1971), 1.4b.

⁷³ *YYZ*, 46.667.

⁷⁴ *YYZ*, 90.1279-80.

⁷⁵ *Lienü zhuan yizhu*, 1.138-39.

⁷⁶ Compare Gudula Linck, "Aus der fruchtbaren Erde wie einsame Schatten—zum Wandel der Wahrnehmung von Weiblichkeit bei der chinesischen Obersicht der Sung-Zeit," in *Lebenswelt und Weltanschauung im frühneuzeitlichen China*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1990), 198-204.

⁷⁷ *Lienü zhuan yizhu*, Chapter 1.

⁷⁸ *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, 1.19.

⁷⁹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Xiaoxue jizhu* 小學集注, Sibuyi ed. 1.1a-b; 4.1a-2a.

程頤 (1033-1107).⁸⁰ In legal terms, remarriage would prevent her from taking any property into a second marriage.⁸¹ By staying in control of her husband's and son's property, Mme. Chao can make good their past wrongs: she returns everything acquired unlawfully to the previous owners.⁸² Faithful widowhood here serves a philanthropic purpose.

The Song dynasty Confucianist Yuan Cai 袁采 (ca. 1140-94) noted on the lives of widows:

In some cases, women suffer their husband's death while their sons are still young, but they are able to educate and raise their sons, live in harmony with their relatives, manage the family finances, and make their households prosper. They are all worthy women.⁸³

Widowhood in imperial China meant hardship, in most cases. The dead husband's clan would covet the widow's property. Ms. Peng 彭氏 from Tancheng 郯城 county in southern Shandong was widowed in 1669 when the scholar-official Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (ca. 1633-after 1704)⁸⁴ served as the magistrate there.⁸⁵ Huang's handbook for magistrates contains a detailed description of Ms. Peng's case. When her husband Chen Taizhen 陳太禎 died, her son Chen Lian 陳連 was still a schoolboy. Chen Taizhen had left her a house, some money, land, and an ox for the farming. Immediately after his death, the members of the Chen clan extorted three taels of silver, stole the ox, and wanted to move into Ms. Peng's house. She resisted, but one relative, Chen Guoxiang 陳國相, shouted at her: "I shall make sure that nothing shall be left for you."⁸⁶ On June 9, 1670, he killed Chen Lian. Huang Liuhong concludes that Chen

⁸⁰ Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Er Cheng ji* 二程集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 22 B.301. On chastity, see Mark Elvin "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 111-52; Waltner, "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," 129-46; Jennifer Holmgren, "The Economic Foundations of Virtue: Widow-Remarriage in Early and Modern China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 13 (1985): 1-27.

⁸¹ *Huang Ming zhi shu* 皇明制書, (1579; reprint, Tokyo: Koten kenkyūkai, 1966), 1:8.

⁸² *YYZ*, 22.331-32.

⁸³ Yuan Cai 袁采, *Yuanshi shifan* 袁氏世範, in *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* 知不足齋叢書, 1.24b-25a.

⁸⁴ On Huang, see *Tancheng xianzhi* 郯城縣志, 1763 ed., 7.26-27; *Wuxianzhi* 吳縣志, 1924 ed., 76B.4-6.

⁸⁵ Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 (author's preface 1694), ed. Obata Yukihiro 小畑行闌; reprint ed. Yamane Yukio 山根幸夫 (Tokyo: Kyūko, 1973), 12.19a-23a. Compare Jonathan D. Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), 59-76.

⁸⁶ *Fuhui quanshu* 12.22a.

Guoxiang's motives for murdering his cousin were to end the family line and usurp the property rights.⁸⁷

Like Ms. Peng, Mme. Chao, too, falls prey to the greed of her husband's clan. The members of the Chao clan introduce themselves to her as soon as Chao Sixiao and Chao Yuan are dead.⁸⁸ The demand grain and loot her house, attempting to dispossess her.⁸⁹ She later divides her property, giving a share to all clan members, but they continue to harass her.⁹⁰ Moreover, a villain from Wucheng, Wei San 魏三, tries to extort money from Mme. Chao. He files a suit against her, falsely claiming Chao Liang as his son.⁹¹ Each time Mme. Chao finds herself at the mercy of the local magistrate—like Ms. Peng in seventeenth-century Tancheng county, whose case Huang Liuhong tried. Each time a fair magistrate appears like a *deus ex machina* to rescue Mme. Chao. The narrating voice concedes that this becomes possible only with the help of higher powers: Heaven does not tolerate such misconduct, and the spirits send the good magistrate in time.⁹² Upon the death of another relative, Chao Jinren 晁近仁, the rapacious members of the Chao clan seize his land and strip his widow of her inheritance.⁹³ The late Ming scholar-official Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618) appears exceptional in his efforts to instruct women how to claim their rights:⁹⁴

Life is hard for widows and orphans. It is even more pitiable if a childless widow has to remain chaste. She may receive generous treatment if she is wealthy. But who will care for her if she is poor? People cheat and harm her in all possible ways and she has nowhere to go. They persist in making false accusations before heaven. If the woman wishes to inherit her husband's property, she should insist on proceeding according to the legal code.⁹⁵

The examples of Mme. Chao and Chao Jinren's widow in the *Yinyuan zhuan* and Ms. Peng in seventeenth-century Tancheng county show how difficult it was to put Lü Kun's advice into practice. Mme. Chao, however, triumphs against all odds.

⁸⁷ *Fuhui quanshu* 12.22a.

⁸⁸ *YYZ*, 20.294.

⁸⁹ *YYZ*, 20.296-98.

⁹⁰ *YYZ*, 22.320; 32.468-75.

⁹¹ *YYZ*, 46.669-78.

⁹² *YYZ*, 20.304.

⁹³ *YYZ*, 53.766-68.

⁹⁴ On Lü Kun, see Joanna F. Handlin, "Lü Kun's New Audience: The Influence of Women's Literacy on Sixteenth-Century Thought," in *Women in Chinese Society*, eds. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 13-38.

⁹⁵ Lü Kun 呂坤, *Zongyue ge* 宗約歌, in *Lizi yishu* 呂子遺書, Kaifeng ed. (preface 1827), 15a.

The Reformer

To Mme. Chao, widowhood also means liberation and the opportunity for leadership. Similar to Tan Yangzi in the Wanli years, Mme. Chao gains the independence to become active in society only as a widow. She can now act outside the confines of her home and teach morality by making her conduct an example for others to emulate. In early fifteenth-century Shandong, the widow Tang Sai'er 唐賽兒 from Putai 蒲臺 rose to power in her community as a religious and military leader. On returning from her husband's grave, she decided to follow her calling, styled herself "Mother of Buddha" (*fomu* 佛母), and led an insurrection in 1420.⁹⁶ The early eighteenth-century novel *Nixian waishi* 女仙外史 by Lü Xiong 呂熊 (fl.1704) portrays her as an immortal.⁹⁷ But unlike Tang Sai'er and other female sectarian leaders in Ming/Qing times, Mme. Chao does not instigate a rebellion.⁹⁸ Her acts never undermine the power of the ruler and the state. On the contrary, she devotes herself to moral reform and the restoration of law and order.

Mme. Chao's deeds dramatize on the local level what the warrior widow Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (ca. 1574-1648) did on the national scale during the last decades of the Ming dynasty. Qin Liangyu, a native of Zhongzhou 忠州 in Sichuan, first gained military fame alongside her husband, a local chieftain, when quelling a local rebellion in 1600.⁹⁹ After his death (ca. 1615), the widow Qin Liangyu took on the leadership of her husband's army and set out to defend the nation against both native rebels and Manchu invaders. She succeeded in suppressing several local rebellions in her native Sichuan but failed to defeat the rebel leader Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 in 1640.¹⁰⁰ Qin received rank and titles (such as brigade-general, Marquis Zhongzhen 忠貞侯, Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent) for her services to the empire. The last Ming emperor

⁹⁶ Compare Goodrich and Fang eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1251-52.

⁹⁷ Lü Xiong 呂熊, *Nixian waishi* 女仙外史 (Huhehot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1985).

⁹⁸ On women in religious movements, see Yu Songqing, "Ming Qing shiqi minjian zongjiao jiaopai zongde nüxing," 29-33; Erhard Rosner, "Frauen als Anführerinnen chinesischer Sekten," in *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien*, eds. Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans-Hermann Schmidt (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1985), 239-46.

⁹⁹ On Qin, see Arthur Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644-1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 168-69; Zhang Qingji, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan xinkao*, 211-12.

¹⁰⁰ On Zhang, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 37-38.

(Chongzhen 崇禎, Sizong 思宗, r. 1628-44) wrote four poems in praise of her bravery and loyalty. She died of illness in 1648. The *Yinyuan zhuan* mentions the glorious widow Qin Liangyu as a contemporary of Mme. Chao's.¹⁰¹

Similar to Qin Liangyu, Mme. Chao, too, takes over the function of her husband after his death. She acts as a mother not only to her son but also to the whole community. But while her husband Chao Sixiao, a selfish, rapacious and ruthless magistrate, fails in his role as the "father of the people,"¹⁰² as "mother of the people" Mme. Chao personifies the ideal Confucian "parent official" (*fumu guan* 父母官) who acts like a parent to the people—as does the ideal magistrate in the utopian Chapter 24.¹⁰³ She receives the emperor's recognition and admiration, like Qin Liangyu in the years of the last Ming monarch.¹⁰⁴

Mme. Chao's native Wucheng appears as a dystopian island, the very inversion of the utopian paradise depicted in Chapters 23 and 24. When natural disasters ravage the empire, the literati elite set up relief projects everywhere—except for Wucheng. Seeing the apathy and lack of compassion among both scholar-officials and local gentry, Mme. Chao becomes active. The narrating voice stresses the Confucian dimension of her motives. As famine and cannibalism decimate the population, she cannot bear to see the suffering (*xinzhong shifen buren* 心中十分不忍).¹⁰⁵ She displays the kind of mentality (having a mind that cannot bear to see others suffer, *you bu ren ren zhi xin* 有不忍人之心) Mencius attributed to the ideal ruler.¹⁰⁶ By taking action, she puts into practice the Confucian concept of ideal leadership.

Mme. Chao as the landlady of Yongshan 雍山 estate in Wucheng county first saves its six to seven hundred inhabitants. She forbids her estate managers to oust a single person, counts the number of people, and orders the distribution of grain. While looting, theft, and starvation are the order of the day on all other estates, everyone at Yongshan survives unharmed.¹⁰⁷ Mme. Chao turns her estate into the utopia of the model landlord, as depicted in seventeenth-century

¹⁰¹ *YYZ*, 49.720.

¹⁰² See *YYZ*, Chapters 1-18.

¹⁰³ *YYZ*, 24.357.

¹⁰⁴ *YYZ*, 32.465: 90.1283-84.

¹⁰⁵ *YYZ*, 32.464. Such conditions prevail in Wucheng in *YYZ*, Chapters 32 and 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Mengzi*, 1A.7;2A.6.

¹⁰⁷ *YYZ*, 32.464-65.

morality books (*shanshu* 善書).¹⁰⁸ Turning her attention to the whole community, she subsequently embarks on famine relief. She starts to sell grain well below the market price to provide food, while economizing with her resources. To aid the destitute, she runs a free soup kitchen.¹⁰⁹ Upon hearing about the deprivation of the commoners at the hands of the vicious magistrate Ke Yishan 柯以善, she pays the remaining tax debts on behalf of the people.¹¹⁰ She distributes rice and grain for famine relief and orders the rich to provide for the poor.¹¹¹ Mme. Chao takes care of the orphans, the crippled, the sick, the poor, and the needy.¹¹² Herself but a widow, Mme. Chao also devotes herself to protecting widows.¹¹³ She acts true to the spirit of King Wen's ideal state as described by Mencius and the utopia of the Great Sharing. (*datong* 大同) as depicted in the *Liji* 禮記.¹¹⁴ She anticipates in spirit the sponsorship of philanthropic institutions for the protection of widows that began to flourish in the early Qing but are lacking in her world.¹¹⁵

The scholar elite, the emperor and the narrating voice laud her as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Guanyin.¹¹⁶ The narrating voice, moreover, places her among the cream of the elite, calling her a "female Sir Fan Wenzheng 女范文正公", *alias* Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052), the Song dynasty scholar and philanthropist.¹¹⁷ She takes on the responsibilities the literati elite should have taken on but did not. Mme. Chao the perfect philanthropist would get full

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g., the ledger of merit and demerit by Yan Maoyou 顏茂猷 (*jīnshì* 1634), *Diji lu* 迪吉錄 (completed 1622), 1886 ed., 4.56a. Compare Sakai, *Chūgoku zensho no kenkyū*, 81. On Yan, see Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, "Gan Moken no shisō ni tsuite" 顧茂猷の思想について, in *Kamata Hakushi kanreki kinen rekishigaku ronsō* 鎌田博士還暦記念歴史学論叢 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1969), 261-62.

¹⁰⁹ *YYZ*, 32.465-66.

¹¹⁰ *YYZ*, 90.1278-80.

¹¹¹ *YYZ*, 90.1282.

¹¹² *YYZ*, 32.475; 57.824-25.

¹¹³ *YYZ*, 36.534; 57.828-29; 92.1308-14.

¹¹⁴ *Mengzi*, 1B.5. *Liji* 禮記, Song ed. reprint [in Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed., *Shisanjing zhushu*] 21.3a-3b.

¹¹⁵ See Fuma Susumu 夫馬進, "Shindai no jutsurikai to shinsetsudō" 清代の恤嫠会と清節堂, *Kyōto Daigaku bungakubu kenkyū kiyō* 京都大学文学部研究紀要 30 (1991): 41-131; Chia-lin Pao Tao, "Chaste Widows and Institutions to Support Them in Late-Ch'ing China," *Asia Major*, Third Series 4.1 (1991): 101-19.

¹¹⁶ *YYZ*, 32.463; 90.1282-83.

¹¹⁷ *YYZ*, 90.1283. On Fan, see Denis Twitchett, "The Fan Clan's Charitable Estate," in *Confucianism in Action*, eds. David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 97-133.

scores in the Ming/Qing morality books.¹¹⁸ As a Daoist immortal, a bodhisattva in her compassion, and a Confucian reformer of society, Mme. Chao epitomizes the syncretist utopia *par excellence*. The rarity of her example, moreover, reflects back on the weakness of her contemporaries: the men in power.

In perfect Confucian form, Mme. Chao stands as a model for her fellow citizens. They learn from her example, just as the author of the guidebook for magistrates, Huang Liuhong, envisaged social reform on the model of the ancient sages.¹¹⁹ She reforms not only the evil and cruel magistrate Ke Yishan but also both the rural and the urban elites of Wucheng in addition to everyone on her estate and in her soup kitchen.¹²⁰ The powerful families in the neighborhood of Yongshan imitate her estate management.¹²¹ Her influence thus saves many lives among the rural population. The retired magistrate Wu Qingyun 武卿雲 in Wucheng city hears of Mme. Chao's example and feels shame:

Such wonderful acts of charity—and us men with our high hats and broad sashes, we are not doing anything at all, while letting one woman who wears a skirt and her hair in a bun do everything! What is the use of all our masculine attire? How shameful!¹²²

He subsequently raises funds to distribute grain and runs a soup kitchen himself. Eventually, all powerful families follow suit and join in the relief work, donating rice and wood or running their own soup kitchens.¹²³ Mme. Chao's morality and generosity prevent her estate managers and aid workers from cheating.¹²⁴ The *Yinyuan zhuan* here makes a point similar to that of the seventeenth-century morality book *Huizuan gongguoge* 彙纂攻過格 (written 1671-87) by Chen Xigu 陳錫嘏 (1634-87), which depicts elderly ladies and widows as the model heads of their households: septuagenarian Mme. Yang Chengzhai 楊誠齋夫人 gives much care to the well-being of her servants; Mme. Sima Wenzheng 司馬文正夫人, née Zhang 張氏, and Mme. Yuan 袁夫人 treat their servants with kindness and generosity. Never showing anger or arrogance, these ladies educate

¹¹⁸ On morality books, see Sakai, *Chūgoku zensho no kenkyū*; Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Zhongguo shanshu yu zongjiao* 中國善書與宗教 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1988); Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹¹⁹ *Fuhui quanshu* 13.12a.

¹²⁰ *YYZ*, 90.1279-82.

¹²¹ *YYZ*, 32.465.

¹²² *YYZ*, 32.466.

¹²³ *YYZ*, 32.467, 475.

¹²⁴ *YYZ*, 32.466-67.

the members of their household by the example of their virtue.¹²⁵ Mme. Chao likewise succeeds in regulating her household and restoring order in her community. Her household and her soup kitchen resemble the philanthropic inn run by a retired chancellor, an ideal member of the literati elite, as depicted in the utopian Chapter 23—flourishing true to the spirit of the ancient Chinese concept of the ideal world.¹²⁶

Patron of Healers

Apart from promoting moral soundness and harmony in her world, Mme. Chao also helps to heal illnesses. As in the lore of Tan Yangzi, Mme. Chao's story combines the imagery of bringing order to the state with that of healing the body. In a world ravaged by sin and illness, she initiates moral reform as well as the return to physical health. She nurses a boy from the Chao clan back to health.¹²⁷ Although Mme. Chao herself does not heal, she sends out healers, patronizes doctors, and distributes medicines. In times of epidemics in Wucheng, she gives money to Hu Wuyi 胡無翳, the actor-turned-monk-turned-healer, to buy land, grow medicinal herbs, prepare medicines, and cure people's illnesses.¹²⁸ When her adopted son Chao Liang falls ill due to excessive mourning after her leaving the mortal world, she sends from heaven the Daoist immortal Sun Zhenren 孫真人 with a wonder drug to save Chao Liang.¹²⁹ First as a widowed mother and later as a goddess, she fulfils the same function of benefactress to society. Under her wing, healers appear and illnesses get cured. Albeit from behind the scenes, she plays an important part in restoring the well-being of the people.

Other Mothers

In depicting how Mme. Chao reforms, cures, and saves her world, the narrating voice becomes increasingly serious. Her hyperbolic

¹²⁵ Chen Xigu 陳錫嘏, *Huizuan gongguoge* 彙纂攻過格, 1758 ed., 2.96a-100b.

¹²⁶ See *YYZ*, 23.341-46.

¹²⁷ *YYZ*, 57.825.

¹²⁸ *YYZ*, 90.1282.

¹²⁹ *YYZ*, 90.1289-90.

representation of goodness and moral soundness sets a counterpoint to the explorations into the depths of sin and vice that dominate the novel. Many mothers appear in the *Yinyuan zhuan* apart from Mme. Chao. Some act as strong-willed, virtuous, and wise mothers, while others are vicious and spiteful. The second hero Di Xichen's mother, Mrs. Di, is a woman with good common sense who tries to manage her household with a strong hand.¹³⁰ So is Mrs. Tong 童奶奶, the mother of Di Xichen's second wife Jijie 寄姐. She handles with aplomb the professional mishaps of her husband, the silversmith Tong Qi 童七.¹³¹ Mrs. Xiang 相大妗子, Di Xichen's aunt, is one of the few characters to castigate Di Xichen's wife, the shrew Xue Sujie 薛素姐.¹³² Professor Xue's 薛教授 wife, Mme. Xue 薛夫人, personifies virtue and gentleness, while his concubine Ms. Long 龍氏, the mother of Sujie, is a rough and wayward character. Mme. Li 李夫人, a minor character appearing only once briefly, represents a model widow and mother who raises her sons to become high scholar-officials.¹³³ Strong mother figures appear in both plots, but none equals Mme. Chao. Length of description, attention to detail, and narrative focus make her alone stand out in the foreground. A unique character among the mother figures of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, she appears as the heroine of the novel, in contrast to the shrewish and childless anti-heroine Sujie and the major male protagonists.

Heroines from the Literary and Historical Context

Powerful women and goddesses also feature in other Ming novels. Guanyin plays the role of savior in the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記.¹³⁴ The divine lady (*Niwa niangniang* 女媧娘娘) reigns supreme in the cosmos of *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義.¹³⁵ In the *Shuohu zhuan* 水滸傳, the Mysterious Goddess of the Ninth Heaven (*Jiutian xuannü* 九天玄女)

¹³⁰ See, e.g., *YYZ*, 33.484-85, 489; 40.584-85; 48.702.

¹³¹ *YYZ*, Chapters 54, 55, 70, 71.

¹³² *YYZ*, 60.859-61. On the shrew, see also Yenna Wu, "The Inversion of Martial Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-century Chinese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48.2 (1988): 363-82; Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³³ *YYZ*, 34.497-98.

¹³⁴ Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (attrib.), *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Beijing: Zuoja, 1954).

¹³⁵ *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (Beijing: Zuoja, 1956), e.g., 1.1-7.

rescues the hero Song Jiang 宋江.¹³⁶ The sixteenth-century novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, however, has no strong mother figure: the hero Ximen Qing's 西門慶 principal wife Yueniang 月娘, the would-be mother, lacks the wisdom and power to make up for her husband's deficiencies, herself seeking rather than giving spiritual protection.¹³⁷ As the mother of Ximen Qing's posthumous son, Yueniang plays a major role in the early Qing sequel *Xu Jin Ping Mei* 續金瓶梅 by Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (ca. 1599-1670). She dies a saint but never attains the aura of Mme. Chao.¹³⁸ The *Xu Jin Ping Mei* portrays Yueniang as a woman in need of support and help, rather mocking the values of chaste widowhood.¹³⁹ Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) classical tales of the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 also recount stories of widows in a mock-heroic and irreverent tone of voice.¹⁴⁰ Mme. Chao ranks among the few most powerful heroines of Ming/Qing fiction.

There were other women in late imperial China who acted like Mme. Chao. Tan Yangzi's mother Mme. Zhu had the reputation of making her family prosper by managing her household properly.¹⁴¹ The local gazetter of Yucheng 虞城 in Henan 河南 province praises Ms. Qiu 邱氏, the second wife of the scholar-official Yang Dongming 楊東明 (1548-1624), for her charitable donations. Once she had more than one hundred rolls of cloth made into clothes for the poor.¹⁴² Many women, especially widows among the sectarian

¹³⁶ Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 and Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (attrib.), *Shuihu quanzhuan* 水滸全傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1953; reprint, Hongkong: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 42.675-80.

¹³⁷ For example, *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, 4 vols. (Hongkong: Xinghai wenhua chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1987), Chapters 21, 40.

¹³⁸ Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢, *Xu Jin Ping Mei* 續金瓶梅, in *Jin Ping Mei xushu sanzong* 金瓶梅續書三種, (Jinan: Qilu, 1988) 1:63.647. On Yueniang, see also Ogawa Yōichi 小川陽一, "Chūgoku shōsetsu ni okeru dōkyō - toku ni Zoku Kin Pei Bai to Taijō kannōhen - 中国小説における道教, とくに続金瓶梅と太上感應篇 in *Dōkyō kenkyū no susume - sono genjō to mondaiten o kangaeru - 道教研究のすすめ - その現状と問題点を考える -*, ed. Akizuki Kanei 秋月観英 (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1986), 121-23.

¹³⁹ *Xu Jin Ping Mei*, 50.482-84.

¹⁴⁰ Pu Songling 蒲松齡, *Liaozhai zhiyi: huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋志異會校會注會評本, ed. Zhang Youhe 張友鶴 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1978), 2.191-93; 5.699-703; 7.927-28; 9.1221-24; 9.1283-86.

¹⁴¹ *Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14-31b, 35a.

¹⁴² Xi Qingyun 席慶雲 (comp.), *Yucheng xianzhi* 虞城縣志, (1895; reprint, Taipei: Chengwen, 1976), 7.3a-3b. On Yang, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1546-47.

followers, sold medicines or practiced as healers.¹⁴³ But it is difficult to find an example to match Mme. Chao.

Saint and Savior: The Superior Woman

In her systematic reform of society, Mme. Chao embodies the savior in the midst of a nightmare. It has been suggested that the late Ming image of the protective mother goddess, in particular Wusheng lamu, represents an androgynous figure.¹⁴⁴ A chaste widow, in particular, would fit this image. Mme. Chao, however, appears as more than the revival of an archetype. Elite and commoners, young and old, men and women all turn to her and take her as a model—like the late Ming citizens who followed Tan Yangzi.

The *Yinyuan zhuan* emphasizes the role of Mme. Chao as a woman. She has greater intelligence and foresight than the male elite. She is the only character in the novel to think of famine prevention by storing up grain, thus putting into practice the granary system propagated by Huang Lihong's guidebook for magistrates, *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, on the model of the community granary system (*shecang* 社倉) Zhu Xi had introduced in the Song dynasty.¹⁴⁵ When she hears about the retired official Wu Qingyun joining in the famine relief, she suggests an even better way of doing it. To prevent sabotage, she suggests dividing among them the tasks of selling cheap grain and running the soup kitchen. Wu Qingyun admits: "What a good idea, and I didn't even think of it!"¹⁴⁶ He takes over Mme. Chao's soup kitchen while retaining her management system, because it is superior to what he can devise himself. The narrating voice makes it clear that only a woman can do what Mme. Chao does:

Mme. Chao, one woman, emptied her pockets to distribute fourteen or fifteen thousand pecks of grain to relieve the starving in the countryside. This is, I fear, what even the public-spirited men are not capable of doing.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Compare: Yu Songqing, "Ming Qing shiqi minjian zongjiao jiaopai zhong de nüxing," 32-33; Waltner, "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," 142-43; Victoria Cass, "Female Healers in the Ming and the Lodge of Ritual and Ceremony," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.1 (1986): 233-40.

¹⁴⁴ D.H. Porter, "Secret Sects in Shantung," *Chinese Recorder* 17.1 (1886): 4; Linck, "Aus der fruchtbaren Erde wie einsame Schatten," 217-18, also perceives a "reduction of femininity" in the ideal image of the mother in late imperial times.

¹⁴⁵ 177, 32.465; see also 90.1286. *Fuhui quanshu*, 27.1a-3a, 27.11a-17b.

¹⁴⁶ 177, 32.466.

¹⁴⁷ 177, 32.468.

The narrating voice portrays Mme. Chao not as equal but as superior to men. In its typical earthy way of expression, this reads:

A man who fails in his moral duties is a swine!
A benevolent woman is mightier than a hero.¹⁴⁸

In the late Ming world, we also hear other voices of literati inverting gender hierarchies and ranking woman at the top. The scholar-official Lü Kun describes many exemplary women as superior to men, using phrases such as: "Even some heroic men cannot match her intelligence and courage."¹⁴⁹ The writer Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) likewise commends such ladies: "Few have her intelligence and courage; not one in a million can match her firmness and endurance."¹⁵⁰ In the early seventeenth century, Tan Yangzi's brother, the *jinsi* degree-holder Wang Heng 王衡 (1561-1609),¹⁵¹ recalled that his grandfather, a magistrate, once said about his mother, Mme. Zhu:

This girl has the same bearing as me. But in intelligence and firmness, she surpasses me. Isn't this girl rather like a man?¹⁵²

Some late Ming literati were convinced that they could learn from a woman.¹⁵³ Wang Heng looked up to his mother as a model of virtue. He considered himself morally and intellectually inferior to her.¹⁵⁴ The scholars who became Tan Yangzi's disciples submitted to her as a teacher, seeking from her spiritual guidance, healing, and a cure for the ills of the world. In 1643, the scholar-official Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) praised Tan Yangzi's niece, the warrioress Ms. Wang 王氏 (Wang Heng's fifth daughter), for her heroic military defense of Xindu 新都 city in Sichuan province at the side of her husband, the scholar-official Huang Yisheng 黃翼聖 (*alias* Ziyu

¹⁴⁸ YYZ, 30.449.

¹⁴⁹ Lü Kun 呂坤, *Guifan* 閨範, 1590 ed., 2.15b.

¹⁵⁰ Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Zhinang quanji* 智叢全集 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986), 26.533.

¹⁵¹ On Wang, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1378; the editor's preface to the Wenhai reprint of *Goushan xianshengji* gives his dates as 1564-1607.

¹⁵² *Goushan xianshengji*, 14.30a.

¹⁵³ See also Ann Waltner, "Learning from Women: Ming Literati Responses to Tanyangzi," *International Journal of Social Education* 6.1 (1991): 42-59.

¹⁵⁴ *Goushan xianshengji*, 14.34a, 38b.

子羽, 1596-1659), against the rebel leader Zhang Xianzhong during the reign period of the last Ming emperor.¹⁵⁵

The narrating voice in the *Yinyuan zhuan* compares Mme. Chao to a historical figure, the heroic warrioress Mme. Feng Bao 馮寶夫人, *alias* Mme. Xian 洗夫人/Duchess of Qiaoguo 譙國夫人 (d. ca. 601 CE).¹⁵⁶ The Duchess of Qiaoguo was famous for her military exploits and her loyalty to the state. She played an important part in quelling rebellions and defending imperial power during the Sui 隋 dynasty's (581-617) pacification of South China. As a widow she became a local ruler. The people called her Sage Mother (*shengmu* 聖母) because she protected their borders and preserved peace.¹⁵⁷ Writing in 1603, Wang Heng likewise places his mother, Mme. Zhu, in the context of the Duchess of Qiaoguo, claiming that a heroine like her could be a savior in times of crisis.¹⁵⁸ Feng Menglong was another late Ming writer to sing the praises of the Duchess of Qiaoguo.¹⁵⁹

Like the Duchess of Qiaoguo, Ms. Wang, and Qin Liangyu in spirit, Mme. Chao struggles to save the nation. Mme. Chao does not take up arms, but her deeds help to maintain order in the empire. As Chao Liang warns the rapacious magistrate Ke Yishan:

If you again extort the tribute grain from the [commoners], they will either rebel or their corpses will all pile up in the ditches.¹⁶⁰

Chao Liang explains his mother's motives for her philanthropy:

My mother seeks neither recognition from the authorities nor repayment from the commoners. She only hopes her native place will be safe and peaceful.¹⁶¹

The narrating voice praises her achievements: while putting an end to disturbances, she succeeds in restoring the utopian world (*taiping*) of the past to some extent.¹⁶² The narrating voice implies that she

¹⁵⁵ Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Muzhai you xue ji* 牧齋有學集, Sibun conkan ed., 37.5a-6a. On Qian, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 148-50. On Huang, see *Muzhai you xue ji*, 23.7b-9b, 31.8a-10a, 37.4b-8b.

¹⁵⁶ YYZ, 32.463.

¹⁵⁷ On the Duchess of Qiaoguo, see Wei Zheng 魏徵, et al., *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 80.1800-3; Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Beishi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 91.3005-7; Li Fang 李昉, et al., comp., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 270.2116-17.

¹⁵⁸ *Goushan xianshengji*, 14.38b.

¹⁵⁹ *Zhinang quanbu*, 26.526-27.

¹⁶⁰ YYZ, 90.1280.

¹⁶¹ YYZ, 90.1281.

¹⁶² YYZ, 32.466.

carries on the tradition of China's sages and perfect rulers¹⁶³—in the absence of capable men.

In this respect, the *Yinyuan zhuan* echoes the voices of other late Ming literati. The modern scholar Joanna Handlin Smith attributes Lü Kun's views on the superiority of some women to his "disillusionment with fellow officials."¹⁶⁴ By immortalizing Tan Yangzi and her female relatives in their writings, Wang Shizhen, Wang Heng, and Qian Qianyi air but "their own moral and political anxieties," as the modern historian Waltner maintains.¹⁶⁵ The Japanese scholar Miura Shūichi 三浦秀一 discusses the cult of Tan Yangzi in the context of late Ming intellectuals and their interest in Maoshan 茅山 Daoism revelation texts, in particular Yu Anqi's 俞安期 (1550-ca. 1618) edition of the *Zhen'gao* 真誥 by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536).¹⁶⁶ Miura suggests that the craze for Tan Yangzi epitomizes the *Zeitgeist* of the late Ming, expressing a longing to transcend human artificiality, to solve the conflict between individuality and public duty in times of political chaos, and to return to nature.¹⁶⁷ However, he does not elucidate the issue of Tan Yangzi taking on moral leadership as a woman.

In the late Ming, the thinker and *jinshi* degree-holder Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524-96) lamented that men could no longer claim moral leadership. In praising Tan Yangzi, he primarily criticizes the shortcomings of his male contemporaries. In his perception, the heroism of women symbolizes the very lack of it in men.¹⁶⁸ But Mme. Chao represents more than the fantasies of some late Ming literati and their disenchantment with the contemporary state of affairs.¹⁶⁹ Since the Wanli era, people from all walks of life flocked to the shrines of maternal deities. Anticipating the apocalypse, they created new images of archetypal mother goddesses. In the

¹⁶³ Comparing her also to the Empress Zhen 甄皇后 (d. 221 CE), famous for her philanthropy, see 王 珣, 32.463; *Weishu* 魏書, in Chen Shou 陳壽, *Sanguozhi* 三國志, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973), 5.159-63.

¹⁶⁴ Handlin, "Lü K'un's New Audience," 27.

¹⁶⁵ Waltner "The Grand Secretary's Family," 572.

¹⁶⁶ Miura, "Shinkō Yu Anki bon seiritsu no jidaiteki jōkyō," 520-44. On Yu, see also Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1606-8.

¹⁶⁷ Miura, "Shinkō Yu Anki bon seiritsu no jidaiteki jōkyō," 556.

¹⁶⁸ Geng Dingxiang 耿定向, *Geng Tiantai xiansheng wenji* 耿天臺先生文集 (1598; reprint, Taipei: Wenhai, 1970), 19.33b-34b.

¹⁶⁹ Anna Gerstlacher, et al., eds., *Women and Literature in China* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1985), 1, interpret all female protagonists in Ming/Qing fiction as manifestations of male projections expressing fear or desire. This approach, however, would fail to take into account the multiple layers of Mme. Chao's appeal and significance.

world of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, too, we watch how society at all levels craves the great mother as a savior. In this light, the image of Mme. Chao reflects a millenarian moment of collective anxiety and longing.