

Bandits Out of the Marshes:
***Shuihu zhuan* in the Context of Late Imperial Military Historical Fiction**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Chinese Late Imperial novel *Shuihu zhuan* (Water Margin) from the perspective of viewing it as a historical representation of the mid-Song Dynasty's many wars and the ways in which it shares thematic and character-based parallels with other Late Imperial novels set during the Song Dynasty. This paper's approach to *Shuihu zhuan* is predominantly based around the final fifty chapters of the 120-chapter edition of the novel, as these chapters deal directly with the historical wars of the mid-Song Dynasty and as such share the most parallels with other stories set in the Song dynasty such as the tales of the Yang Family generals and the Qing dynasty novel *Shuo Yue zhuan*. The first section of this thesis examines the ways in which these texts depict the foreign wars of the Song against the Liao and later Jin dynasties and the prominent recurring themes regarding these wars that appear in these texts. The second section explores *Shuihu zhuan*'s depiction of the historical Fang La rebellion and the broader moral quandaries that surround the concept of anti-government resistance in these novels. The final section examines the relationship between *Shuihu zhuan*, *Shuo Yue zhuan*, and *Sanguozhi tongsu yanyi* that exists through their sharing of prominent characters and themes, as well as the broader reasons outside of the text that often have influenced the creations of these allusions. Key themes discussed in this thesis include: the interconnection between strategy and magic in Late Imperial military literature, the villainization of government officials to protect the reputation of the emperor, the issue of just and unjust rebellion, the variations on the theme of sworn brotherhood, and the role of marketing and audience reception in the construction of the Late Imperial novel. The goal of this paper is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the intertextuality of Late Imperial novels set during the Song Dynasty from the starting point of *Shuihu zhuan*.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Amongst the major works of Late Imperial Chinese literature, *Shuihu zhuan*¹ 水滸傳 (The Water Margin; hereafter shortened to *Shuihu*), a tale of heroic bandits fighting corruption during the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (960-1279) attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (c.1330-1400) and Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (c.1296-1372) from the late fourteenth century, has been positioned by scholars such as C.T. Hsia and Andrew Plaks as the successor in tone and scope to the great fourteenth-century novel *Sanguozhi tongshu yanyi* 三國志通俗演義 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms; hereafter shortened to *Sanguo*), also attributed to Luo Guanzhong.² While this is often due to the fact both novels feature great battles and legendary heroes, this analysis is hindered by the fact that most analysis of *Shuihu* is primarily focused on the actions of the heroes of Liangshan during their days of banditry that comprise the first two-thirds of the novel.³ Yet this neglects the final third of the novel, in which we see the heroes of Liangshan become closer to the heroes of *Sanguo* by joining the Imperial Government to fight wars for the benefit of the whole Empire.⁴ It is thus the goal of this thesis to analyze the ways in which *Shuihu* parallels and interacts with other Late Imperial historical fiction novels, through its depiction of wars both foreign and domestic, and how it relates, often in an intertextual manner, to other periods of Chinese history.⁵ In this way, it is my intention to place *Shuihu zhuan* more firmly within the

¹ All titles and names in this text, with some exceptions for contemporary scholars' names such as C.T. Hsia and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, or part of the titles of their works, have been Romanised in Hanyu pinyin.

² C.T. Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): pg. 141.

³ Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pg. 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 108.

⁵ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg. 141-143.

history and evolution of the Chinese historical fiction genre during the Late Imperial era.⁶ Key to this is drawing specific attention to the way by which Late Imperial, herein defined as the Ming 明朝 (1368-1644) and Qing 清朝(1644-1911), novels depicted the Song Dynasty, and in doing so helped influence popular perceptions of this era of history.⁷ In addition, by largely focusing on the later chapters of *Shuihu*, specifically those found in the 120-chapter edition, which have traditionally been removed from the more popular 70-chapter editions of the novel, I hope to highlight the importance of these overlooked sections of the novel. Moreover, while we do not know the exact authors nor date of original composition for many of these novels, and nor will this paper seek to resolve this question, I will be presenting the chronology of these texts in accordance with view the theory put forward by scholars such as C.T. Hsia and Andrew Plaks which sees *Sanguo* as the first of the major Late Imperial Novels and *Shuihu* as the second.⁸

The primary form of methodology that I have employed in this study is that of Historicism, or more specifically New Historicism, a field of study which is defined by placing works of literature within their historical context and which, as described by Wesley Morris in his book *Towards a New Historicism*, acknowledges that “literature has a significant relationship with its cultural-historical milieu”.⁹ It is Morris’ definition that has provided the most guidance for me for me within this study as since we do not know, nor does it truly matter, who the author of *Shuihu* was. Rather what is relevant to this study is to examine the work within the context of the cultural and historical background that produced and more importantly popularized the work. Historicism offers a solid framework by which I can examine *Shuihu* and similar Late Imperial

⁶ Ibid., pg.141-143.

⁷ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.108.

⁸ Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel: Ssu ta ch'i-shu*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): pg. 3.

⁹ Wesley Morris, *Towards a New Historicism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972): pg. 3.

vernacular fiction. Moreover, since I am focusing specifically on literature that deals with the Song Dynasty, Historicism allows us to see how these works are connected through shared themes, characters, and ideological beliefs about the past and present of their authors and readers.¹⁰

In the first section of my thesis, my intention is to focus on the broader trends of Late Imperial military-historical fiction set during the Song Dynasty, comparing *Shuihu*, *Shuo Yue zhuan* 說岳轉 (The General Yue Fei; hereafter shortened to *Shuo Yue*) by Qian Cai 錢彩 (fl. late seventeenth to early eighteenth century) from the early Qing Dynasty and the popular tales of the *Yangjia jiang* 楊家將 (Yang Family Generals) from the Ming Dynasty. In this section my goal is to look at the way in which these works portray the military campaigns of their heroes against the “northern barbarians” of the day, whether Khitan or Jurchen.¹¹ I intend to look at the ways in which the actions of the generals, and of individual heroic soldiers, are portrayed as the cause of triumph or defeat in any given battle, firmly presenting the power of martial virtues above all else, and also how their actions affect historical currents.¹² This is presented as a contrast to the general perception of the Song Dynasty as a pacifistic dynasty who held a contradictory view of war, requiring a state of constant defense while despising those who took part in the military.¹³ Moreover, these stories share a similar theme in which warfare and strategy are treated like a form of magic, based heavily within ritual, reflecting the cultural and spiritual trends of both the era depicted by the novels and the era in which these stories were written through the way in

¹⁰ Robert E. Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): pg. 46-48.

¹¹ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg. 141-143.

¹² *Ibid.*, pg.143-145.

¹³ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2023): pg. 189-191.

which ritual religious practices are given military application.¹⁴ Likewise, these texts depict the Song's Northern enemies, each of whom claimed to be a Chinese-style dynasty in terms of their legitimacy, as ersatz in their actions and whose attempts to adopt Chinese culture often leads to their defeat by the heroes of the stories.¹⁵ Finally, all three texts depict the greatest antagonists facing the martial heroes not to be the northern enemies, but rather the officials and ministers of the Imperial Court, whose schemes and treachery often bring them down. What is key about this is that it reflects a popular conception of Song Dynasty history, which placed the blame of all its failures on corrupt officials and lazy emperors rather than considering broader and fundamental systemic problems.¹⁶ What this section seeks to highlight are the various tropes and literary conventions used by Late Imperial novels when depicting the Song Dynasty and its complicated military history.¹⁷

In the second section, the focus will shift to the portrayal of internal wars and struggles within China as depicted in *Shuihu* and *Shuo Yue*. In this chapter, I intend to look at how these novels craft the difference between a justified act of rebellion and an unjustified rebellion, using *Shuihu*'s depiction of the Fang La rebellion as a starting point in understanding this dichotomy.¹⁸ For much of the novel the battles between the bandits of Liangshan against the forces of the Song Dynasty are depicted as just and righteous. Yet in these later chapters the now pardoned bandits lead campaigns against other bandits and rebels, most notably the war against Fang La's army. In the war against Fang La, we see a more nuanced version of this historical war as a

¹⁴ Mark R.E. Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015): pg. 192-193.

¹⁵ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib. *Iron Ox: Part Four of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2002): pg. 432-434.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 474.

¹⁷ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.141-143.

¹⁸ Kao Yu-kung, "A Study of the Fang La Rebellion", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 24 (1962-1963): pg. 28-30.

means to restore stability within the empire and protect the dynasty, as it is ultimately this internal conflict that does the most damage and nearly destroys the bandits of Liangshan.¹⁹ Moreover, in contrasting the portrayal of the domestic wars with the foreign wars in both *Shuo Yue* and *Shuihu*, we are able to see a double standard emerge regarding the capabilities of the enemies faced by the heroes in these novels. Here the domestic enemies are shown as equal parts dangerous and potential allies while foreign enemies are seen as totally inferior and often barbaric.²⁰ Through this, I intend to use these novels to see how they reflect the changing ideas and values regarding rebellion and banditry that existed between the Song and early Qing dynasties, and examine how these novels often need to thread the line between praising the heroics of rebels and bandits while also condemning their overall actions.²¹ This would carry on in the themes of the first part of the thesis by shifting the focus from how these Ming novels present foreign conflicts of the Song to how they represent domestic conflicts and examine themes of rebellion.²² This in turn would tie into a larger theme that stands at the heart of *Shuihu*'s popularity, namely the way in which it seemingly valorizes bandits and wars against the state while also trying to tread a line where it is not in favour of completely overthrowing the state.²³

Moving now to the third and final section of the thesis, it is my intention to look at the role of intersectionality between many of these texts, in particular the direct line that can be drawn from the *Sanguo* through to *Shuihu* and finally to *Shuo Yue*, as characters and concepts

¹⁹ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Scattered Flock: Part Five of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002): pg. 440-441.

²⁰ Cai Qian, *General Yue Fei: A Novel of the Qing Dynasty*, translated by C. L. Yang (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing LTD, 1995): pg. 305-307.

²¹ Robert E. Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981): pg. 77.

²² David Rolston, "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the Shui-hu chuan (Water Margin)" in *How To Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 127.

²³ Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg.77.

recur between them.²⁴ This is best seen in the way in which heroes from the Three Kingdoms period 三國時代 (220-280) often seem to be reborn as new, but similar, heroes in *Shuihu* and *Shuo Yue*, or their very descendants (whether they were real historical figures or not) appear as major characters and allies to the original heroes in these later novels (or, in the case of *Shuihu*, having the heroes from that novel later reappear in *Shuo Yue*).²⁵ I am interested in looking at how these novels reference one another and how they try to create their own reputations from the historical content of the earlier novels.²⁶ Within this section, I examine not only the recurrence of characters but also the ways through which these novels share similar themes of brotherhood yet approach these themes from different angles, highlighting the various ways sworn brotherhood can be enacted.²⁷ Finally, this form of intertextuality can be seen in a metatextual sense as a way through which the authors, publishers, and commentators of these novels sought to advertise their own books through comparison with other novels.²⁸ This form of comparison could range from outright criticism of the other novels or praise through the inclusion of similar characters, yet the goals remained the same: to promise the readers a similar experience to ones they had found through other books.²⁹

Through this thesis, it is my intention to highlight how we can see *Shuihu* not only as one of the great novels from the Late Imperial period but also, through its shared themes and characters, how it functions as a work that exists in direct communication with other novels about the era in which they are all set and within the broader evolution of historical fiction as a

²⁴ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-48.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.46-48.

²⁶ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.143.

²⁷ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

²⁸ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-48.

²⁹ Jin Shengtan, "How to Read the *Fifth Book of Genius*" translated by John C.Y. Wang and annotated by David L. Rolston in *How to Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 137-138.

genre in Late Imperial China.³⁰ And through placing greater focus on the later, often neglected, chapters of *Shuihu*, we can see these parallels and connections brought forward in understanding the intertextuality of these works.

Literature Review

Due to the breadth of the field regarding Chinese novels, this literature review will only concern itself with English-language studies. Regarding the sources that have been useful in the construction of the first and final section of this thesis, it would be remiss of any discussion on the subject of the Late Imperial novel not to begin by mentioning the work of C.T. Hsia (1921-2013) and his impact on the field, which whether one agrees or disagrees with his arguments, must be considered and commented on.³¹ Consequently this thesis will concern itself with Hsia's study of Chinese military historical fiction as discussed in his 1974 essay "The Military Romance".³² In that study, Hsia explored the way in which the tradition of military historical fiction that emerged in the Yuan 元朝 (1261-1368) through Qing dynasties blended historical fact with artistic fiction to craft a popular imagining of the past.³³ While Hsia's arguments presented in his article are of great interest to me and to this work, after reading the original works referenced by Hsia, I find that I am in disagreement with Hsia regarding his claim that depictions of military operations in *Shuihu* lack character and are by and large outdated.³⁴ To justify my disagreement I will seek to demonstrate here that the later chapters of *Shuihu*, consisting mostly of military campaigns against foreign invaders and/or rebels, are thematically rich and as worthy of study as the earlier chapters. Moving on from C.T. Hsia, the next major

³⁰ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-48.

³¹ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.xi.

³² *Ibid.*, pg.135.

³³ *Ibid.*, pg.136-137.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.170.

scholar whose work has been crucial for this thesis is Robert E. Hegel, whose examination of the literary culture in Late Ming and Qing China in his 1998 book *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, and specifically his discussion of Late Imperial military fiction, are major influences for this thesis.³⁵ In Hegel's work, focus is placed on the intersectionality that has existed between many of these novels, such as *Shuo Yue* and *Shuihu*, whether in characters or themes, and how these often helped to boost the popularity of certain novels over others by tying them in to larger and more famous works.³⁶ Hegel's emphasis on the intersectionality that exists between these works of military historical fiction is one that I hope to explore in my thesis, in particular looking at how the recursion of and allusion to other popular characters, such as those from *Sanguo* or historical figures, served to enhance the themes and messages of these novels.³⁷

Regarding the historical or fictional narratives on the Yang Family, I wish to draw attention to the works of historical fiction from the Late Imperial era and the articles of Wilt Idema on the stories of the Generals of the Yang Family, as Idema is one of the few major scholars in the Western world to have discussed the Yang Family Generals and their mythologization.³⁸ Idema's approach in discussing this martial family and their legends is to look at the way in which the stories often reflect a sense of frustration with the government of the Song Dynasty, who often appear to be a greater obstacle than the enemy in the battlefield, Khitan Liao, to the goal of the reunification of China.³⁹ A more fantastical examination of Late Imperial military history is Mark R.E. Meulenbeld's book *Demonic Warfare* (2015), which while mostly

³⁵ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47-49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pg.47-49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.47-49.

³⁸ Wilt L. Idema, "Something is Rotten in the State of Song: The Frustrated Loyalty of the Generals of the Yang Family", *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 36 (2006): pg. 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 58-60.

focused on the novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (Investiture of the Gods), is equally focused on discussing the role of magic and fantastical warfare in the popular culture of the Ming Dynasty.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to bring together these different approaches to the scholarship of Late Imperial military historical fiction to highlight the ways in which the novels serve to reimagine the history of the Song Dynasty and construct an ideal of unconventional loyalism to the Imperial State.⁴¹ Finally, Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang's work *History and Legends* has provided an excellent source for understanding the broader historical context of the Late Imperial Novels and the way by which these novels interacted with one another during the Late Imperial era.⁴²

Regarding my discussion of the Fang La rebellion and the internal wars of the Song, one of the earliest and most prominent modern scholars of the war was Kao Yu-kung, a professor at Princeton who in the 1960s studied this rebellion within the broader context of the history of Chinese peasant revolts.⁴³ In his overview of the this brief but devastating war, Kao sought to pull aside the popular conception of the rebellion as found in *Shuihu* in order to see the causes, course, and consequences of Fang La's rebellion.⁴⁴ In this context, he examined the war from several perspectives, from the economic to the religious to the political and military, all in order to better understand why this rebellion occurred and why it had such a profound effect on Chinese history despite its brevity.⁴⁵ Kao's study of the rebellion is detailed and covers this

⁴⁰ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pg.197.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47-49.

⁴² Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁴³ Kao Yu-kung, "A Study of the Fang La Rebellion", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 24 (1962-1963): pg. 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.28-30.

moment in history from multiple angles to help place this rebellion within the context of other major rebellions of Imperial Chinese history.⁴⁶

Using a similar approach, albeit more modern than Kao, is the scholarship of Patricia Buckley Ebrey, presented in her 2014 biography of Emperor Song Huizong 宋徽宗 (1082-1135, r. 1100-1126), the last major emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty. Ebrey's focus is on separating the later historiography from the details of Huizong's life to give a clearer picture of the doomed aesthete emperor and the troubled times in which he ruled.⁴⁷ While Ebrey ultimately agrees with the popular consensus on Huizong's reign as being disastrous for the Song Dynasty, she still has sympathy for Huizong, who in her opinion, is just as worthy of respect for his artistic and religious pursuits as he is worthy of scorn for his political failures.⁴⁸ While Ebrey's book is useful for learning of Huizong's accomplishments, it is his political failures that we will be exploring in this thesis and so Ebrey's study of his flaws is helpful.⁴⁹ With regard to the Fang La rebellion, while Ebrey does not dedicate much time to the war, she does wisely place her discussion of the revolt at the beginning of her section on the later military failures of Huizong's reign to help set the scene for the disasters to come.⁵⁰

A more focused contemporary study of the Fang La rebellion comes from Wu Junqing in their 2017 article, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse." In this article, Wu examines the Fang La rebellion from a religious perspective, looking to sift through all the many sources on the rebellion to see what exactly the rebels' religious aims were, and what was

⁴⁶ Ibid., pg.61.

⁴⁷ Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, pg.515.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pg. 515.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pg. 515.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pg. 399.

rooted in Song Dynasty propaganda.⁵¹ Wu's article also examines the changing narratives around the Fang La rebellion and the ways it has been recorded and remembered throughout history.⁵²

Another major historical source that has been influential in this specific study with regard to the ideas of rebellion, war, banditry, and crime in the Song Dynasty is Elad Alyagon's 2023 book *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex*. While the book is not directly about the Fang La rebellion, Alyagon looks at the intersection between criminal and military life in the Song dynasty and its effect on both the morale of the army and the broader perception of the army by the public.⁵³ Alyagon seeks to give voice and perspective to the everyday soldier in the Song military, with all their struggles and the bonds they formed with each other, often in opposition to the state they were nominally fighting for.⁵⁴ Although this is not directly about *Shuihu* itself, it does reflect the broader ideas the novel is trying to convey regarding the bonds amongst the soldiers, and the way in which soldiers are able to fight for a state which ultimately does not care for, and often even despises, them.⁵⁵

Regarding a more literary approach, three of the key sources are the works of David Rolston and Liangyan Ge. David Rolston focuses primarily on the tradition of commentary with regard to *Shuihu*, in particular the commentary of early Qing scholar Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (c.1610-1661) and the choices he made in the construction of his edition of *Shuihu*.⁵⁶ Of particular interest is his commentary as to why Jin ended up removing whole sections of the

⁵¹ Wu Junqing, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", *Journal of Chinese Religions* 45 (1) (2017): pg. 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pg. 20.

⁵³ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2023): pg. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

⁵⁶ David Rolston, "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the *Shui-hu chuan* (Water Margin)" in *How To Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 127.

novel following the 108 Heroes' surrender to the Song government.⁵⁷ Finally, with Liangyan Ge and his 2001 book *Out of the Margin*, we once again see the development of *Shuihu* as a novel, though this time from a more literary perspective that looks at the evolution of Late Imperial literary culture and how it affected the development and reception of the novel within the broader Chinese literary world.⁵⁸ In this way, we are able to see how the values and perceptions of Ming and early Qing commentators and readers found their way into this story of Song-dynasty bandits.⁵⁹ What I seek to bring to this scholarship through this thesis is both an emphasis on the later chapters of *Shuihu*, which I believe are too often neglected in studies of the novel, and to highlight the ways in which works such as *Shuihu*, *Shuo Yue*, and the *Yangjia jiang* all work together as historical representations of the Song Dynasty.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 127.

⁵⁸ Ge, *Out of the Margin*, pg. 168-169.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pg. 168-169.

Chapter 2:

Loyal Bandits and Treacherous Officials: The Representation of Song Dynasty Loyalism and Warfare in Late Imperial Prose Vernacular Fiction

Within Chinese literature there is a form of novel that tells and retells stories about the significant wars that shaped the development of China. This is exemplified in the narrative found in the later chapters, roughly from chapter 81 to 120, of the epic novel *Shuihu*. In these chapters, we see our 108 Bandit Heroes of Liangshan 梁山 setting aside their outlaw ways to join the Imperial Army of the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (960-1279), specifically the Northern Song Dynasty 北宋 (960-1127), and serve nobly in their many wars.⁶⁰ What is especially noteworthy about this section of the novel is the way in which it presents the Bandits' struggles. This portrayal is interesting in the way it demonstrates the tropes and themes found in a number of fictional writings from the Ming 明朝 (1368-1644) and Qing 清朝 (1644-1911) dynasties about the periods preceding them.⁶¹ In particular, the two bodies of work that most clearly resemble these latter chapters of *Shuihu* are the tales surrounding the doomed general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142) of the Southern Song dynasty, in particular the early Qing novel *Shuo Yue* by Qian Cai,⁶² and the body of theatrical and literary works immortalizing the *Yangjia jiang* 楊家將.⁶³ Within these novels and stories depicting the tumultuous history of the Song Dynasty and its many wars, we

⁶⁰ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib. *Iron Ox: Part Four of The Marshes of Mount Liang*. Translated by John and Alex-Dent Young. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2002): pg. 357.

⁶¹ Robert E. Hegel. *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): pg. 47.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁶³ Wilt L Idema and Stephen H West. "Introduction" in *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays* by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West. (Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corp., 2013): pg. xii-xiv.

can see the construction of a recurring series of tropes, themes and archetypes that characterize the wars of the Song as an era of brave generals being betrayed by corrupt and cowardly governments.⁶⁴ In these depictions of the Song's wars, the battlefield and those who fight on it are depicted in almost supernatural terms, a place wherein history and myth collide and military strategy appears as a form of magic.⁶⁵ Within these battles, as for the generals and soldiers who are fighting, we are made to feel as though they are agents of history, holding the history of their dynasties in their hands, and fully comprehend how even the smallest battle can change the destiny of the world.⁶⁶ These tales also view their enemies, whether rebel or foreign barbarian, as a unique "Other" presented both as a worthy adversary but also as a literary cipher for the various threats facing the dynasty that produced the work of literature.⁶⁷ Finally, all three works depict the greatest threats to the heroes, and by extension China, as not being the foreign enemies but rather the officials and ministers back home. These ministers are presented as cowards who prefer peace to war and use their influence over the emperor to discredit the heroes and bring about their downfall.⁶⁸ This betrayal at home is presented in these stories not only as a personal insult to the generals and the soldiers fighting on the frontlines to protect the evil nobles at court, but as degrading these officials into traitors to the whole dynasty, who either work directly or indirectly to bring about the downfall of the dynasty and are deserving only of the worst punishments imaginable.⁶⁹ In examining the ways in which the military history of the Song Dynasty is retroactively interpreted by works from later dynasties such as *Shuihu*, stories whose themes include the mythologization of Yue Fei,⁷⁰ and the tales of the Generals of the Yang

⁶⁴ Ibid., pg. xiii-xiv.

⁶⁵ Shi and Luo, attrib. *Iron Ox*, pg.448-450.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pg.454.

⁶⁷ Idema and West, "Introduction", pg. xxviii-xxx.

⁶⁸ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.469-470.

⁶⁹ Qian Cai, *The General Yue Fei*, translated by T.L. Yang, (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1995): pg. 866-867.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg. 46-47.

Family, we can see the way that the writers of the Ming and Qing era constructed a shared mythology of this tumultuous period of history with a series of recognizable tropes, characters, and themes to simplify the historical narrative into something more tangible.⁷¹

Part 1: The Clash of Generals as the Clash of Empires

In the stories of the various wars that our heroes must fight in, we see a recurring image of war as effectively a clash between almost superhuman generals over the future of the dynasty.⁷² In the chapters of *Shuihu* in which the now reformed bandits are fighting against the Khitan Liao invaders, emphasis is given to how the skills developed by the 108 heroes during their time as outlaws aid them in fighting their enemies.⁷³ An example of this can be seen in Chapter 84, as Song Jiang 宋江 has led his army to besiege the Liao-held city of Qizhou.⁷⁴ Rather than simply waiting to starve out the city or make futile attacks on the walls, Song Jiang and his chief strategist Wu Yong 吳用 devise a scheme in which the former thief Shi Qian 時遷 and the arsonist Shi Xiu 石秀 smuggle themselves into the city and use their skills at burglary and arson to cause havoc in the city and create enough chaos for the rest of Song's army to take the city with minimal resistances and casualties.⁷⁵ A similar occurrence is found in Chapter 22 of *Shuo Yue*, wherein Yue Fei leads his ragtag army of former bandits and remnants from the main Song army, numbering roughly 5000, to ambush and decisively defeat a Jin Dynasty 金朝 army 100,000 strong.⁷⁶ In this battle, Yue uses his knowledge of the terrain and his former bandit soldiers' skills at making ambushes to lure the Jin troops into a trap. Using their cannons and fire

⁷¹ Idema and West, "Introduction", pg. xxviii-xxx.

⁷² C.T. Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): pg. 141.

⁷³ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.389-391.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pg.389.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pg. 389-391.

⁷⁶ Qian, *General Yue Fei*, pg.259-261.

arrows to ignite dry grass that has been secretly placed around the Jin army, Yue Fei's army wreaks havoc on the Jins' ranks and easily routs them.⁷⁷ In spite of the severe numerical disadvantage, the text makes it clear that Yue Fei's strategic brilliance, martial prowess, and trust in his soldiers meant that there was never any fear of defeat among the soldiers of the imperial Song army he led.⁷⁸

This trend of highlighting the cleverness of the Han Chinese generals and their soldiers can also be seen in the Ming Dynasty Yang Family play *Haotian ta Meng Liang Daogu zaju* or 昊天塔孟盜骨雜劇 (*At Bright Sky Pagoda Meng Liang Steals the Bones*; hereafter shortened to *Bright Sky Pagoda*), wherein the sixth son of the Yang Family, Yang Jing 楊景 (958-1012), devises a plan to "rescue" the bones of his father Yang Jiye 楊繼業 (d.986) and younger brother Yang Yansi 楊延嗣 from the Khitan Liao army and defeat the Liao so as to avenge his family. He has his close friend Meng Liang 孟良 pretend to desert the army to sneak in and help Yang reclaim the bones before luring the Liao army into a trap.⁷⁹ Yang gets Meng to help him by telling him specifically to try not to help in this mission and relies on Meng's stubborn character to follow along anyway. As Yang points out "Meng Liang has a quirky and obstinate character. If you tell him to go, he won't, but if you tell him not to go, he will insist on going... That will make him accompany me for sure to rescue my father."⁸⁰ The plan ends up working as intended, as they are not only able to recapture the bones of Yang's father and brother, but also trap the man responsible for their deaths by leading him straight into Yang's army, which has fortified the

⁷⁷ Ibid., pg.262-264.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pg. 262-264.

⁷⁹ Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, trans., *At Bright Sky Pagoda Meng Liang Steals the Bones*, in *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays* by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West (Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corp., 2013): pg. 72-73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pg. 72.

local passes.⁸¹ In this case, Yang Jing relies on his knowledge of his friends' personalities and quirks to create a cunning plan that allows him to both respect and avenge his family at the same time.⁸²

This perspective, in which battles are treated as a showcase for the individual skills and cleverness of the generals, is a key aspect of military fiction in Late Imperial China as it seeks to expand the scope of the conflict from the purely physical and political into the internal.⁸³ The key to this is the way in which these stories highlight the bonds between the generals⁸⁴ and their subordinate officers.⁸⁵ In *Shuihu*, Song Jiang is assisted in achieving victory after victory by the other 107 Celestial Heroes, who provide Song Jiang with their own unique skills and quirks.⁸⁶ For the Yang family they have great stalwart heroes like Meng Liang and Yue Sheng assisting them.⁸⁷ And Yue Fei is aided by his fellowship of eccentric and powerful generals such as Niu Gao 牛皋 and Ji Qing 吉青.⁸⁸ The battlefield becomes a space not only for these generals to clash in battles of wit and prowess with their rivals, but also to strengthen the bonds of friendship with their officers in order to win wars and achieve glory for the whole empire.⁸⁹ This also ties into another key point on the nature of Dynastic military fiction as discussed by C.T. Hsia, namely that in these types of stories the actual tactics of war matter less than to the character of those leading the armies and the way in which the narrative wishes to portray the goal of the

⁸¹ Ibid., pg. 82-84.

⁸² Ibid., pg. 82-84.

⁸³ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg. 148-149.

⁸⁴ I will be referring to Song Jiang as a general due to his status as the commander in chief of the Liangshan Bandits during their outlawry days and in their days as Imperial soldiers.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pg. 149-150.

⁸⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 389-391.

⁸⁷ Idema and West, trans., *Bright Sky Pagoda*, pg. 71-73.

⁸⁸ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg. 150.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pg. 149-150.

combat.⁹⁰ This is especially the case for all three of these stories set in the Song Dynasty, as, beyond any personal glory or ambition, it is the dream of all these generals to strengthen and defend the Song Empire so that it may rule peacefully and prosperously over all of China.⁹¹

The Magic of Strategy: The Roles of Magic in the Text

Further developing this theme of fantastical warfare within these three texts is the way in which strategy and magic are heavily intertwined.⁹² As C.T. Hsia observes, due to the fact that many of these tales emerged from folklore and popular stories, there is a strong fantastical element that permeates them; this is articulated through the presence of magic on the battlefield as a supplement to strategy.⁹³ In *Shuihu*, much of the magic that appears in battle comes from the Daoist master Gongsun Sheng 公孫勝, who creates strategies and formations for the army of Liangshan that are aided and guided by his own powerful magic.⁹⁴ For example, during one battle, he manages to cover the battle in a magical darkness that only affects his enemies and allows the soldiers of Liangshan to capture the enemy general.⁹⁵ It is also noted in this battle that the general who is captured was an “expert in strategy and also in the magic arts.”⁹⁶ Here, magic and strategy are essentially equated as the skills that come hand in hand for those who study them.⁹⁷ However, because this enemy commander is portrayed as young and inexperienced compared to the master tactician and (Daoist) magicians from the 108 Heroes, his overreliance on his knowledge of strategy allows him to be ensnared both by the formation set up by Song

⁹⁰ Ibid., pg.138-139.

⁹¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.411-413.

⁹² Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.139-141.

⁹³ Ibid., pg.140-141.

⁹⁴ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.434-436.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pg.434-436.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pg.432.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pg.432.

Jiang and Wu Yong and also by Gongsun Sheng's magic.⁹⁸ In this way, magic and strategy are presented as critical and complementary components in a synergetic relation with each other, wherein the placement of emphasis on only one of these skills can lead to losing a battle against an enemy who utilizes both skills simultaneously.⁹⁹ This notion of the interconnection of strategy and magic is reiterated in Chapter 88 of *Shuihu*, in which Song Jiang receives a visitation in a dream by The Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven (*jiutian xiuanü* 九天玄女), who teaches Song Jiang the proper strategies and formations to use in order to defeat a particularly formidable Liao army that has assumed a seemingly unbeatable formation.¹⁰⁰ The advice she provides is rooted in the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) theory, as each division of Song Jiang's army is equated to an element/phase and must be placed against the enemy division associated with the weaker element (for example, the Metal Division of Liangshan beats the Wood Division of their enemy as the Fire Division defeats the Metal Division, and so forth).¹⁰¹ Here, the art of war and strategy is directly tied into knowledge of the natural world and the principles that govern the cosmos, heightening the role of strategy into being based on an understanding of the principles of the world.¹⁰² In this context, The Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven specifically tells Song Jiang that during the battle he should "Get Daoist Gongsun to raise wind and thunder with a spell to penetrate their right [flank]".¹⁰³ Once again, magic is presented as a key part of any strategic decision in military affairs within this sort of fiction.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the use of magic and strategy in concert is one that is likely an intentional one in *Shuihu*, as historian Mark Meulenbeld notes

⁹⁸ Ibid., pg.432-434.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pg. 434-436.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pg. 460-461.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pg. 460-461.

¹⁰² Ibid., pg. 460-461.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pg. 461.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pg.461.

that during the Yuan and the Ming Dynasties the 108 Celestial Forces, whom the Heroes of Liangshan are the earthly incarnations of,¹⁰⁵ were depicted as military forces that served the higher powers of Heaven and acted as protectors of Time.¹⁰⁶ While these spirits were often invoked as protection spirits, they are described in the terms of military organization, tying the spiritual and the martial.¹⁰⁷ I would argue, based on this connection, that through the appearance of the 108 Celestial Forces as the 108 Heroes of Liangshan, their ability to fight so effectively and perform great feats of strategy and magic is a manifestation of their heavenly origins that aids them in their wars.¹⁰⁸

Though generally more grounded and realistic than *Shuihu*, there are still moments in *Shuo Yue* in which magic and fantastical powers are presented as a key part of strategy and the battlefield.¹⁰⁹ In a similar scene to the visitation by The Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven, Yue Fei is visited in a dream by the aforementioned Yang Jing who teaches Yue Fei the strategies and skills of the Yang Family Generals.¹¹⁰ In this sequence, Yue Fei not only receives magical support to aid him in the battles to come, but also is directly tied by these powers to his heroic predecessors, emphasizing his own heroicism by association with the legendary Yang Family Generals.¹¹¹ In another moment that combines the two themes of victory through personal connections and of magic as strategy, Yue Fei is saved by his brave friend Niu Gao from the spectral assassins that had been summoned by the Jin army and used magic he had been taught to

¹⁰⁵ For more information on the way the 108 appeared in other works of Chinese literature and ritual practice, see Mark Meulenbeld's book *Demonic Warfare*.

¹⁰⁶ Mark R.E. Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015): pg. 69-70.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 69-70.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 69-70.

¹⁰⁹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg. 549-550.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 549-550.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 549-550.

counter various magical traps set up by Yue's enemies.¹¹² Niu Gao likewise provides an interesting variation on this theme of the strategist/magician as he himself is not a strategist but one of Yue Fei's primary warriors; yet through training he becomes a Daoist sage.¹¹³ Niu Gao's actions highlight that one does not need to be a superb strategist to master magic because ritual magic and warfare are inherently connected in these stories.¹¹⁴ While of a lower key than the grand magical battles of *Shuihu*, the account given in the later *Shuo Yue* highlights in the texts the way in which skill in martial prowess and skill in magic often go hand in hand in order to achieve victory.¹¹⁵

Moving now briefly to the story of the Yang Family Generals, which like those of Yue Fei are comparatively light on overtly supernatural elements, we continue to see the intersection between the fantastical and the military in these stories, such as in the mid-Ming Dynasty play *Yang Liulang tiaobing po tianzhen* 楊六郎調兵破天陣 (*Yang Six Lines Up His Troops to Defeat the Heavenly Array*, hereafter shortened as *Heavenly Array*)¹¹⁶ When confronted with a powerful Liao army that has assembled itself in a series of seemingly unbreakable formations, Yang Jing is unperturbed and states, "A hundred battles, a hundred triumphs,/From marvelous tactics and schemes divine."¹¹⁷ In his statement, Yang is indicating that the reason for his success comes from the fact he relies on both his wit and on the powers of the world (be they magic or natural).¹¹⁸ Moreover, the act of dividing the army into specific divisions associated with

¹¹² Ibid., pg. 596-598.

¹¹³ Ibid., pg. 586.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 586.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,pg. 596-598.

¹¹⁶ Idema and West, trans., *Yang Six Lines Up His Troops to Defeat the Heavenly Array*, in *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays* by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West (Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corp., 2013): pg.164-166.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pg. 164.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pg. 164.

different natural phenomenon or phases, as seen in all three texts, was one that was believed to have inherent magical power in and of itself, as the unit was seen to carry with them the spirit of that element or occurrence into battle.¹¹⁹ In this way, the art of being a strategist and general is transformed into that of a sage or wizard, with the art of coming up with plans being just as magical as any specific ritual.¹²⁰

The significance of this intersection between the supernatural and the strategic within these military stories is one that is also rooted within historical beliefs that were popular at the time regarding success in war.¹²¹ When many of these stories were either written into text or popularized in the Ming period, a key part of maintaining the cohesion and identity of the Ming army was through rituals for gods and local spirits to aid them in war, to the point that the founder of the Ming Empire, Emperor Ming Taizu 明太祖 (r. 1368-1398) tried to stamp out these practices for fear of rebellion.¹²² One can interpret that the image of the General to be one who communed with gods and spirits and relied on magic, in addition to strategy, as revealed in these stories, was a somewhat subversive message to present. At the same time it also highlighted the theme that these heroes were true loyalists even if they broke the law, and showed foolish it would be to separate the military from its rituals.¹²³ Indeed, despite these early prohibitions, the association between the army and ritual was a bond that remained strong throughout the Ming dynasty and was even supported by some emperors.¹²⁴ A real life example of someone like Daoist Gongsun can even be found in the figure of Zhou Side (1359-1451), a Daoist priest who

¹¹⁹ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pg.103.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pg.103.

¹²¹ Ibid., pg.136-138.

¹²² Ibid., pg.145-147.

¹²³ Ibid., pg.45-147.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pg.160.

aided the Yongle Emperor 永樂帝(r. 1402-1424) in his many campaigns, believing that it was critical for him to possess the powers and ability to commune with the divine to achieve the victories for the Ming .¹²⁵ As Mark Meulenbeld notes in his book *Demonic Warfare*, stories of Zhou Side’s power and his successes were very popular in the Ming and it is likely that they were influential in the popular imagination with regard to other strategists who connected the line between strategist and sage-magician as seen in *Shuihu*.¹²⁶ As such, while it is unlikely that such magical and supernatural occurrences actually happened in reality as described in these novels and stories, their existence in the texts does reflect a very real belief and practice that was popular at the time of their creation.¹²⁷ In this way, it ties the stories closer to contemporaneous people’s beliefs in the Ming period than to the Song dynasty, during which they are set.¹²⁸

Ersatz Tactics: The Portrayal of China’s Northern Enemies in Late Imperial Military Historical Fiction

The manner in which these tales of military campaigns in the Song Dynasty depict the various foreign enemies of Han-centred China reflects a common theme: namely, that those foes often tried to mimic the culture, tactics and traditions of the current ruling dynasty of China, but ultimately fell short compared to the power of the legitimate dynasty.¹²⁹ In the previous section, we examined the case of the young Liao commander who attempted to use his profound knowledge of Chinese traditional military theory (and magic) to defeat Song Jiang and his army.¹³⁰ This General in many ways reflects typical clichés in the archetype of the “barbarian”

¹²⁵ Ibid., pg.164-165.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pg.164-165.

¹²⁷ Ibid, pg.164-165.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pg.164-165.

¹²⁹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 431-432.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pg.431.

commander that often appears in these military tales: he is arrogant, brash, and believes that due to his supposedly profound understanding of classical Chinese military texts, he is the equal to any Chinese general opposing him.¹³¹ During his stand-off against Song Jiang, the young general (whose name is not specified in the text) boastfully orders his army to assume different formations as taken from the writings of the Three Kingdoms 三國 (220-280) era strategist Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), albeit strategies that likely have more basis in the version of Zhuge Liang found in *Sanguo* than the historical individual, in order to intimidate Song Jiang and demonstrate his knowledge of military tactics.¹³² Song Jiang watches on and feels only pity for this young commander, warning him “You’re as limited in your views as the frog in the bottom of the well. All you know is these manoeuvres which you think so great.”¹³³ The clash ends with a decisive victory for Song Jiang’s army and the capture of the boastful foreign commander. The cause of this victory is attributed to the fact that the Liao commander is merely mimicking the Chinese way of warfare but lacks the intimate knowledge of the tactics that allow Song Jiang and his commanders to use the tactics more flexibly, thus sealing his fate.¹³⁴ A similar scenario occurs in *The Heavenly Array* Yang Family play, in which the Liao strategist Yan Dongbin arrogantly assumes that his army will be able to win because the formations he has placed his army in are supposedly undefeatable. His arrogance leads him to ignore any report of their defeat by Yang Jing’s forces by insisting that there will be another formation to replace the one that was lost.¹³⁵ In a comedic sequence, all of Yan’s divisions are defeated while Yan insists that he still has confidence in overall victory and that his formations are unbreakable, even up to

¹³¹ Ibid., pg.432-433.

¹³² Ibid., pg.433.

¹³³ Ibid., pg.433.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pg.433-434.

¹³⁵ Idema and West, trans., *The Heavenly Array*, pg.170-171.

the point that the Song army is in his camp and he is chased off by Yang's soldiers who had reached his camp.¹³⁶ Here again we see the Khitan Liao depicted as an ersatz Chinese state that is trying to mimic the forms and traditions of China but failing miserably.¹³⁷

This reflects a view that was common from the Song Dynasty onwards, when foreign powers like the Liao were an occupying force over part of the land that was traditionally part of the Central Plains from which the Liao needed to be driven out.¹³⁸ In both the plays depicting the Yang Family Generals and in *Shuihu*, the goal of reconquering the lost sixteen prefectures of Northern China 燕雲十六州 (*Yanyun shiliu zhou*) is not only the goal of our heroes, but is presented as something that needs to be achieved for the good of the Song Empire.¹³⁹ In *The Heavenly Array*, the Liao commander in chief, Han Yanshou 韓延壽, even considers returning the prefectures to Yang Jing as a possible reward should he be able to break Yan Dongbin's formations, though his lack of faith in Yang's abilities indicates he would never actually consider returning any of China's lost territory.¹⁴⁰ Likewise, in *Shuihu*, after Song Jiang decisively crushes the Liao army in one grand final battle, the King of Liao surrenders to Song Jiang and is forced to promise never to threaten the Song again and to pay tribute to the Song Emperor.¹⁴¹ This portrayal, that the Song Empire could so thoroughly defeat the Liao, reclaiming the sixteen prefectures and forcing the Liao into becoming a tributary state, is pure fantasy and wishful thinking on the part of the later authors.¹⁴² In reality, the Song had to pay tribute to the Liao and

¹³⁶ Ibid., pg.170-171.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pg.171.

¹³⁸ Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): pg. 81-83.

¹³⁹ Idema and West, trans., *The Heavenly Array*, pg.160.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pg.160.

¹⁴¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.468-469.

¹⁴² Peter Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005): pg. 33-35.

acknowledge their rule of the prefectures as well as to view the Liao as an empire as nominally equal to (if not greater than) the Song, greatly damaging the traditional view that the Emperor of China was the sole ruler, with the Mandate of Heaven, in the world known to them.¹⁴³ In this way, these later authors are imagining a scenario in which this humiliation could be reversed and the traditional order of the world, shattered by the wars of the Song Dynasty, could be restored.¹⁴⁴

The complicated relationship between the Song and Liao is probably best understood not so much as a clash between states in the modern sense of the word, but rather as a clash over legitimacy for claiming the Mandate of Heaven.¹⁴⁵ As such, in the depiction of the Song-Liao war in *Shuihu*, the primary source of conflict between the Song and Liao armies is not strictly based on ethnicity but rather based around loyalty.¹⁴⁶ This is most clearly illustrated in chapter 83 of *Shuihu* during a duel between a Liao general named Aliqi 阿里奇 and the Liangshan Hero Xu Ning 徐宁, during which Aliqi attempts to taunt his opponent by saying, “The Song Dynasty is destined to be defeated!...now they dare to oppose a mighty nation, they must want to die!”¹⁴⁷ Aliqi’s statement highlights a historical viewpoint held by the Liao during their wars against the Song, namely that the Liao were the rightful heirs to the Mandate of the Heaven from the Song Dynasty, who in their eyes had lost the Mandate of Heaven, and that their wars were an attempt to achieve this goal.¹⁴⁸ It is not framed as a war between Khitans and Han Chinese but as a

¹⁴³ Ibid., pg. 34-35.

¹⁴⁴ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 468-469.

¹⁴⁵ Jingshen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988): pg. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 370

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pg.370.

¹⁴⁸ Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg.25.

struggle for the authority for the throne.¹⁴⁹ The response from Xu Ning, however, complicates this matter as he replies “You’re just a petty chieftain from a rotten little principedom! How can you dare to use such language!¹⁵⁰ (*chen guo xiaojiang, gan chu huiyan* 辱国小将，敢出秽言.)”¹⁵¹ In the translation by John and Alex Dent-Young, *xiaojiang* 小将 is translated as “petty chieftain” to emphasize Aliqi’s identity as a “barbarian” general. However, the literal translation of *xiaojiang* 小将 is a petty general. As a result, the translation discloses Xu Ning’s viewpoint that being a barbarian, Aliqi has no grounds on which to make these bold claims to imperial legitimacy.¹⁵² Yet this implication is not found in the original text as found in the *Library of Chinese Classics edition*, as Xu Ning’s words are better understood to be criticizing Aliqi’s character as a general rather than explicitly attacking his status as a foreigner.¹⁵³ It should also be noted that during this section of the novel, the word used to describe the Liao most commonly is *fan* 番,¹⁵⁴ which is in and of itself a generic term meaning “foreigner”.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, *fan* itself was often seen as a neutral term and largely used to describe foreign countries who interacted with China (and by extension its ruling dynasty) on a regular basis.¹⁵⁶ This relates to the broader perception of the conflicts between the Song Empire and its foreign rivals. In this view those who supported war saw the Liao’s attempt to establish themselves as a rival dynasty to be a direct threat to the Song’s own legitimacy and belief that they alone could hold the Mandate of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pg.25.

¹⁵⁰ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 370.

¹⁵¹ Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳: *Outlaws of the Marsh, Library of Chinese Classics Chinese-English Edition*, translated by Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1999): pg. 2526.

¹⁵² Ibid., pg.370.

¹⁵³ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳: *Outlaws of the Marsh*, pg. 2526-2527.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pg.2541.

¹⁵⁵ Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation*, pg. 163.

Heaven.¹⁵⁷ The perspective that these were wars over dynastic legitimacy is in turn reinforced by the anti-war faction of the Song Court, who believed that it would be better to simply view the Liao as a foreign kingdom for the Song Empire to interact with peacefully rather than painting them as a rival to the throne.¹⁵⁸ In this way, we can see the heroes of *Shuihu* adhering to the logic of the pro-war sentiments in the imperial Song court, who saw the Liao as a foreign kingdom attempting to steal the Mandate of Heaven from their own legitimate dynasty.¹⁵⁹ While this perspective does present them as a foreign enemy in the terminology used to describe them, it is largely intended to emphasize the foreignness of the foe rather than as a statement of ethnic/national difference.¹⁶⁰

Such tendency to put more importance on the acceptance of the Chinese notion of legitimacy rather than one's ethnic background is revealed in chapter 84 of *Shuihu*. Here Song Jiang, upon capturing the city of Tanzhou 檀州, proclaims that any Khitan official who either possesses or is willing to accept a Chinese surname may stay and remain in their current positions, while those who either do not have or are unwilling to accept a Chinese surname are expelled from the city.¹⁶¹ In this specific incident, while Song Jiang is discriminating against Khitan subjects who do not accept a Chinese surname, the fact that he allows those who do have/accept a Chinese surname to keep their original positions¹⁶² emphasizes this notion that what is at stake in this war is not the clash between ethnicity-based nation-states but rather between a legitimate imperial power and a rival kingdom attempting to usurp it.¹⁶³ The

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 174.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 177-179.

¹⁵⁹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳: *Outlaws of the Marsh*, pg. 2526-2527.

¹⁶⁰ Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg. 35.

¹⁶¹ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 377.

¹⁶² Ibid., pg. 377.

¹⁶³ Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg. 35.

acceptance of a Chinese surname is therefore presented as a form of submitting to the authority of the Imperial State of Song and acknowledging their legitimacy over the legitimacy claimed by the Liao.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, this fit in with a general perception held by the people of the Song Empire that viewed both Han Chinese subjects of the Liao and Sinicized Khitan as having the potential to be loyal subjects of the Song Empire, or even as secret Song loyalists.¹⁶⁵ With this historical perspective in mind, I argue that we can see Song Jiang's clemency towards the Sinicized civilians of Tanzhou as being an acknowledgement of this potential for loyalty towards the Chinese empire Song Jiang serves.¹⁶⁶

Since the stories about Yue Fei depict him as a hero fighting the Jurchen-ruled Jin Dynasty rather than fighting against the Liao, there are some differences in how they are presented in works like *Shuo Yue*, but by and large the novel's portrayal of the Jin still fits the overall image of a usurping foreign force.¹⁶⁷ When Yue Fei sends his friend Niu Gao to inform Prince Wushu of Changping or Jin Wuzhu (金兀朮) (d.1148) that he, on behalf of the Song Empire, intends to declare war on the Jin and recapture all of Northern China, Niu is haughty and dismissive of Wushu's title and positions and sees him as little more than an invader.¹⁶⁸ It is only because Wushu is impressed by Niu Gao's boldness that Niu is not killed on the spot for his denunciation of the Jin.¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, the Jin have the same view of Yue Fei and the Song Dynasty as a whole, constantly referring to them as "the Southern Barbarians" and viewing themselves as the true bearers of the Mandate of Heaven.¹⁷⁰ The text of this novel on the whole

¹⁶⁴ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 377.

¹⁶⁵ Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007): pg. 154.

¹⁶⁶ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 377.

¹⁶⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.452-453.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pg.452-453.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pg. 452-453.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 461.

works to show this view as being misleading and paint the Song as the only bearers of the Mandate of Heaven, albeit in a weaker position politically and militarily than before the Jin invasion. Notably this still is a perspective not seen in the other texts discussed that focus on the Song Dynasty's wars.¹⁷¹ This is reinforced by the fact that the novel ends by giving an ahistorical victory to the Song by allowing Yue Fei's loyal followers to avenge the Jingkang Calamity by defeating and slaying Prince Wuzhu.¹⁷² Through this, the novel ends on a note of triumph, with the promise of an eventual defeat of the enemies who ravaged the Song and caused the death of Yue Fei, and shows the superiority of spirit and martial valor of the Song over the Jin.¹⁷³ Again, the goal of Yue Fei and his companions is to reunify all of China for the Song Dynasty and restore peace to All Under Heaven, but the knowledge the reader in the late imperial period has about the fate of the real Yue Fei means that his ultimate failure is a foregone conclusion to this story.¹⁷⁴

Likewise, the more nuanced portrayal of the invading Jin can be attributed to the fact that the text was written by Qian Cai during the Qing Dynasty, when the Jin's Manchurian descendants conquered all of China, and specifically during the reign of its fourth and fifth emperors Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1661-1722) and Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1722-1735).¹⁷⁵ During both emperors' reigns, although outspoken praise and worship of Yue Fei was not officially banned, it was not directly sponsored by the emperors themselves due to the fact that Yue Fei had fought against their ancestors.¹⁷⁶ In addition, during the Yongzheng Emperor's reign, controversy

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 539-541.

¹⁷² Ibid., pg.956-957.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pg.956-957.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pg.540.

¹⁷⁵ T.L. Yang, "Introduction" in *The General Yue Fei*, translated by T.L. Yang, (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1995): pg. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Yue Du, "Toward a Nation Defined by a State: Tattooed Loyalty and the Evolution of Yue Fei's (1103-1142) Image from Song to Present", *Journal of Chinese History* (2023): pg. 9-10.

around Yue Fei arose in 1728 when one of his direct descendants, Governor-General Yue Zhongqi 岳種琪 (1686-1754), was implicated in a conspiracy to overthrow the emperor and place a “native” Han Chinese emperor back on the throne.¹⁷⁷ In fact, Yue Zhongqi, allegedly involved with this alleged act of treason, had reported the conspiracy to the emperor upon learning of it and was not punished for his indirect association with the conspiracy. Despite his innocence, the association between Yue Zhongqi and the conspirators still cast a shadow over the memory of Yue Fei as the symbol of Han Chinese patriotism for the Qing government.¹⁷⁸ By highlighting the Jin’s own biases against the Song, the novel *Shuo Yue* takes a diplomatic approach in its portrayal of Yue Fei and his conflict with the Jurchen Jin, presenting him as a righteous warrior for the glory of the Song Dynasty. However, this does not mean that the Jin are fully demonized or lampooned in this work.¹⁷⁹ In this way, *Shuo Yue* does deviate slightly from the general narrative found in the Chinese military history fiction written in the late imperial period, but still conforms to the notion that these portrayals of Yue Fei are shaped by politics and the perception of the Han Chinese vs. “others”.¹⁸⁰

Destroyed by Schemes: The Role of Evil Ministers in Late Imperial Military Historical Fiction

The most recurring thread throughout all three stories, though, is the way in which the greatest threat to the success of these generals comes not from their foreign enemies but rather from the scheming politicians and officials back in the Imperial Court.¹⁸¹ Beyond all other

¹⁷⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York: Viking, 2001): pg.2-3.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pg.24-25.

¹⁷⁹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.540.

¹⁸⁰ Yue, “Toward a Nation Defined by a State”, pg.9-10.

¹⁸¹ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire’s Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard East Asia Center, 2023): pg. 190-191.

similarities and tropes, this theme of the scheming official who brings down the loyal but eccentric general is the most commonly repeated formula in the popular literature surrounding the Song period.¹⁸² This idea is central to the plot of *Shuihu*, as many of the 108 Heroes turn to banditry because of corrupt and decadent officials, while said officials are a favourite target for the Heroes' attacks.¹⁸³ One of the main inciting incidents in the novel is the appointment of the buffoonish Gao Qiu 高球 (1076-1126), also known as Gao the Ball, to the post of Grand Marshal of the Palace...based on his skills at a soccer-like game.¹⁸⁴ During the final arc of the 120-chapter edition of the novel, when the 108 Heroes are fighting the enemies of the Song Emperor, we see the true face of such villainous officials as they turn traitor and carry out sabotage purely out of spite towards the heroes.¹⁸⁵ With total victory over the Liao within reach, the four most corrupt chief officials in the Song court are easily bribed by the Liao diplomats to accept a treaty which not only orders Song Jiang's army to withdraw from the Liao lands, but also allows for the retention of Liao control over the sixteen northern prefectures and the annual tribute from the Song court to the Liao Empire.¹⁸⁶ This act is presented as the only way by which the Liao are able to come out of the war with all their power intact, as they are shown to be too weak to defeat the Song in the field; thus, for them to achieve victory over the Song, they must rely on internal corruption at the imperial court of the Song.¹⁸⁷

Such depictions are made even more explicit by the Liao's earlier attempt to use this tactic on Song Jiang, offering to make him rich beyond his wildest dreams and to give him the

¹⁸² Ibid., pg.190-191.

¹⁸³ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Broken Seals: Part One of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1994): pg. 353.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pg.34.

¹⁸⁵ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.469-471.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pg.469-471.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pg.469-471.

position of the supreme commander of the Liao army if he and his army would defect.¹⁸⁸ The Liao ambassador even invokes this idea of the corrupt officials back home as one of the reasons for Song Jiang to defect, as he is unlikely to be properly rewarded and will most certainly be betrayed once he returns.¹⁸⁹ Song Jiang, however, is portrayed as being immune to such attempts at deception since he is a strong-willed general loyal to the Song Empire. His love of the Song Dynasty (no matter how flawed it is), and his desire to leave behind a good and respectable reputation, keep him loyal to the state even if it does betray him.¹⁹⁰ The main reason this stratagem is shown to fail with Song Jiang, but succeeds with the evil officials back at the court, appears to be rooted in the fact that as a martial hero Song Jiang is more accustomed to risking his life for the state than those back in the imperial capital who are living in luxury.¹⁹¹ It reflects an idea that celebrates martial virtues (*wu* 武) as more beneficial to the state in comparison to civil virtues (*wen* 文), directly critiquing the Song Empire's general view that *wen* and the officials associated with it were superior to *wu* and its associated soldiers.¹⁹² In doing so, the perspective taken by these popular novels equated any attempts at forming peace with the empire's neighbours with treason.¹⁹³ Moreover, after all the wars, the corrupt officials successfully arranged for the assassination of Song Jiang and a few other key heroes of Liangshan, fearing that the 108 heroes' power and popularity would be a threat to the ministers' own power, and that Song Jiang and his followers could unveil the ministers' corruption and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pg.397-399.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pg.397.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pg.399.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pg.399.

¹⁹² F.W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): pg. 103-104.

¹⁹³ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

treachery.¹⁹⁴ Most egregiously, no matter how many times these evil ministers are nearly exposed and condemned for their actions, they are always able to weasel their way out of punishment and get away with their deeds scot-free.¹⁹⁵

This same view of treasonous officials, in contrast to the noble generals, is also the core of all stories surrounding Yue Fei, largely stemming from the fact that his death has long been attributed in history and popular culture to the machinations of the corrupt and cowardly Prime Minister of the Song Qin Kuai 秦儉 (1091-1155).¹⁹⁶ In the novel *Shuo Yue*, Qin Kuai is depicted as the most despicable type of traitor, being introduced as cowardly, surrendering himself to the encroaching Jin army, and simultaneously selling out his companions in exchange for his own life being spared.¹⁹⁷ The novel laments that due to the Jin's decision to keep him alive, "Emperors Huizong and Qinzong died in old age in the desert, and all loyal men and patriotic officials suffered at the hands of traitors."¹⁹⁸ This statement refers to the sorry fate of Emperor Huizong and his son, who were dragged off to modern-day Manchuria as prisoners of the Jin following the fall of Kaifeng in 1127, an exile from which they would never return.¹⁹⁹ Qin Kuai's betrayal and ultimate killing of Yue Fei is also depicted as a ploy created by the Jin prince Wushu to deliberately destabilize the Song Dynasty and to get revenge on Yue Fei for defeating the Jin in so many battles.²⁰⁰ The novel portrays this as being the logical conclusion of the Jingkang Incident (*Jingkang shi bian* 靖康事變) of 1127 that started the Jin-Song wars and caused the

¹⁹⁴ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Scattered Flock: Part Five of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2002): pg. 451-453.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pg.466-467.

¹⁹⁶ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

¹⁹⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.214.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pg.214.

¹⁹⁹ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014): pg. 474-476.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pg.528-529.

southward flight of the Song Dynasty, as the whole Jin invasion is blamed on the treachery of Qin Kuai's predecessor Zhang Bangchang 張邦昌 (1081-1127).²⁰¹ Zhang's misguided and secretly treacherous advice leads to the weakening of the Song and allows the Jin to easily conquer much of Northern China and capture the reigning emperor and his father. This all comes about because, in the story, the Jin rulers know that treasonous officials are the most efficient way they can win the war.²⁰² Here, the emperors and court officers of the Song Empire are seemingly absolved of any blame for any of the events leading up to 1127, as historian Elad Alyagon notes in his book *Inked*, both large and small, and instead all blame is placed on the actions of a handful of "bad actors."²⁰³ This allowed the reputation of the Song as an Imperial Dynasty to remain intact and its historical memory to be one of good rulers and good generals who are undone from within, rather than accepting the harsh reality of what occurred.²⁰⁴ The desire to protect the reputation of the Imperial Clan is reinforced by the fact the novel portrays Emperor Song Gaozong 宋高宗 (r.1127-1162, r.1162-1187 as Retired Emperor) in a largely positive light, with him being praised for his daring escape from the Jin and for preserving the Song Dynasty in Southern China.²⁰⁵ The novel even ends with Gaozong and his successor Song Xiaozong 宋孝宗 (r.1162-1194) successfully negotiating the return of the bodies of the captured emperors from the Jin. In addition, on a more personal level, they also pardon the Yue family and elevate them in status while also posthumously condemning Qin Kuai.²⁰⁶ Moreover, the demonization of Qin Kuai reflects real sentiments felt in the aftermath of the historical figure

²⁰¹ Ibid., pg.208-210.

²⁰² Ibid., pg.210.

²⁰³ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pg.190-191.

²⁰⁵ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.152.

²⁰⁶ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg. 959-960.

Yue Fei's death: betrayal and anger at the injustice of Yue Fei's death, and the belief that the Song could have reunited China had the Imperial Court not negotiated with the Jin.²⁰⁷ This sentiment regarding the idea that the Peace Faction led by Qin Kuai at court had traded Yue Fei's life and the chance for reunification for an unjustified and unfair peace with China's enemies when Yue Fei was about to reunify all of China, only grew stronger in the centuries following his death.²⁰⁸ Of course, the feasibility of the historical Yue Fei being about to reunify all of China is largely wishful thinking, as the primary goal of Yue's campaigns was the stabilization of the Southern Song's territory.²⁰⁹ Any campaigns directed to into the regions conquered by the Jin seem to have been largely punitive in nature, as most Southern Song officials and generals agreed that a full reconquest of their lost territory would be highly difficult and impractical given their circumstances.²¹⁰ The concept of a Peace Faction was associated with treason and blamed for all of the Song's faults in the popular culture of the time. However if examined more historically, an alternative perspective would view these officials as simply trying to save China from a conflict that caused more harm to the Song Dynasty than treaties had ever done.²¹¹ Moreover, placing the blame on Qin Kuai and other officials allowed Emperor Gaozong to appear blameless, keeping the position of emperor safe from criticism.²¹² It should also be noted that some scholars such as Jennifer Jay have argued that it is just as plausible that the real blame for the death of Yue Fei can be placed on Emperor Gaozong, who feared Yue Fei's conquests would threaten this legitimacy to the throne since Yue's goal was to free Gaozong's captive

²⁰⁷ Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009): pg. 78.

²⁰⁸ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

²⁰⁹ Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800*, pg.301.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 301.

²¹¹ David Curtis Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Khitan Liao*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005): pg. 231.

²¹² Jennifer W. Jay, *A Change in Dynasties: Loyalism in Thirteenth Century China* (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 1991): pg. 95-96.

father and older brother, which would have cost Gaozong the throne.²¹³ As such, placing blame on figures like Qin Kuai became a way to criticize the Song government without directly threatening the power on which it was built.²¹⁴ In addition, the fixation on the actions of such bad faith actors within the Song Court may also have been a reflection of frustrations amongst the literati in Late Imperial China, as they saw corruption and factional disputes lead to the banishment or execution of their colleagues.²¹⁵ A similar trend towards blaming the officials while keeping the Emperor blameless is found at the very end of *Shuihu*, where Emperor Huizong posthumously ennobles Song Jiang and lavishes riches upon the surviving Heroes of Liangshan, even if he is unable to actually deal with the corrupt officials who caused Song Jiang's death.²¹⁶ Through this, characters like Yue Fei, Song Jiang and the Yang Family Generals became outlets for writers and editors to express their frustration with the current regime by hiding behind the veil of history to implicitly draw connections between the past and the present.²¹⁷

The novel likewise creates karmic punishments for Qin Kuai and his supporters, with Qin Kuai in particular suffering the humiliating death of choking on his own blood after accidentally biting his tongue off.²¹⁸ As Qin's deceptive words and tongue had led to the downfall of the Song as a unified entity, and Yue Fei specifically, the novel finds it only natural that he would die because of his tongue and the words it produced.²¹⁹ Qin Kuai is later seen being tortured in Hell for his actions, where the torturing deities make assurance that Qin Kuai's fellow conspirators

²¹³ Ibid., pg. 95-96.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 95-96.

²¹⁵ Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pg. 144-145.

²¹⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg. 467.

²¹⁷ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg. 144-145.

²¹⁸ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg. 858.

²¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 858.

and lackeys will suffer the same fate when they too finally pass away.²²⁰ In this way, *Shuo Yue* offers a cathartic punishment for the cruel officials, an outcome that some readers wanted to see in works like *Shuihu*,²²¹ especially readers from the literati class who wished to see their present political woes avenged.²²²

This approach to punish corrupt and treacherous officials in terms of the karma they accumulated is also found in the Yang Family General play from the Ming Dynasty *Ba dawang kaizhao jiu zhongchen* 八大王開詔救忠臣 (*The Eighth Great Prince Opens a Proclamation and Saves a Loyal Vassal*, hereafter shortened to *The Eighth Great Prince*) through its treatment of Grand Preceptor Pan Renmei 潘仁美 (925-991).²²³ In this play, the wicked Pan Renmei deliberately sabotages the campaigns of the Yang family to protect the Song Dynasty and its emperor, though unlike the treasonous actions of the cadre of evil ministers in *Shuihu* or Qin Kuai in *Shuo Yue*, Pan is motivated almost entirely by personal jealousy and hatred for the Yang family.²²⁴ As such, we see Pan Renmei as somehow even more base than the characters who actively are serving China's enemies, since his cruel deeds are based solely on a petty rivalry, and his willful harm of his own dynasty has no clear incentive except for his personal vendetta against the Yang family.²²⁵ Pan even takes a more direct role in threatening the Yang family by refusing to send reinforcements to Yang the Elder, which leads to his death, and by personally executing Yang the Seventh when the young officer comes to beg for assistance in saving his

²²⁰ Ibid., pg. 863-864.

²²¹ Ibid., pg. 863-864.

²²² Chang, *History and Legend*, pg. 144-145.

²²³ Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, trans., *The Eighth Great Prince Opens a Proclamation and Saves a Loyal Vassal*, in *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays* by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West. (Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corp., 2013): pg. 46-47.

²²⁴ Idema and West, trans., *Opens a Proclamation*, pg. 27.

²²⁵ Ibid., pg.27.

father.²²⁶ However, Pan is unable to escape punishment as Yang Jing personally kills him and all the other corrupt officials involved with the deaths of his father and younger brother.²²⁷ Yang Jing is then pardoned by the Eighth Great Prince, a high-ranking and noble member of the Imperial Family of the Northern Song Empire. Furthermore, the Prince proclaimed that Pan's crimes would be made known and any crimes he had accused the Yang family of committing were to be revoked.²²⁸ This is arguably the most cathartic version of the trope of the corrupt minister in conflict with the noble general, as the honourable general is actually able to get revenge on the minister for his misdeeds and avoids being punished for it.²²⁹ This version of the trope also features a brief moment that shows some self-awareness as to why this type of narrative exists, as the character Liu Da comments, "I am thinking of how the common people harbor hatred for the way Pan Renmei trapped and killed the good and loyal."²³⁰ This line stands out because it highlights a key point: that the memory of the common people popularizes the beliefs and themes of good generals being taken down by evil ministers.²³¹ Though this line is probably not a deliberate nod to this trend in historiography and the development of popular fiction in depicting wicked ministers and their conflicts with righteous generals, it still highlights how these stories are formed and how they survive.²³²

Conclusion

In examining the recurring patterns, themes, and tropes in *Shuihu*, *Shuo Yue*, and the stories of the Generals of the Yang Family, we can see the way in which the chaotic wars of the

²²⁶ Ibid., pg. 28-30.

²²⁷ Ibid., pg. 56-57.

²²⁸ Ibid., pg. 60-61.

²²⁹ Ibid., pg. 60-61.

²³⁰ Ibid., pg.53.

²³¹ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

²³² Idema and West, trans., *Opens a Proclamation*, pg.53.

Song Dynasty were immortalized in the popular history and popular culture of Early Modern China.²³³ In their portrayal of warfare as a heroic space where victory and defeat are decided by the valour and skill of the individual generals and soldiers fighting in the war, they emphasize the popular values of martial virtue that formed the key point of development for the broader genre of military fiction in Early Modern China.²³⁴ Likewise, by portraying strategy and magic as being interconnected, these stories heightens the art of war to a more spiritual and supernatural affair that requires more than just brute strength.²³⁵ This portrayal of Song Dynasty warfare as a space where reliance on the supernatural was the key to victory can be seen as overly fantastical. Yet these works do reflect popular beliefs and practices of the Ming Dynasty where most of these stories came to be codified and show the way in which such practices found their way into popular fiction.²³⁶ In their portrayal of China's enemies, both foreign and domestic, the novels and stories rely on a recurring idea that the enemies are too weak to defeat the heroes in an honourable and fair manner and must instead resort to trickery and deception to undermine both them and the dynasties they serve.²³⁷ In the case of the foreign enemies, their foreignness is highlighted in these stories by their attempts to imitate the strategies and traditions of China, but they all ultimately fail through their lack of proper understanding of what the strategies and traditions mean.²³⁸ By contrast, the cruel, corrupt officials and ministers who often bring down the heroes are depicted as undertaking deliberate acts of treason either for greed or for spite, eventually betraying their own empire and its heroes. In doing this, the ministers become the scapegoats in the popular imagination, whether they deserved it or not.²³⁹ Ultimately, the purpose

²³³ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

²³⁴ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.138-139.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.145-147.

²³⁶ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pg.164-165.

²³⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.210.

²³⁸ Shi and Luo, attrib. *Iron Ox*, pg.433.

²³⁹ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.190-191.

of this chapter has been to show that through these three tales of drama and war, we see how the Song Dynasty is remembered as a time when great heroes endeavoured to save their struggling empire only to be let down and even killed by the people they were trying to protect.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Ibid., pg.191.

Chapter 3

Rebellions Just and Unjust: The Fang La Rebellion Chapters and the Ethics of Uprising in *Shuihu zhuan* and Late Imperial Chinese Literature

In the 119th chapter of the 120-chapter edition of *Shuihu*, when all the wars had been fought and won, and the Emperor wished to honor the Heroes of Liangshan 梁山, only twenty-seven of the original 108 remained alive²⁴¹ and able to receive their awards.²⁴² Yet the many deaths by illness and battle that afflicted the Heroes, and reduced their number so greatly, occurred in the single southern pacification campaign against the rebel Fang La 方臘 (d. 1121).²⁴³ It is in this section of *Shuihu* that the text becomes arguably its darkest, and the tables turn on the 108 Heroes by putting them in the position of their antagonists from the first half of the novel, that being servants of the Imperial Court going forth to crush a rebellion.²⁴⁴ This reversal, wherein the bandits become that which they fought, has from the first tellings been a part of the narrative behind *Shuihu*, albeit one that like most of the later chapters of *Shuihu* was cut due to its supposed support for banditry and rebellious behaviour.²⁴⁵ But before we can understand why the story of the Fang La rebellion is narratively and thematically important both to *Shuihu* and Late Imperial Chinese literature, it is important to understand why the Fang La rebellion would receive so much attention in the first place. The historical Fang La rebellion,

²⁴¹ Technically 11 are also still alive but are either working directly in the Imperial Court, have gone off to live a quiet secluded life as a hermit, or have declined the honours.

²⁴² Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Scattered Flock: Part Five of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002): pg. 440-441.

²⁴³ Ibid., pg.440.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., pg. 440-442.

²⁴⁵ Robert E. Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981): pg. 82.

which lasted less than a year, has been seen as one of the main catalysts that led to the collapse of the Northern Song Dynasty 北宋朝 (960-1127).²⁴⁶ As a result of this historical importance, this approach allows us to interpret the Fang La chapters (chapter 110 to 119 of the 120-chapter edition) as a form of historical storytelling and historiography, as the crushing of Fang La's rebellion contributed to the growing folklore around the semi-mythical figure of Song Jiang 宋江, hero of the *Shuihu*.²⁴⁷

In addition,, the Fang La chapters serve as a thematic contrast to the campaigns fought by the Heroes of Liangshan against the Khitan Liao 遼朝 (916-1125), as the Han Chinese rebels led by Fang La are presented as being an equal match to the previously undefeatable army of Song Jiang.²⁴⁸ This by and large reflects a larger trend in the popular culture and literature from the Song to Late Imperial Dynasties of the Ming 明朝(1368-1644) and Qing 清朝(1644-1911), which saw Han Chinese bandits and rebels as being more righteous, cunning and worthy of praise than the foreign enemies, who existed in stories simply to be resisted.²⁴⁹ The skill displayed by Fang La's rebels in this conflict and the losses they inflicted on Song Jiang's forces likewise highlight a commonality between the two armies which makes their clash more tragic than righteous.²⁵⁰ Moreover, this moral conundrum raises a broader thematic question of why Song Jiang's resistance against the Song government is presented in the book as being just, while Fang La's resistance is presented as unjust, and underpins the broader question to the storyteller and audience: What makes rebellion just in the first place?²⁵¹ Ultimately, the Fang La chapters of

²⁴⁶ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014): pg. 395-396.

²⁴⁷ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg.37.

²⁴⁸ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.394-396.

²⁴⁹ F.W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): pg. 302.

²⁵⁰ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.262-263.

²⁵¹ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg.37-39.

Shuihu reflect the novel's role as a work of historical fiction and historical representation, as well as providing a means of reflecting on the changing values of its audiences and storytellers.²⁵²

Part 1: The History and Historical Fiction of The Fang La Rebellion

In the waning months of 1120, a massive rebellion broke out along the Yangzi River delta near the city of Hangzhou.²⁵³ The leader was a mysterious and charismatic man by the name of Fang La, who proclaimed himself The Sacred Lord and claimed that his war would herald The Reign of Perpetual Happiness.²⁵⁴ While details about Fang La's life are sketchy, the generally accepted narrative of his life, as detailed by Kao Yu-Kung, presents him as a relatively wealthy lacquer merchant who was frustrated by the incompetence of Emperor Huizong's government and the rising taxes within his prefecture.²⁵⁵ Taking advantage of the growing discontentment in the region, he began to preach against the Song government and to present himself as an almost messianic figure who would usher in a new age of peace, prosperity, and power to the land.²⁵⁶ His rebellion appealed to many middle class farmers and merchants who hated the government's taxes as much as Fang La did, and appears to have targeted members of the Literati class (*wenren* 文人) due to their power and sway in the government.²⁵⁷ This is significant since those intellectuals were also the only people who could realistically participate in the civil service examination system and serve in government, something that many farmers and merchants did not have the time or resources to do.²⁵⁸ As such, the anti-intellectual bend of the Fang La

²⁵² Ibid., pg.37-39.

²⁵³ Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, pg.395-396.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pg.397.

²⁵⁵ Kao Yu-kung, "A Study of the Fang La Rebellion", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 24 (1962-1963): pg. 30.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pg.30.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., pg.38.

²⁵⁸ Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2009): pg. 124-125.

rebellion could have been a reaction to the inability of the rebels to enter government solely on merit and ability.²⁵⁹ While Fang La himself tried to court intellectuals to his cause, it appears, based on the records of the time, that his generals were less supportive and thus made it difficult for the Literati to join the cause.²⁶⁰

Fang La's rebellion also seems to have had a religious component to it, as Fang La himself likely was a Manichaean, an adherent of an offshoot of Zoroastrianism that preached that the world existed in constant struggle between Pure Good and Pure Evil, and that it was the job of humans to expunge the Evil in all aspects to preserve the Good.²⁶¹ While it is still hotly debated by scholars, including Patricia Ebrey and Wu Junqing, just how religiously devoted Fang La was to Manichaeism, it is clear that he definitely gathered a following with strong interest in Manichaeism and other religious movements deemed unorthodox by a large part of the society of that time.²⁶² As a result, the rebellion was not a religious one but rather a broader social movement that ended up being interpreted as a great religious rebellion due to the beliefs of individual participants.²⁶³ Wu attributes this to the fact that the rebellion's start and spread was not organized or planned in the way many other religious rebellions were, but rather appears to have spread organically, gaining support from an eclectic range of dissidents.²⁶⁴ This notion of the Fang La rebellion as a loose collection of dissidents each with their own motives for rebellion will be very important for examining it in context of *Shuihu*.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ Kao Yu-kung, "A Study of the Fang La Rebellion", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 24 (1962-1963): pg. 38.

²⁶⁰ Not that many wanted to join anyway. *Ibid.*, pg.38.

²⁶¹ For more information on the tenets, history, and spread of Manichaeism, see Kao's article. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

²⁶² Wu Junqing, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", *Journal of Chinese Religions* 45 (1) (2017): pg. 25-27.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pg. 25-27.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.25.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.25.

The Song government's response to this large and eclectic movement was muddled. At first, this involved sending local garrisons and piecemeal army units to fight the rebels, only for those units to be ambushed and routed by the rebels, who made use of the environment to lure the soldiers into carefully planned traps.²⁶⁶ Soon, the rebels had taken control of Hangzhou, and after sacking it thoroughly, made the city the capital of their new dynasty and began to spread their influence across the province.²⁶⁷ Realizing this rebellion was not going away any time soon, Emperor Huizong dispatched the imperial general Tong Guan 童貫(1054-1126) in 1121 to crush the rebellion, as well as to try to deal with the causes to the best of his ability.²⁶⁸ In this, Tong was highly successful, crushing Fang La's armies in three months and reforming the government to eliminate many of the rebels' main complaints.²⁶⁹ It is impossible to know the true death toll of the rebellion, but Song-era sources placed the number of dead at over three million. Although these numbers are not likely the true number of dead and were probably exaggerated, these numbers do accurately reflect the scale and spread of destruction caused by the rebellion.²⁷⁰

In general, despite its briefness, Song dynasty historical narratives concerning the Fang La rebellion present it as a key stepping stone on the road to the Jingkang Calamity, and the collapse of the Northern Song Dynasty.²⁷¹ It is thought that this came about because the armies sent to put down the rebellion had originally been raised to help the Jin Dynasty 金朝 (1115-1234) fight against the Liao Dynasty 遼朝 (916-1125), meaning that the Jin had to fight the Liao alone.²⁷² This infuriated the Jin, who felt betrayed by the lack of Song support in their wars, and

²⁶⁶ Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, pg.397-398.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.398.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.398-399.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.398-399.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.399.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pg.399-400.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pg.399-400.

led to them to renounce their treaty with the Song to return the Sixteen Northern Prefectures, stating that the Song had not earned them. This would set the Song and Jin on the path to a war that would bring the Northern Song crashing down.²⁷³ In a somewhat ironic twist of fate, the centre of the new Southern Song Dynasty 南宋朝 (1127-1279) would be Hangzhou, the former capital of Fang La and his rebels.²⁷⁴

As a result of this unintended consequence, these political ramifications meant that what usually would have been forgotten as just another rebellion, helped to keep the memory of the Fang La rebellion alive during the Southern Song and later dynasties.²⁷⁵ It is in these later histories, both official and unofficial, that the image of Fang La as a mad religious leader with delusions of grandeur came about and began to dominate the narrative in a way that previous sources written closer to the event had not depicted.²⁷⁶ The events of the Fang La rebellion became popular in literati-written unofficial histories, drawing largely on folk traditions and presenting the rebels' participation in supernatural rituals to guard themselves, and to demonstrate their purity, most notably through mirrors adorning their clothing.²⁷⁷ These tales transformed a large but disorganized and easily crushed rebellion into a supernatural and existential threat to the Song that justified the role of the rebellion in bringing the dynasty down.²⁷⁸ It is in this environment of fantastical reimagining of history during the Southern Song and later Yuan dynasty 元朝 (1261-1368) that stories were added to the tales of Song Jiang and his heroic bandits from Liangshan in which these heroes took part in the crushing of Fang La's

²⁷³ Ibid., pg.400.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., pg.398-400.

²⁷⁵ Wu, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", pg.26-28.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pg.26-28.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pg.29-31.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., pg.29-31.

rebellion.²⁷⁹ While some historical records such as the *Songshi* 宋史 mention a general by the name of Song Jiang partaking in the campaign against Fang La, it is unknown whether (and unlikely that) this is the same Song Jiang as the one depicted in *Shuihu*, who was likely an amalgamation of several late Northern Song figures who happened to share this name or characteristics.²⁸⁰ As a result, the tale of Song Jiang and his brave warriors from Liangshan became linked to the Fang La rebellion.²⁸¹

The narrative of the Fang La rebellion as depicted in *Shuihu* begins in chapter 110 of the 120-chapter edition of the novel and is part of a larger story arc wherein the Liangshan heroes defeat several large rebellions on behalf of the Song government.²⁸² Having just defeated the rebel Wang Qing 王慶, Song Jiang is informed of Fang La's rebellion and begins mustering his army to go to fight the rebels and reclaim the lands they have seized.²⁸³ The narration describes Fang La as a humble woodcutter who one day saw a reflection in a pool of himself dressed in imperial robes and became convinced he was the rightful new emperor.²⁸⁴ The novel attributes his name to a Daoist ritual that he conducted to give himself a more auspicious name to reflect his status as an imperial ruler, rewriting the character *wan* 万 into *fang* 方 and drawing the word *la* 臘 from a local festival, so as to present himself as the great king of the southern lands.²⁸⁵ This origin for Fang La combines elements from the actual history and the popular history of the event. Fang La's decision to take on his name based on Daoist rituals and magic draws upon the

²⁷⁹ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg.37.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.37.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pg.37.

²⁸² Richard Gregg Irwin, *The Evolution of a Chinese Novel: Shui-hu-chuan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953): pg. 174-175.

²⁸³ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.272-274.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.276.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.276.

supernatural retellings of the history of the rebellion that viewed Fang La as a demonic king.²⁸⁶ At the same time, the novel mentions that he gained so much support from the commoners because, “At the time when granite was collected in the south, the people became resentful and disaffected.”²⁸⁷ This discussion of granite collection and the frustration it causes the common people is a reference to the so-called Flower and Rock Network (*hua-shi kang* 化石鋼), a highly unpopular tax on flowers and stones instituted by Emperor Huizong to support his vast gardens.²⁸⁸ These levies were wildly cited as one of the main reasons for the growth of the rebellion, as they were seen as wasteful, extravagant and a symbol of government corruption. In the end, the rebellion helped to bring an end to the practice, demonstrating just how hated it was.²⁸⁹ Indeed, one of Tong Guan’s main tactics to combat the rebels was to shut down the local taxation offices for the levy and abolish the levy in the regions threatened by the rebellion, thus depriving the rebels of support and making the government look better.²⁹⁰

While the novel does depict Tong Guan as being present in these campaigns, it is ultimately Song Jiang and his army who do most of the work in defeating Fang La’s armies and capturing Fang La.²⁹¹ It should be noted that while Tong Guan appeared in previous chapters of the book and had unsuccessfully fought against Song Jiang, in those chapters he was portrayed as a naïve and gullible general who was nonetheless able to call out the corruption he witnessed.²⁹² As a result, it makes sense that the narrative would downplay his role in the military victory over

²⁸⁶ Wu, “The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse”, pg.26-28.

²⁸⁷ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.276.

²⁸⁸ Kao, “A Study of the Fang La Rebellion”, pg.42-43.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., pg.42-44.

²⁹⁰ Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, pg.398.

²⁹¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.430-431.

²⁹² Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Iron Ox: Part Four of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2002): pg. 235-237.

Fang La but still portray him as supportive of the reformed Song Jiang and his army.²⁹³ In addition, the fact that the victory over Fang La is presented as more bitter than sweet, with many of the Liangshan heroes dying in the campaign and Song Jiang being aware that the corrupt officials at court still threatened the safety of the realm, by and large reflects the widespread destruction caused by the rebellion and the broader political ramifications of the event.²⁹⁴ In this way, the depiction of the causes and course of Fang La's rebellion in *Shuihu* synthesizes the historical and fantastical narratives surrounding the event into a new fictional account rooted in history, but presented in fantastical terms through the characterization of Fang La as a heretical leader surrounded by sorcerers.²⁹⁵

Part 2: The Perils of Domestic Wars as a Contrast to the Glories of Foreign Wars in *Shuihu zhuan*

Within what I will refer to as the Fang La arc of *Shuihu*, we see by the manner in which the campaign is portrayed as a contrast in the narrative tone; specifically this is in reference to the Liao campaign fought by the heroes of Liangshan.²⁹⁶ These differences become evident to the reader during the first major battle against Fang La's forces, as Song Jiang attempts to take the city of Runzhou 潤州.²⁹⁷ Although Song Jiang is victorious in the battle, his initial attempts to deceive the enemy commander into thinking part of his own army has come to surrender fails as the rebel general, Marshal Lü, and his advisors quickly realize that these troops are a trap; as a result, Song Jiang is forced to fight a pitched battle against the rebel army.²⁹⁸ More crucially, for

²⁹³ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.430-431.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., pg.439-441.

²⁹⁵ Wu, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", pg.26-28.

²⁹⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.335-336.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., pg.293.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., pg.291-293.

the first time in any of the campaigns, three of the 108 heroes, Tao Zongwang 陶宗旺, Jiao Ting 焦廷, and Song Wan 送完, are killed in battle.²⁹⁹ We hear of these deaths after the battle, not in heroic terms, but rather as anonymous casualties of war who suffered ignominious deaths.³⁰⁰ This is in contrast to an earlier battle against the Liao, in which one of the heroes, Zhang Qing 張清, is shot by a crossbow but survives due to getting immediate medical attention.³⁰¹ This supposedly fatal wound allows Song Jiang to trick the Liao commanders into thinking they have an advantage over Song Jiang's army, thus easily baiting them into a trap.³⁰²

This difference in tone is further seen in Song Jiang's first attempt to take Fang La's capital in Hangzhou, a battle that results in defeat for Song Jiang's forces and the loss of even more heroes in the process.³⁰³ As they are forced to make camp and besiege Hangzhou for weeks, the hero Zhang Shun 張順 laments their circumstances and states, "How are we ever going to win fame stuck here in these mountains?"³⁰⁴ To remedy this, Zhang attempts to recreate a classic strategy of the 108 Heroes by swimming to Hangzhou and setting fire to part of the city gates to create confusion amongst the rebels.³⁰⁵ A previous version of this type of plan had worked brilliantly during the campaign against the Liao, as several of the heroes were able to sneak into a Liao city and cause sufficient chaos to distract the Liao, allowing Song Jiang and the rest of the army to storm in.³⁰⁶ Here at Hangzhou, however, the guards prove much more

²⁹⁹ Ibid., pg.293.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pg.293.

³⁰¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Iron Ox*, pg.386.

³⁰² Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.386-388.

³⁰³ Ibid., pg.335-336.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., pg.336.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., pg.336.

³⁰⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.391.

perceptive and quickly spot Zhang as he swims towards the city and proceed to fill him with arrows, killing him before he can even reach the city.³⁰⁷

The difference in tone and struggle between the Liao War arc and the wars against various rebellions, of which Fang La is the most noteworthy, is further seen in the way in which strategies and magic are used to a highly dangerous degree by the rebels.³⁰⁸ During the first anti-rebel campaign Song Jiang leads his heroic army off to fight against the rebel Tian Hu 田虎; Song's greatest challenge is presented by a wizard in Tian Hu's employ called Qiao Lie 喬冽.³⁰⁹ Qiao represents the ideal strategist in Late Imperial historical fiction, being equal parts magician, strategist, and political advisor, who is worthy of both fear and respect by his enemies.³¹⁰ During his introduction in chapter 94, he successfully lures Li Kui 李逵, the most terrifying and powerful of the 108 heroes, into a trap and captures him by enveloping him in a mass of magical shadows.³¹¹ When Song Jiang comes to rescue his companion, Qiao once again demonstrates his brilliance and skill in the combined arts of strategy and magic by creating a massive storm to strike Song Jiang's army while Qiao's own forces attack from every direction.³¹² The result of this battle is an abject rout for Song Jiang's army, and only the magic of Song Jiang's own strategist/magician Wu Yong 吳用 allows the heroes to escape.³¹³ Even when Wu Yong tries to fight Qiao with his own magic by summoning spirits to aid his own army, Qiao is able to defeat Wu Yung's army until the arrival of the even more powerful wizard Gongsun Sheng 公孫勝,

³⁰⁷ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.338-340.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pg.59.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., pg.59.

³¹⁰ Ibid., pg.55.

³¹¹ Ibid., pg.55.

³¹² Ibid., pg.58-59.

³¹³ Ibid., pg.62-63.

who finally defeats the troublesome Qiao for good.³¹⁴ This is in marked contrast to the chapters depicting the war against the Liao, where even the most clever and skilled in strategy and magic of Liao's generals are no match for Song Jiang's forces who (rather) effortlessly defeat the Liao troops.³¹⁵

Later in the Fang La chapters, we meet the wizard Bao Daoyi 包道乙, whom we are told was essentially Fang La's spiritual advisor and has used Fang La's fondness for the supernatural to gain power in his court.³¹⁶ It should be noted how Bao Daoyi fits into the larger mythology of the Fang La rebellion. As discussed, storytellers attributed the initial successes of Fang La's armies and the destruction caused by his rebellion to Fang La's use of magic and the courting of renegade Daoist and Manichaeian religious groups, a role which Bao Daoyi plays in the story.³¹⁷ Moving now to Bao Daoyi's role in the novel, his use of magic is presented as especially dangerous as he uses various summoned spirits to empower his fellow commanders, allowing them to kill several of the Liangshan heroes in battle and drive back the others.³¹⁸ Ultimately the battle against Bao Daoyi is won when Song Jiang summons the Black Dragon God to aid his general Guan Sheng 關勝 in defeating the spirits empowering Bao's generals. Then Song Jiang's artillery manages to hit Bao at point blank range and blow him up.³¹⁹ Yet even in his fight against the other spirits, while empowered by the Black Dragon God, Guan Sheng is generally only able to fight the best of Bao's generals to a standstill before finding an opening to slay the general and allow the artillery to find their mark.³²⁰ Historian Mark Meulenbeld notes that this clash, and

³¹⁴ Ibid., pg.66-67.

³¹⁵ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 436.

³¹⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg. 387.

³¹⁷ Wu, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", pg. 28-30.

³¹⁸ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg. 388-391.

³¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 394-396.

³²⁰ Ibid., pg. 396.

others like it in Late Imperial fiction, is a reinforcement of the idea that the martial and the spiritual are interconnected, with the spirits summoned in the battle being regarded as being just as much under the personal command of the general as the human soldiers involved in the battle are.³²¹ Building on this interpretation offered by Meulenbeld, I argue that the fact that Bao Daoyi and by extension Fang La's army can summon such powerful spirits to fight even the best warriors to a standstill highlights the equal ground upon which Song Jiang's and Fang La's armies exist in this war.³²² The explosive death of Bao Daoyi is not the result of countering magics being used against him, as was the case in the Liao and Tian Hu campaigns, but rather resulted from the overwhelming force of cannon fire overpowering the sorcerer.³²³ In this way, Bao's power is shown to be equal to that of the strongest magic in Song Jiang's army, and the only way he can be properly defeated is through the overwhelming use of technology (in this case, cannons and rockets) to bring the wizard down.³²⁴ The brutality of this campaign, in contrast to the Liao campaign, is discussed by Song Jiang, who laments to Tong Guan how, "during the northern campaign against the Tartars [Liao], we were entirely successful and we did not lose a single commander."³²⁵ As Song Jiang notes in the ensuing speech to Marshal Tong, even the natural environment of southern China is fighting against them, adding to the ferocity of the conflict.³²⁶ Though it is a war that can be won, it can only be won at a high cost for the heroes in the *Shuihu*, one that they are unfamiliar with in their many battles.³²⁷

³²¹ Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, pg.197.

³²² Shi and Luo Attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg. 394-396.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 396.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 396.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 382.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 382.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 382.

The discrepancy presented in how the skills of the rebel armies contrasts to those of the inferior Liao armies may be seen as an attempt on the part of the novel to highlight the superiority of the subjects of the legitimate imperial dynasty over those deemed to be “barbarians” and usurpers of the throne.³²⁸ As shown in *Shuihu*, even an outnumbered rebel army on its last legs can give a truly spectacular fight against an Imperial army in a way that a foreign army is unable to.³²⁹ On the whole, the novel largely adheres to a political idea that had been popular since the Northern Song dynasty, namely that the best way to subdue “barbarians” was through displays of the Empire’s superior culture and traditions, thereby encouraging the “barbarians” to become Sinicized vassals of the Empire.³³⁰ As a result, the novel’s depiction of the defeat of the Liao falls in line with this form of hegemonic domination, as after Song Jiang’s crushing defeat of the Liao, the Liao king is forced to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Song Dynasty and give tribute to the Emperor in Kaifeng in a wishful reverse of the historical relationship between the Song and Liao.³³¹ As such, the novel presents what readers would understand as the “ideal” relationship between an Imperial Dynasty and a neighbouring kingdom, one wherein the neighbour can be respected on its own merits but is ultimately subservient to the Dynasty.³³² By contrast, the anti-Song rebellions in *Shuihu* are presented as good common people of the empire with legitimate grievances who are ultimately misled by charismatic rebel leaders who are able to convince them to turn on their dynasty.³³³ This is shown in the novel by the way in which Fang La uses the people’s hatred of unfair taxes to rile

³²⁸ Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988): pg. 42.

³²⁹ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.388.

³³⁰ Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg.43.

³³¹ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.471-472.

³³² Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, pg.43.

³³³ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.276.

up a great rebellion and threaten the Emperor.³³⁴ As a result of this, the rebels are seen as being on equal footing with those who are fighting against them, as all are from the same Imperial State and have been immersed in the same traditions.³³⁵

This dichotomy in treatment is also seen in the fact that rebel generals and soldiers are willingly accepted into the ranks of the heroes' armies, while no Liao generals or soldiers defect to Song Jiang.³³⁶ This is seen early on in the campaign against Tian Hu, where the wizard Qiao's final defeat is not through total subjugation on the battlefield (though he was thoroughly defeated) but rather by Song Jiang's offer of clemency. Moreover, Gongsun Sheng recognizes Qiao's potential as a sorcerer and invites him to become his disciple, which Qiao accepts.³³⁷ Qiao later proves that his devotion to Song Jiang and Gongsun Sheng is sincere when he uses his powers to help the heroes' armies during their later campaigns and bring them victory in multiple battles.³³⁸ During the Fang La campaign, Song Jiang shows clemency to all captured rebel soldiers and gives them the option to either return to their homes in peace or join his army,³³⁹ thereby winning the hearts and minds of the people back to the Song Dynasty.³⁴⁰ This generosity towards rebels and the willingness to not only pardon them, but to allow them to join the army of those who defeated them, is also found in *Shuo Yue*. Here the heroic general and patriot Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142), through his benevolence as a person and brilliance as a general, similarly

³³⁴ Ibid., pg.276.

³³⁵ Ibid., pg.276.

³³⁶ Ibid., pg.87.

³³⁷ Ibid., pg.87.

³³⁸ Ibid., pg.190-192.

³³⁹ Though it should be noted that, in keeping with the idea that the people were led astray by their leaders, Song Jiang often orders the captured commanders to be executed while the common soldiers are spared and freed. Ibid., pg.400.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., pg.400.

wins over many rebels and bandits to join his army to fight the Jurchen Jin Dynasty 金朝.³⁴¹ This sense of patriotism amongst the bandits is later reinforced when Yue Fei allies with several bandit armies to lure the Jurchen armies into an ambush and capture their overall commander.³⁴² These bandits are shown to have a sense of loyalty to China prior to joining Yue Fei, as they are aroused from their hiding by the desire to fight against the invading Jurchen.³⁴³ When Yue Fei meets them following this battle, he immediately forgives the bandits for their previous crimes in exchange for joining his army, telling them, “To abandon evil and return to the righteous way – this is the natural law.”³⁴⁴ For both Yue Fei and the narrative as a whole, the act of fighting invaders is part of the path to righteousness and it is thus moral for bandits³⁴⁵ to be pardoned and allowed to return to society, provided they turn their attention against the enemies of their country.³⁴⁶ This view in turn has historical precedence, as Yue Fei’s army historically was made up of a motley band of former rebels, bandits, and other vagrants that were forged into a disciplined and deeply loyal force through their dedication to Yue Fei, and, by extension, his cause of fighting for the survival of the Song Dynasty.³⁴⁷ This connection also highlights the often vague and blurry distinction that existed in this time period between bandits, Song Loyalist volunteers, and actual soldiers of the Song military.³⁴⁸ In this chaotic period surrounding the formation of the Southern Song Dynasty, one was just as likely to encounter bandits acting like

³⁴¹ Cai Qian, *General Yue Fei: A Novel of the Qing Dynasty*, translated by C. L. Yang (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing LTD, 1995): pg. 166-167.

³⁴² Ibid., pg.305-307.

³⁴³ Ibid., pg.302-303.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pg.304.

³⁴⁵ It should be noted that the bandits that Yue Fei allies with are the children of the heroes of Liangshan who have returned to banditry following their fathers’ deaths, though the significance of this continuity will be explored in the next chapter. Ibid., pg.302-304.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., pg.304.

³⁴⁷ Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800*, pg.302.

³⁴⁸ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire’s Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2023): pg. 185-187.

proper soldiers and soldiers acting like bandits, though all seemingly united in their shared hatred of the Jin and alleged loyalty to the Song.³⁴⁹ Consequently, we see how within the historical mindset of the era, and the subsequent literary memory that led to the writing of these novels, those on the margins of society, including outlaws, were seen as acceptable³⁵⁰ and were included in the defense of their society, rather than those who lived outside of the borders of China.³⁵¹

Part 3: Punished for Loyalism? The Ethics of Putting Down Rebellions

Arguably the most troubling aspect of these later chapters of *Shuihu* is the way in which they reverse the dynamics that had been established throughout the book, in which the heroes of Liangshan were presented as brave rebels against the corrupt Song government, but are now serving the Song government to repel other rebellions.³⁵² Indeed, it appears to have troubled one of *Shuihu*'s most prominent editors and commentators, Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1610-1661), who reduced the novel from 120 to 70 chapters by completely removing the section of the story in which Song Jiang and the 108 Heroes become the elite army of the Song Dynasty.³⁵³ The two main arguments for this being done were first, because Jin was disappointed by the section of the story which saw the heroes work and die for the government they had fought against.³⁵⁴ Secondly, Jin was responding to the tumultuous times in which he lived, when the Ming Dynasty was beset by countless rebellions and ultimately conquered by the Manchu Qing forces; in this setting Jin wished to end the story by not pardoning the bandits.³⁵⁵ In particular, around the time

³⁴⁹ Ibid., pg.185-187.

³⁵⁰ Acceptable to be used as soldiers, not acceptable as people in their own right. For more information on the complicated reception of soldiers in the Song Dynasty, see Elad Alyagon's book *Inked*.

³⁵¹ Ibid., pg.302.

³⁵² David Rolston, "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the *Shui-hu chuan* (Water Margin)" in *How To Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 127.

³⁵³ Ibid., pg.127.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pg.127.

³⁵⁵ Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg. 77.

Jin Shengtan was working on his commentary, the Ming government was attempting to ban the novel due to fears it would lead to more people joining the anti-government rebel armies that were growing.³⁵⁶ As such, a novel that showed the bandits being pardoned and supporting the government, even if they were fighting other bandits, was seen as too dangerous to be portrayed.³⁵⁷ As a result, Jin cut these later chapters in order to protect the novel from being censored by the government.³⁵⁸ A part of justifying these changes was that Jin went so far as to argue that the later chapters of the novel were not the work of the alleged author Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (c.1296-c.1372) but were added later and less skillfully by Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (c.1330-c.1400).³⁵⁹ However, regardless of the reason for the omission of these later chapters, there seems to be an underlying issue at the heart of the compilers, rewriters, and readers of the work, that being the concern over what it means for the Bandits of Liangshan to fight against people who are in many ways just like them.³⁶⁰

The writers and editors of the novel seems to be partially aware of this twist of positions, as not long before Song Jiang receives the order to go and suppress Fang La's rebellion, he finds one of his companions, the archer Yan Qing 燕青, casually using a flock of migrating geese for target practice.³⁶¹ Song Jiang, horrified by this action, orders Yan to stop, explaining to Yan, "This bird is an emblem of virtue. No matter if they're ten or fifty, the group is bound together by mutual courtesy...A creature so abounding in virtue, how can you harm it?"³⁶² To Song Jiang, the flock of geese is similar to the brotherhood of the 108 Heroes of Liangshan in being virtuous

³⁵⁶ Ibid., pg. 77.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 77.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 77.

³⁵⁹ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg.102.

³⁶⁰ Rolston, "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the Shui-hu chuan (Water Margin)", pg.127.

³⁶¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.262.

³⁶² Ibid., pg.262.

and supportive of one another, and by shooting the birds Yan Qing is essentially shooting at his own kin.³⁶³ It is fitting that this incident comes after the hero Song Jiang's campaigns against the rebellious factions of Wang Qing, who were defeated relatively easily, and before being sent against Fang La.³⁶⁴ Consequently, this incident can be read as a metaphor for how far the heroes have come since their own days as bandits.³⁶⁵ In particular, I interpret Yan Qing's actions of shooting the geese as being similar to campaigns against rebels and bandits with grievances against the Song Dynasty.³⁶⁶ Likewise, Song Jiang's horrified reaction to Yan Qing's actions, and his depression over the shooting of the geese, can be seen as Song Jiang having a moment of clarity, realizing that his attacking other rebels is akin to attacking the members of the 108 Heroes.³⁶⁷ It is important that this event occurs just before the Fang La campaign, wherein so many of the 108 will face tragic death, as their demise can be read as punishment for shooting the birds, but more importantly, for the actions of the 108 heroes in betraying their roots and fighting other rebels.³⁶⁸

This reading of the event is reinforced by the fact that many of the deaths that befall members of the 108 heroes of the Liangshan during the Fang La rebellion are far from glamorous or heroic.³⁶⁹ This view comes from the manner in which the deaths of some heroes are added on, almost as an afterthought to the battle, adding to the pointless tragedy of their deaths.³⁷⁰ Other heroes are afflicted by diseases and plague and die slow lingering deaths not in battle but in a

³⁶³ Ibid., pg.262.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., pg.262-264.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., pg.262-263.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., pg.262.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., pg.262-263.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., pg.262-263.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., pg.325.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., pg.419.

sickbed, a horrifically realistic fate for soldiers in any period of history.³⁷¹ These deaths by illness are particularly linked to the Heroes' service to Imperial Court, as it is textually noted that one of the reasons wounds and illnesses have become so deadly for the Liangshan Heroes is because their main doctors An Daoquan 安道全 and Huangfu Duan 皇甫端, who possessed almost supernatural abilities, had, before the anti-rebel campaigns, been reassigned to work directly for the Imperial Court.³⁷² In effect, these deaths by wounds and disease can be blamed directly on the Imperial Court for greedily hoarding great doctors like An Daoquan and Huangfu Duan rather than allowing them to continue working alongside their longtime companions.³⁷³ In addition, the 108 heroes were likely aware of the irony of the position they were in, as seen in the previously discussed incident in which Zhang Shun complains at Hangzhou.³⁷⁴ Here the framing of the complaint is important as Zhang Shun is complaining that he and the other heroes had become like the government forces who had once been sent after them, defeated in battle and forced into a gruelling siege that favoured the rebellious defenders.³⁷⁵ This in turn contributes to Zhang Shun's death as he attempts to recreate one of his many daring water attacks in an attempt to break the siege.³⁷⁶ Ultimately, the alignment between the government and the heroes of Liangshan appears to be what leads them to their downfall.³⁷⁷

Yet at the same time, beyond the irony of having the former bandits fight against other rebels, what was the point of having the heroes who we followed for so many chapters fight against people with grievances similar to their own?³⁷⁸ In trying to understand this, I am in

³⁷¹ Ibid., pg.367.

³⁷² Ibid., pg.441.

³⁷³ Ibid., pg.441.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., pg.336.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., pg. 336.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pg. 336-338.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., pg. 340.

³⁷⁸ Rolson, "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the *Shui hu chuan* (Water Margin)", pg. 127.

agreement with Chinese literary historian Robert E. Hegel who argues in his book *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China* that all of this is meant to highlight to the reader the difference between a justified and unjustified uprising against the government, from the perspective of one living in Late Imperial China.³⁷⁹ Supporting this, Hegel notes that Song Jiang and his companions are a very peculiar rebel type who are not fighting against the state as a whole, but rather against only those officers they deem to be corrupt and cruel.³⁸⁰ This is stated very clearly in an early chapter, chapter 19, of the novel, by the boatman bandit Ruan Xiaowu 阮小五, who rows into battle singing, “At my hand wicked officials die,/Yet faith to my Emperor I keep!”³⁸¹ Here the theme of the Liangshan Heroes’ rebellion is clearly spelled out to us, the readers, in that they are not turning away from society because they are trying to make their own dynasty or completely overturn it, but rather that they believe that by fighting against corruption in the government and society they can save the current dynasty.³⁸² In contrast, Fang La and other rebel leaders whom Song Jiang is sent to fight against are all characterized as greedy and manipulative men who seek to use the peoples’ discontentment with the Song government to prop themselves up as the new emperor, and to start their own dynasty.³⁸³ As a result, these rebellions are presented in the text as being less legitimate in their grievances and goals than those of the more loyal Liangshan bandits.³⁸⁴ As Hegel notes, this approach to rebellion taken by Song Jiang and his companions is an attempt by the author (whoever it may be) to portray a group who are all violent bandits as being worthy heroes and potential role models who adhere to societal

³⁷⁹ Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg. 74-76.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., pg. 75.

³⁸¹ Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Broken Seals: Part One of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994): pg. 353.

³⁸² Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg.75.

³⁸³ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.276.

³⁸⁴ Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg.75-76.

norms.³⁸⁵ Likewise, by painting the rebels whom they later fight against to be ambitious, power hungry, would-be emperors, it allows the writers, editors, and commentators of the novel to reaffirm the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty and continue to show our bandit heroes as dynasty protectors.³⁸⁶

Conclusion

In looking at the thematic role of the Fang La chapters in comparison to the Liao campaign chapters, readers of *Shuihu* see the fall of the Heroes of Liangshan through their association with the Song government, while also helping to better see how the text functions as a work of historical fiction.³⁸⁷ The novel's take on the Fang La rebellion by and large serves as a demonstration of the different perspectives on the real Fang La rebellion.³⁸⁸ The narrative, in this manner, threads the line between historical accounts and fiction, showing both its historical reality as an anti-government rebellion motivated by frustration with imperial decadence and corruption, and its popular image as a religiously motivated and supernaturally guided movement.³⁸⁹ Within the novel itself, the Fang La rebellion is painted as a "bad war" in comparison to the "good war" against the Liao, with the heroes suffering greatly in trying to put down this rebellion.³⁹⁰ A major part of this depiction is the novel's presentation of the forces of Fang La, and other rebels fought by Song Jiang, as being of equal strength in force, strategy, and magic due to their shared heritage living under the same legitimate dynasty, in contrast to the foreign Liao.³⁹¹ This perspective is further evident in the novel's view on the recruitment of, and

³⁸⁵ Ibid., pg.75-76.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., pg.75-76.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pg.75-76.

³⁸⁸ Kao, "A Study of the Fang La Rebellion", pg.28-29.

³⁸⁹ Wu, "The Fang La Rebellion and the Song Anti-Heresy Discourse", pg.26-28.

³⁹⁰ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.430.

³⁹¹ Ibid., pg.394-396.

friendship with defeated rebels, compared to defeated foreign enemies, and in this way sees the rebels as a more worthy ally than the foreigner who, while respected, can never recruited.³⁹² Finally, the novel's complicated approach to the topic of rebellion highlights both textual and metatextual concerns with the novel's presentation of rebellion. This forces the reader to question when, if ever, rebellion is truly justified and for what cause.³⁹³ In the end, the novel's presentation of the Fang La rebellion reflects the contradictory nature of the novel itself, as the bandits who we cheer on as heroes are simultaneously fighting for the state that is actively trying to kill them.³⁹⁴ What this chapter has sought to accomplish is therefore to show how the novel functions both as a work of historical fiction depicting a key event from the Song Dynasty and a commentary on the nature of rebellion as a whole.³⁹⁵

³⁹² Ibid., pg.192.

³⁹³ Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, pg.75-76.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., pg.74-76.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., pg.74-76.

Chapter 4:

Romance of the Marshes: Intertextuality and Literary Allusion in Late Imperial Literature

Introduction

While the thesis so far presented has concentrated on the relationship between the epic text *Shuihu* and its contemporary novels set during the mid-Song Dynasty, it would be reductive to say that these are the only texts with which *Shuihu* shares common themes and tropes.³⁹⁶ One of the texts it draws most heavily upon in its storytelling and characterization, is the equally famed novel *Sanguo*, a tale set almost 800 years before the presumed events of *Shuihu*.³⁹⁷ These two texts have traditionally been seen as equal parts of the rise of the Late Imperial novel during the Ming Dynasty. Despite their different narrative focuses and time periods they are connected through references to *Sanguo* found in *Shuihu*.³⁹⁸ These types of allusions appear in two forms throughout the *Shuihu*. The first is through character allusions, in which characters from *Sanguo* either appear directly in or are heavily referenced in the later *Shuihu*, this most notably being the case of the famed Three Kingdoms 三國 era (220-280 CE) general Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 220), who casts a shadow over two major heroes of Liangshan in *Shuihu*.³⁹⁹ This form of repetition and historical allusion is further repeated in *Shuo Yue*, wherein heroes from both *Sanguo* and *Shuihu* make appearances either through their descendants or replication of their actions.⁴⁰⁰ This use of

³⁹⁶ Robert E. Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): pg. 46-47.

³⁹⁷ C.T. Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): pg. 140-141.

³⁹⁸ Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel: Ssu ta ch'i-shu*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): pg. 366.

³⁹⁹ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Broken Seals: Part One of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex-Dent Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994): pg. 258.

⁴⁰⁰ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

historical reference and repetition serves to create a sense of continuity and commonality within the texts of these novels.⁴⁰¹ The other method through which these Late Imperial novels interact with one another is the use of shared themes and narrative conventions, specifically through the concept of the bonds of brotherhood, and what brotherhood entails.⁴⁰² Yet in alluding to these themes, *Shuihu* also offers its own unique interpretation of them through its very structure and scope, namely in the sense that the focus is placed upon a large cast of heroes bound together by brotherhood and shared values, in contrast to the more contained scope of brotherhood found in *Sanguo* and *Shuo Yue*.⁴⁰³ Moving beyond the texts themselves and onto their construction, the cause of this form of literary repetition can be found in the desire for the authors of these texts, and their editors and publishers, to bolster the reputation of their newest book through affiliation with previous popular publications.⁴⁰⁴ At the same time, these connections can be understood as a form of metatextual criticism of the other works.⁴⁰⁵ As such, by tracing linkage both textually and metatextually, between *Sanguo*, *Shuihu*, and *Shuo Yue*, we can see how Late Imperial Chinese historical fiction novels drew on their predecessors to both help build their own distinct reputations and to expand upon the themes found within prior novels.⁴⁰⁶

Part 1: From God of War to Bandit of the Marshes

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., pg.47.

⁴⁰² Chun Mei, *The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China*, (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2011): pg. 80.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁰⁴ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

⁴⁰⁵ Liangyan Ge, *Out of the Margins: The Rise of Chinese Vernacular Fiction*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001): pg. 51-53.

⁴⁰⁶ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46- 47.

To say that Guan Yu is one of the most beloved and iconic heroes of *Sanguo* would be an understatement. Few characters have captured the imagination of readers in the same way as the Lord of the Beautiful Beard or *meiran gong* 美髯公, whose exploits elevated him from being a decently successful historical general to a martial deity by the time the abovementioned literary works appeared.⁴⁰⁷ It is thus not surprising that such a beloved and iconic figure would have literary imitators in the wider field of Chinese historical martial fiction.⁴⁰⁸ In the case of *Shuihu*, this is made most explicit by the fact that he has not one, but two imitators amongst the 108 Heroes of Liangshan, those being the noble Zhu Tong 朱仝⁴⁰⁹ and Guan Yu's own descendant Guan Sheng 關勝.⁴¹⁰ Starting with Zhu Tong, his introduction and physical description is so similar to that of Guan Yu that they seem mirror images, one for the other. In chapter 1 of *Sanguo*, the narration describes Guan Yu thusly:

“a man of enormous height, nine spans tall, with a two-foot-long beard flowing from his rich ruddy cheeks. He had glistening lips, eyes sweeping sharply back like those of the crimson-faced phoenix, and brows like nestling silkworms.”⁴¹¹

And when we are first introduced to Zhu Tong in chapter 13 of the 120-chapter edition of *Shuihu*, he is described in this manner:

⁴⁰⁷ Louie Kam, *Theorising Chinese Masculinities: Society and Gender in China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): pg. 25-27.

⁴⁰⁸ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

⁴⁰⁹ Shi and Luo, attrib. *The Broken Seals*, pg.258.

⁴¹⁰ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Iron Ox: Part Four of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex-Dent Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994): pg. 15.

⁴¹¹ Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Three Kingdoms, Volume 1*, translated by Moss Roberts (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1995): pg. 8.

“He was a giant of a man, with a resplendent beard. His face was as red as a date and his gaze was piercing; he could have been a model for the God of War. Throughout the region was known as “The Beard”.”⁴¹²

In the case of Zhu Tong, the similarities in his appearance (a tall man with a red face and beautiful long beard and sharp eyes) is so reminiscent of Guan Yu’s that the text draws direct attention to the connection between the two and in doing so provides a shorthand for the readers to understand how noble a character Zhu Tong is.⁴¹³ This similarity in their descriptions is highlighted by the fact that in the original text for both novels, certain phrases are directly copied from one another,⁴¹⁴ most notably the description of their faces which in the original read as *mian ru zhongzao* 面如重棗,⁴¹⁵ literally meaning a face like red dates.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, Zhu Tong’s nickname, which is translated by Alex and John Dent-Young as “Beard” or “Whiskers”, is *Meiran gong* 美髯公 or “Lord of the Beautiful Beard” in the original,⁴¹⁷ which is also the same nickname given to Guan Yu by the great warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220) in *Sanguo*.⁴¹⁸ This form of literary copying appears to be in line with traditions of the day, as, according to the literary and historical scholar Lois Fusek, this sort of repetition of one text into another was a common trend in Late Imperial literature, especially during the Ming dynasty, as it was seen as a form of adding emphasis to the idea that the novel is trying to convey homage to a central

⁴¹² Shi and Luo, attrib. *The Broken Seals*, pg.258.

⁴¹³ Ibid., pg.258.

⁴¹⁴ Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995): pg. 4

⁴¹⁵ Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Shuihu quan zhuan* 水滸全傳, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995): pg. 155.

⁴¹⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib. *The Broken Seals*, pg.258.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., pg.258.

⁴¹⁸ Kam, *Theorising Chinese Masculinities*, pg.27.

character.⁴¹⁹ As such, by repeating elements of Guan Yu's description wholesale in the description of Zhu Tong, it is made clear to the reader that Zhu Tong is a figure who is to be admired and is a great warrior, on par with Guan Yu.⁴²⁰

While Zhu Tong is designed to resemble Guan Yu in appearance and personality, and borrows one of his most famous nicknames,⁴²¹ Guan Sheng shares a much more direct connection with Guan Yu by being his direct descendant.⁴²² While Guan Sheng's physical description lacks the same form of direct repetition from *Sanguo*, we are assured by the narrative that he does look more or less the same as Guan Yu as, "In looks he resembles his famous ancestor and since he fights with a sword which is curved like a moon, people call him Scimitar."⁴²³ It should be noted that while Alex and John Dent-Young chose to translate his weapon and nickname around resembling a sword, the nickname Guan Sheng is given, *da dao* 大刀, more literally just means "Big Blade"⁴²⁴; emphasis on the crescent moon shape of the blade brings it more in line with Guan Yu's famous *Qinglong dao* 青龍刀 (Green Dragon Crescent Blade).⁴²⁵ In this, Zhu Tong and Guan Sheng effectively serve as the carriers of Guan Yu's legacy, with Zhu Tong being associated specifically with Guan Yu's appearance, personality and beard through his nickname of *meiran gong*⁴²⁶, while Guan Sheng inherits the appearance of his ancestor along with his ancestor's famous weapon.⁴²⁷ Moreover, once Guan Sheng officially

⁴¹⁹ Lois Fusek, "A Fantastic History: *San Sui ping yao zhuan* Reconsidered" in *The Three Sui Quash the Demons' Revolt: A Comic Novel*, attributed to Luo Guanzhong, translated by Lois Fusek (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2010): pg. 188-189.

⁴²⁰ Shi and Luo, attrib. *The Broken Seals*, pg.258.

⁴²¹ Ibid., pg.258.

⁴²² Shi and Luo, attrib. *Iron Ox*, pg.15.

⁴²³ Ibid., pg.15.

⁴²⁴ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳: *Outlaws of the Marsh, Library of Chinese Classics Chinese-English Edition*, translated by Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1999): pg. 2146-2147.

⁴²⁵ Luo, *Three Kingdoms*, pg.12.

⁴²⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib. *The Broken Seals*, pg.258.

⁴²⁷ Shi and Luo, attrib. *Iron Ox*, pg.15.

joins the 108 Heroes of Liangshan, he is ranked first of the five chief cavalry generals of the Liangshan army, also called the Five Tiger Generals (*wu hu jiang* 五虎將),⁴²⁸ a role that appears to be a deliberate reference to Guan Yu's honorary title as the chief of the Five Tiger Generals of Shu.⁴²⁹ In this way, Guan Sheng also inherits his ancestor's rank in addition to his name, appearance, and weapon, making his role as Guan Yu reborn even more explicit than that of Zhu Tong, who is only ranked as one of Liangshan's junior cavalry commanders; however, this lower rank in a similar position does still continue to emphasize the connection with Guan Yu.⁴³⁰

This view of Guan Sheng as Guan Yu's noble successor in the area of the Song Dynasty is reinforced within the commentary tradition around *Shuihu*, wherein the novel's most famous commentator, Jin Shengtan (c. 1610-c.1661), cites Guan Sheng as being similar to his ancestor as being a sign of his incomparable level of character and morality, and whose presence as a version of Guan Yu elevates the whole novel itself to becoming an untouchable masterpiece.⁴³¹ It is worth noting that Jin considered the connection between Guan Sheng and Guan Yu, as well as the effect such a relationship had on Guan Sheng's character, to be one of the key selling points for *Shuihu*'s brilliance.⁴³² This may seem odd since Jin Shengtan by and large did not care much for *Sanguo* as a whole, seeing it as too complex and grand to be relatable.⁴³³ I believe the reason he saw the inclusion of Guan Yu through Guan Sheng in such a positive light can be found in his praising of Wu Song 武松 and Li Kui 李逵 as the greatest of the 108 Heroes due to their honesty,

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 154.

⁴²⁹ Luo, attrib. *Three Kingdoms*, pg. 1316.

⁴³⁰ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.154.

⁴³¹ Jin Shengtan, "How to Read the *Fifth Book of Genius*" translated by John C.Y. Wang and annotated by David L. Rolston in *How to Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 138.

⁴³² Ibid., pg.138.

⁴³³ Ibid., pg.132.

bravery, and devotion to their fellow heroes.⁴³⁴ All these traits he praises these two heroes for can be found in Guan Yu as well, which leads me to believe that despite Jin Shengtan's broader dislike of *Sanguo*, he still admired Guan Yu in *Sanguo* and saw the inclusion of his descendant amongst the 108 Heroes positively.⁴³⁵ Moreover, Guan Sheng's presence highlights another concept from the commentary tradition, as noted by the literary scholar David Rolston in his book *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, in which he highlights the interpretations of earlier commentators of *Sanguo*, such as Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (1632-1701), who emphasized the role played by the children of Guan Yu and his sworn brother Zhang Fei 張飛 (d.221) in carrying on their father's legacy in becoming heroes in their own right.⁴³⁶ To these commentators, "as long as their sons are alive, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei cannot be considered dead".⁴³⁷ This view gives a new perspective on the inclusion of Guan Sheng in *Shuihu*, as it follows this same principle established by the *Sanguo* commentators who believed that the longevity of the Guan clan meant that Guan Yu remained alive through the actions of his descendants and their emulation of him.⁴³⁸ It should also be noted that both Zhu Tong and Guan Sheng are ranked amongst the Thirty-Six Heavenly Stars of Liangshan, ranked Star Twelve and Star Five respectively, and are thus seen as peerless heroes amongst their comrades.⁴³⁹ This status of Guan Sheng and Zhu Tong, amongst the Thirty-Six Heavenly Stars, rather than the Seventy-Two Earthly Stars, becomes important within the broader textual history of *Shuihu*, as historians such as Liangyan Ge generally believe that the Thirty-Six Stars are the original heroes

⁴³⁴ Ibid., pg.136-137.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., pg.136-138.

⁴³⁶ David L. Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): pg. 199.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., pg.199.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., pg.199.

⁴³⁹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.148.

of Liangshan that debuted in the pre-*Shuihu* storytelling tradition about Song Jiang and his noble bandits.⁴⁴⁰ This is reinforced by the findings of the Hungarian scholar Barnabas Csongor, who in his study of the development of *Shuihu* noted that in several early tellings of the *Shuihu*, most notably the earlier popular history *Forgotten Matters from the Xuanhe Reign Period* (*Xuanhe yishi* 宣和遺事, hereafter shortened to *Xuanhe*), consisting of stories from the late Song through early Ming, both Zhu Tong and Guan Sheng are found listed amongst the Thirty-Six Heroes of Liangshan who served under Song Jiang.⁴⁴¹ As such, it appears that both Zhu Tong and Guan Sheng, with their connections to Guan Yu, are an integral part of the *Shuihu* storytelling tradition from its earliest days.⁴⁴²

In addition to the commentary by the above scholars, my own interpretation as to why Guan Yu, of all the major heroes of the Three Kingdoms period, ended up becoming associated with the Heroes of Liangshan in *Shuihu*, can be found in his vaguely alluded-to backstory in *Sanguo*.⁴⁴³ When Guan Yu introduces himself to his future sworn brothers Zhang Fei and Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223), he tells them that the reason he has arrived in Zhuo county is because “I had to leave there [his home county] after killing a local bully who was persecuting his neighbours and have been on the move these five or six years.”⁴⁴⁴ This backstory of slaying someone who had been causing trouble and abusing others is consistent with many of the backgrounds of heroes in *Shuihu*, such as Lu Zhishen 魯智深, who became outlaws because they had killed cruel and

⁴⁴⁰ Liangyan Ge, *Out of the Margins: The Rise of Chinese Vernacular Fiction*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001): pg. 37-39.

⁴⁴¹ Barnabas Csongor, “On the Prehistory of *Shui-hu chuan*” in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (1972): pg. 77-79.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, pg.37-39.

⁴⁴³ Luo attrib., *Three Kingdoms*, pg.8.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.8.

wealthy men who used their position to exploit and abuse others.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, as noted by *Sanguo* scholar and translator Moss Roberts, the image of Guan Yu being an outlaw who targeted corrupt men, before meeting his future sworn brothers, is one that dates back to the earlier *Sanguo* storytelling traditions such as late Yuan dynasty text *Sanguozhi pinghua* 三國志平話 (The Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language).⁴⁴⁶ In the *pinghua* telling of the event, Guan Yu states that the man he killed was not just some bully, as is implied in *yanyi*, but rather was the local magistrate who was oppressing the whole county, thus motivating Guan Yu into action.⁴⁴⁷ In acting thus, Guan Yu becomes even more like the heroes of *Shuihu*, who pride themselves on their hatred of corrupt government officials and ministers and see their goal being to save both the dynasty, and the people, from these evil officials by eliminating them.⁴⁴⁸ Moreover, in the popular storytelling traditions surrounding Guan Yu, he is depicted as a divine spirit of justice and morality, who uses his martial prowess to protect the innocent and punish the wicked, no matter their social status.⁴⁴⁹ This likewise connects with a perception of Guan Yu noted by the historian Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, to whom Guan Yu is a “plebian hero”, which is to say a hero of the common folk and of the masses, rather than of the elites, in a manner comparable to those of *Shuihu*.⁴⁵⁰ A key part of this, to Chang, is the notion that these “plebian heroes”, as she refers to them, have a disregard for conventional law and order in favour of personal morality and justice, often clashing with the established elites in the process.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Broken Seals*, pg.75-77.

⁴⁴⁶ Luo, attrib. *Three Kingdoms*, pg.546.

⁴⁴⁷ Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, trans. *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2016): pg. 14.

⁴⁴⁸ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Broken Seals*, pg.353.

⁴⁴⁹ Barend J. ter Haar, *Guan Yu: The Religious Afterlife of a Failed General* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): pg. 18-20.

⁴⁵⁰ Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pg. 85.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pg.84-85.

Consequently, I argue that based on Guan Yu's popular backstory as a righteous bandit, and his divine role as a strict but fair guardian of the oppressed, for the storytellers of the *Shuihu* tradition it made sense to associate Guan Yu with their own heroes and include him through his alleged descendants in the roster of bandit heroes who gathered in the Marshes of Liangshan.⁴⁵² The association between Guan Yu's virtues and the virtues of the Heroes of Liangshan is reinforced, albeit somewhat comedically, in chapter 110, when Li Kui is attending a storytelling performance of tales from the Three Kingdoms period and is so overtaken by emotions when he hears of Guan Yu's bravery that he interrupts the performance to yell out "That's what I call a real man!"⁴⁵³ *zhege zheng shi hao nanzi* 这个正是好男子"⁴⁵⁴ This outburst highlights the influence that tales of Guan Yu and other Three Kingdoms-era heroes had on the audience of these novels. Through this scene, Li Kui plays the part of the reader in being inspired by Guan Yu and in drawing attention to the broader parallels between *Sanguo* and *Shuihu*.⁴⁵⁵

Another recursive character within *Shuihu* is that of Yang Zhi 楊志 also known as the "Blue-Faced Beast" (*qingmian shou* 青面獸), the latest member of the legendary Yang Family of Generals 楊家將 and also the latest of the Yang Family to be cursed with falling afoul of corrupt government officials.⁴⁵⁶ After being humiliated one too many times, Yang Zhi bonds with Lu Zhishen over their shared experiences of being betrayed and humiliated within the Song government, and as a result joins Lu's bandit company.⁴⁵⁷ Later, Yang Zhi and Lu Zhishen

⁴⁵² ter Haar, *Guan Yu*, pg. 146-147.

⁴⁵³ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Scattered Flock: Part Five of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002): pg. 271.

⁴⁵⁴ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传: *Outlaws of the Marsh*, pg. 2376.

⁴⁵⁵ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg. 153.

⁴⁵⁶ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Broken Seals*, pg. 235.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 318-320.

combine their bandit army with Song Jiang's, taking their rightful place amongst the 108 Heroes, in order to defeat a large government army sent to destroy Liangshan.⁴⁵⁸ While Yang is ultimately just another of the many heroes of Liangshan, what he represents is a connection to the Yang Family, who were arguably amongst most famed heroes of the Song Dynasty prior to Yue Fei.⁴⁵⁹ The presence of a member of the Yang family in this novel thereby ties the novel more firmly to the Song Dynasty and highlights the shared themes between the tales of the Yang Family and *Shuihu*, namely loyalty to the Emperor even if the State does not return that loyalty.⁴⁶⁰ In addition, it is likely that the connection between the Yang Family and the 108 Heroes goes back further as not only is Yang Zhi one of the original Thirty-Six Heroes who form the core of the *Shuihu* mythos, but in earlier *Xuanhe* he is ranked Number Three amongst the Heroes⁴⁶¹ in contrast to the main version of *Shuihu* where he is only ranked Seventeenth in the order of heroes.⁴⁶² Even if Yang Zhi was ultimately demoted in importance during the process of the construction of *Shuihu*, his presence nonetheless helps connect Song Jiang and the other Heroes of Liangshan to the larger thematic world of - Song-based military fiction by creating a direct line of continuity between the Yang Family, Song Jiang, and later Yue Fei.⁴⁶³ Moreover, C.T. Hsia argued in his work *On Chinese Literature* that the tragic end of Song Jiang, being betrayed by his government, may have been a later addition to his story to more closely tie him to the struggles of the Yang Family Generals and to highlight the common struggle of Song

⁴⁵⁸ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong attrib., *The Gathering Company: Part Three of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001): pg. 281-283.

⁴⁵⁹ Jin, "How to Read the *Fifth Book of Genius*", pg.138.

⁴⁶⁰ Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, "Introduction" in *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays*, edited and translated by Wilt L. Idem and Stephen H. West (Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corp., 2013): pg. xiii-xv.

⁴⁶¹ Csongor, "On the Prehistory of *Shui-hu chuan*", pg.78.

⁴⁶² Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.148.

⁴⁶³ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.143.

military officers.⁴⁶⁴ Through this, Song Jiang changes from just another betrayed Song dynasty officer into becoming an almost metatextual figure who takes on aspects of other Song dynasty era military heroes and synthesizes them into a single character to represent their glories and their tragedies.⁴⁶⁵

This concept of character recursion is expanded in Qian Cai's early Qing novel *Shuo Yue*, as heroes from both *Sanguo* (or more accurately descendants of *Sanguo* heroes) and *Shuihu* appear throughout the novel to aid Yue Fei in his quest to protect China from all of its enemies.⁴⁶⁶ The first of such characters to appear in the novel is Zhou Tong 周同 (d.1121), a popular martial figure from Song Dynasty folklore who is said to have been the teacher of the Liangshan heroes Lin Chong 林冲 and Lu Junyi 盧俊義.⁴⁶⁷ Zhou, the trainer of two of the greatest heroes of Liangshan, later becomes Yue Fei's teacher and aids him in becoming a legendary warrior and general, on par with those of Liangshan, through his combined teachings of scholarly and martial skills to the young Yue Fei.⁴⁶⁸ As C.T. Hsia observed, Zhou Tong effectively serves in both stories as an archetypal trainer of heroes, whose brilliance and skills provides each generation with a repertoire of legendary warriors who define their respective generation.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, by receiving training from Zhou Tong, Yue Fei is elevated to the level of the heroes of Liangshan.⁴⁷⁰ His connection to Liangshan is further established when, during his war against the Jin, Yue Fei meets and recruits Zhang Guoxiang 張國祥, the son of the

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., pg.143.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., pg.143.

⁴⁶⁶ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

⁴⁶⁷ Qian Cai, *The General Yue Fei*, translated by T.L. Yang, (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1995): pg. 25.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., pg.32-33.

⁴⁶⁹ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.149.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., pg.149.

Earthly Star hero of Liangshan Zhang Qing 張青, and Dong Fang 董芳, the son of the Heavenly Star hero Dong Ping 董平.⁴⁷¹ Despite the clemency given to the 108 Heroes, these two sons returned to the banditry of their fathers and are said to be similar in personality and tactics to their parents, using their status as bandits to ambush and kill Jin soldiers invading China.⁴⁷² On meeting Yue Fei, the two immediately swear loyalty to the general and join his army.⁴⁷³ The text makes it clear that Yue Fei is especially pleased to have these two amongst his army because of their connection to the Heroes of Liangshan, and is willing to overlook their crimes due to their background and loyalty to the Song Empire.⁴⁷⁴ Not long after meeting these heroes, Yue Fei receives help from another offspring of Liangshan, this time Ruan Liang 阮良, the son of Ruan Xiao'er 阮小二, one of the legendary aquatic heroes of Liangshan.⁴⁷⁵ Similar to his father, who was a fisherman who specialized in underwater ambushes,⁴⁷⁶ Ruan Liang uses his position as a fisherman and superb swimmer to ambush and capture the Jin Prince Wushu 兀朮 (d.1148).⁴⁷⁷ Though this incident is one of Ruan Liang's few major moments, it is taken almost straight out of *Shuihu*, with the wily fisherman hero tricking the evil noble and making an improbable escape through the water upon completing his mission.⁴⁷⁸ The connection with the heroes of *Shuihu* is made more explicit when one of the heroes directly appears in the novel; this is the Eighth Heavenly Star Hero Huyan Zhuo 呼延灼, who is called up by the Song court to help in their fight against the Jin invaders.⁴⁷⁹ Though Huyan does not directly interact with Yue Fei, he is

⁴⁷¹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.302-304.

⁴⁷² Ibid., pg.302-303.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., pg.304.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., pg.304.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., pg.306-307.

⁴⁷⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Broken Seals*, pg.277.

⁴⁷⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.306-307.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., pg.306-308.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., pg.422-423.

presented in the novel as a noble warrior of the older generation whose loyalty to the Song helps keep them afloat against the Jin invasion, and kills various traitors against the Song who had defected to the Jin.⁴⁸⁰ When confronting Prince Wushu, Huyan laments the situation the Song have fallen into, saying, “In the old days, Song Jiang and I went on an expedition against the Great Liao, and countless leading generals died under my whip!”⁴⁸¹ To Huyan, despite the service he and the other heroes of Liangshan did for the Song in fighting the Liao, they have just been replaced by a larger and more powerful northern kingdom that has proven to be a greater threat than the Liao ever were.⁴⁸² And despite his bravery and history of victories against the Liao, Huyan is killed by Wushu, who is forced to resort to trickery to defeat Huyan.⁴⁸³ In this section featuring Huyan and his death at the hands of Wushu, the author Qian Cai expands upon the brief description of Huyan’s fate at the end of *Shuihu*, which simply states that “Later he took part in the campaign against the Fourth Prince of Jin [Wushu] and died in action west of the River Huai.”⁴⁸⁴ In this way, Qian Cai appears to have used this small reference to Huyan’s war against the Jin, and his death, to slot it into his broader story of the war against the Jin to give proper closure to Huyan.⁴⁸⁵

Similar to the role played by the Liangshan heroes and their descendants in aiding Yue Fei, the descendants of the heroes of *Sanguo* equally support Yue Fei and his sons.⁴⁸⁶ Firstly, Yue Fei recruits the bandit hero Zhao Yun 趙雲, who becomes a loyal and capable commander in Yue’s army⁴⁸⁷; Zhao Yun shares the same name, in both English and the original Chinese, to one

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., pg.422-424.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., pg.425.

⁴⁸² Ibid., pg.425.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., pg.425.

⁴⁸⁴ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg. 449.

⁴⁸⁵ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.425.

⁴⁸⁶ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

⁴⁸⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.325.

of the other Five Tiger Generals of Shu and Liu Bei's greatest champion Zhao Yun 趙雲 (d. 229).⁴⁸⁸ Though this Zhao Yun is not explicitly related to the *Sanguo* Zhao Yun in the text, the fact that he shares the same name implies a connection, and through his service to Yue Fei it is as though the original Zhao Yun has come back to serve a new worthy general.⁴⁸⁹ Moreover, the fact that the new Zhao Yun was originally a bandit-turned-warrior makes it as though the narrative is also creating its own version of *Shuihu*, but with the addition of Zhao Yun to the cast of the Heroes of Liangshan.⁴⁹⁰

This hybridization of *Sanguo* characters with *Shuihu*-style backstories of being bandits is repeated with the hero Zhuge Ying 諸葛英, who is a direct descendant of the legendary Three Kingdoms-era strategist Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (c.181-c.234), who also starts as a bandit before joining Yue Fei's forces.⁴⁹¹ While Zhuge Ying is presented as a great warrior and strategist, he is ultimately surpassed by his son Zhuge Jin 諸葛錦, who is presented as even more of a new version of Zhuge Liang than his father.⁴⁹² In the wake of Yue Fei's death, Zhuge Jin is visited in a dream by his great ancestor Zhuge Liang and is bestowed with a collection of military strategy texts that transform him into a strategist on Liang's level.⁴⁹³ With this knowledge, Zhuge Jin is able to use a mix of strategy, divination and magic to help Yue Fei's sons lead the Song army to victory over the Jin.⁴⁹⁴ An important aspect to note about all these descendants and mirrors of Three Kingdoms-era heroes who join with Yue Fei is that all of them are based around generals

⁴⁸⁸ Luo, attrib. *Three Kingdoms*, pg. 1316.

⁴⁸⁹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.325.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., pg.285.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., pg.384-386.

⁴⁹² Ibid., pg.756-758.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., pg.757-758.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., pg.940.

and advisors of Liu Bei of the state of Shu 蜀, who, by the time of *Shuo Yue*, was generally acknowledged in the popular culture as the legitimate successor to the Han Dynasty and its empire, and rightful bearer of the Mandate of Heaven, despite his failure to re-unify China.⁴⁹⁵ As such, by associating Yue Fei with the heroes of Shu Han, the Southern Song are likewise associated with Shu Han and are thus entrenched in their presentation as the rightful bearers of the Mandate of Heaven even if they are ultimately doomed by history like Shu Han.⁴⁹⁶ This connection was made explicit by the *Sanguo* commentator Mao Zonggang, who states that Emperor Song Gaozong 宋高宗 (r.1127-1162, r. 1162-1187 as Retired Emperor) shared the same legitimacy to rule as Liu Bei due to his immediate connection to the Imperial Line of Descent as a prince of the blood, and his work to keep some aspect of the Song Dynasty alive even after the Jingkang Incident.⁴⁹⁷ Through this, Yue Fei and his battles on behalf of the Song are presented as a historical repetition of Liu Bei's attempts to revive the Han Dynasty, with many of the same players reappearing through their descendants.⁴⁹⁸

Finally, returning to our discussion of Guan Yu and Guan Sheng, Guan Sheng's son Guan Ling 關鈴 later joins as an ally of Yue Fei and his sons, and in his first appearance gives Guan Yu's fabled horse the Red Hare 赤兔馬 to Yue Fei's son Yue Yun 岳雲 to use in battle, as he is too young to join the army at the time of his introduction.⁴⁹⁹ Through his use of the Red Hare, and his direct line to Guan Sheng, Guan Ling borrows elements from his ex-bandit father and his

⁴⁹⁵ Mao Zonggang, "How to Read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" translated by David T. Roy and annotated by David L. Rolston in *How to Read the Chinese Novel* edited by David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): pg. 153-155.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., pg.154-156.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., pg.155-156.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., pg.155-156.

⁴⁹⁹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.474-475

famed ancestor.⁵⁰⁰ Later on, following Yue Yun's death and the ascendancy of Yue Lei 岳雷, Guan Ling grows up to become a spitting image of both his father and ancestor and goes into battle riding the Red Hare and wielding the *Qinglong dao*.⁵⁰¹ Though he is not quite as great a warrior as either Guan Sheng or Guan Yu, he is still regarded highly as one of the best fighters in the Yue Family Army and as a talented commander.⁵⁰² While he is not the one who delivers the final blow, Guan Ling is crucial to the slaying of Prince Wushu through distracting him in battle and overwhelming him with sweeping attacks to allow others to kill Wushu.⁵⁰³ Guan Ling's role can be seen as an attempt to give his father Guan Sheng a more dignified role post-*Shuihu*, as Guan Sheng is said to have died falling off his horse while inspecting his soldiers, being blind drunk.⁵⁰⁴ My interpretation of this result of this is that it allows Guan Sheng to be remembered both as a hero of Liangshan, and as the father of a noble warrior who aided Yue Fei and his family to protect China,⁵⁰⁵ rather than a hero of Liangshan who died embarrassingly due to his alcoholism.⁵⁰⁶ As with the appearance of Guan Sheng and Zhu Tong in *Shuihu*, the appearance of descendants of Guan Yu, Zhuge Liang, and the Heroes of Liangshan in *Shuo Yue* reinforces the idea that so long as the descendants remain alive, the original heroes will live on through their legacy and actions to aid the rise of a new generation of heroes.⁵⁰⁷ Thus, the presence of these older generations of heroes, represented through their children and descendants, allows the new

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., pg.474-475.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., pg.952.

⁵⁰² Ibid., pg.952-953

⁵⁰³ Ibid., pg.952-954.

⁵⁰⁴ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.449.

⁵⁰⁵ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.952-954.

⁵⁰⁶ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.449.

⁵⁰⁷ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pg.199.

heroes to achieve glory, and to carve out their own stories that solidly stand alongside the heroes of the past.⁵⁰⁸

The presence of these references to earlier heroes, in particular those of *Sanguo* and *Shuihu*, is important in the creation of the Yue Fei mythos, according to the sinologist and literary scholar Robert E. Hegel.⁵⁰⁹ According to Hegel, the inclusion of these earlier heroes in the stories of Yue Fei's adventures and campaigns helped to elevate Yue Fei beyond simply being a successful historical general, making him a hero worthy of being viewed alongside the likes of Guan Yu and Song Jiang.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, from a metatextual perspective, it helped encourage new readership for these novels and stories because they included variations on characters they were already familiar with, and fond of, from earlier tales.⁵¹¹ Hegel's argument for the inclusion of the *Shuihu* and *Sanguo* heroes in *Shuo Yue* also applied more broadly to the recursion of popular, albeit anachronistic, characters like Guan Yu and Zhuge Liang in other works of Late Imperial historical literature such as *Shuihu*.⁵¹² Similarly, Elad Alyagon argues in his book *Inked* that another reason for the creation of a link between the Yue Fei mythos and the *Shuihu* mythos can also be found in the fact that Yue Fei himself was considered a spiritual descendant of the Heroes of Liangshan during the Ming Dynasty.⁵¹³ Alyagon notes that the popular imagination of Yue Fei, a wise tattooed warrior who was capable of great kindness and cruelty and who appeared to be loyal to the idea of the Song Dynasty rather than its reality, bears a strong resemblance to the values, aesthetics and actions of the Liangshan Heroes.⁵¹⁴ The commonalities between Yue Fei

⁵⁰⁸ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.46-47.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.47.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, pg.46-48.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, pg.47-48.

⁵¹³ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2023): pg. 188-190.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.188-190.

and the 108 Heroes is further reinforced by the revelation after Yue Fei's death that he was actually a Celestial Spirit, a star, specifically, reincarnated on Earth to enact justice upon the world.⁵¹⁵ This celestial origin is shared with the origin of the Heroes of Liangshan, each of whom is the human personification of one of the 108 Divine Stars.⁵¹⁶ By having Yue Fei share this celestial status, he is treated in the text as being intrinsically linked to the iconic heroes of *Shuihu* on Earth and in Heaven.⁵¹⁷ As a result, the connection between Yue Fei and the 108 Heroes created in *Shuo Yue* can be seen as an attempt amongst later storytellers to bring Yue Fei into the narrative of *Shuihu* and allow him to join its heroes while sticking to the historical continuity.⁵¹⁸ Moreover, their presence also can be seen as an extension of the novel's themes of patriotism and loyalty, since Yue Fei is such an ideal patriotic hero that he is able to rally heroes of the previous generations and their descendants to defend China against invaders.⁵¹⁹

Part 2: A Universal Brotherhood of Heroes

In these three novels detailing the glories and horrors of war, one of the most prominent themes that arises and is shared across the texts is the concept of brotherhood as something created between like-minded individuals and sustained through a mix of oaths and actions.⁵²⁰ According to Shelley Chang, the idea of brotherhood is practically a universal theme across the Late Imperial genre of historical fiction, and permeates almost all aspects of the stories told within them.⁵²¹ According to Chang, the major reason for this is because the values represented by sworn brotherhood are all encompassed under the broader Confucian value of *yi* 義

⁵¹⁵ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.867.

⁵¹⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.145-147.

⁵¹⁷ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.867.

⁵¹⁸ Alyagon, *Inked*, pg.188-190.

⁵¹⁹ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.150.

⁵²⁰ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, pg.108.

(righteousness). However, Chang goes on to note that the version of *yi* practiced in these novels is a more colloquial interpretation of the concept, defined by bonds of friendship and the search for justice.⁵²² More specifically, *yi* is interpreted in novels such as *Sanguo* and *Shuihu* to refer to brotherhood and solidarity, which is how we shall be interpreting it here.⁵²³ Yet deeper inspection reveals that the way in which Brotherhood functions as a concept is interpreted uniquely across these three novels.⁵²⁴ Moreover, the presentation of *yi* in *Shuo Yue* offers a unique synthesis between how *yi* and sworn brotherhood are shown in *Sanguo* and *Shuihu*.⁵²⁵

Sanguo famously begins with the *Taoyuan jieyi* 桃園結義 (Oath of the Peach Garden), in which Guan Yu, Liu Bei, and Zhang Fei swear to become as brothers to one another, hoping to die on the same day, and to aid each other in protecting the Han Dynasty and its people against any harm that comes its way.⁵²⁶ Within this particular oath of brotherhood comes a degree of hierarchy amongst the three heroes, their positions determined by their social standing and in the case of Liu Bei, alleged imperial lineage. In this order, Liu Bei is above the other two as the eldest brother regardless of his physical age, due to being an (alleged) scion of the Imperial Household, Guan Yu is the middle brother, and Zhang Fei is the youngest brother.⁵²⁷ As Chang notes, this oath effectively establishes the precedent which all other brotherly oaths in Late Imperial historical fiction will follow.⁵²⁸ These oaths combine the personal goals of supporting your comrades as though they were family, along with the larger political goals of fighting for

⁵²² Ibid., pg.106.

⁵²³ Ibid., pg.106.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., pg.106-108.

⁵²⁵ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg. 290.

⁵²⁶ Luo attrib., *Three Kingdoms*, pg.11.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., pg.11.

⁵²⁸ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-107.

the empire and its people, with the people being an important addition to emphasize the common background of the heroes swearing the oath.⁵²⁹

In the case of the Peach Garden Oath in *Sanguo*, the bond created by this oath helps lead Guan Yu and Zhang Fei to heroic deeds in the name of upholding their oath.⁵³⁰ In the case of Guan Yu, this is in his famous ride to reunite himself with Liu Bei in which he crosses five passes and slays the six generals guarding those passes to reunite with his brothers.⁵³¹ It is of note that in this instance, upon reuniting with his sworn brothers, they are initially mistrustful of Guan Yu and he must prove that he has not betrayed their oath, and through deeds must re-affirm his oath to regain the trust and love of his brothers.⁵³² In this case, the sense of fraternity between the three heroes, though strong, is affirmed through action, in order to be upheld.⁵³³ Zhang Fei meanwhile proves his loyalty to the Oath during the Battle of Changban Bridge when he singlehandedly frightens off Cao Cao's army by standing alone on a bridge and screaming at them to fight him if they dare. All this helps Liu Bei and the rest of his own army, as well as the refugees he is protecting, to escape Cao Cao's pursuit.⁵³⁴ However, as with Guan Yu's ride, this action also complicates the nature of the brotherhood since upon returning to Liu Bei, Zhang Fei is criticized for his stand because it indicated to Cao Cao that Liu Bei was in retreat to a position to fight, thus denying Liu Bei the chance to lure Cao Cao into an ambush.⁵³⁵ The fact that both these acts of heroism motivated by the sense of brotherhood are often followed by criticism and require further action to remedy, highlights one of the main aspects of the theme of brotherhood

⁵²⁹ Ibid., pg.107.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., pg.107-108.

⁵³¹ Luo attrib., *Three Kingdoms*, pg.456-457.

⁵³² Ibid., pg.466-468.

⁵³³ Ibid., pg.466-468.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., pg.745-746.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., pg.746.

in *Sanguo*. Namely, that though this oath of brotherhood strengthened the three heroes, it also causes troubles and ultimately disaster to them as well, as it ultimately leads to their deaths and the fall of Liu Bei's kingdom.⁵³⁶ The tragedy of *Sanguo* comes about from the fact that the Oath in the Peach Garden is ultimately broken, with the three brothers not saving the Han Dynasty, but rather hastening its fragmentation, leading to decades of war. A symbol of the broken oath occurs in the fact that all three brothers die one year apart from one another.⁵³⁷ As such, while it is often seen as the pinnacle of sworn brotherhood and the power found in those bonds, *Sanguo* also implicitly warns about the dangers that such oaths can create and how even the best of intentions can turn to tragedy.⁵³⁸ Yet we also see in *Sanguo* how these bonds of brotherhood can exist across generations, as Guan Yu's son Guan Xing 關興 and Zhang Fei's son Zhang Bao 張苞 end up forming their own pact of brotherhood under the guidance of Liu Bei, who becomes a sort of sworn father to them.⁵³⁹ As such, an opportunity to these young heroes (whether or not they actually take it) is provided for the mistakes of the older generation to be avoided, while still honouring their actions through the next generation of sworn brothers' sons carrying on their fathers' oaths.⁵⁴⁰

Moving now to the use of brotherhood in *Shuo Yue*, we see a deliberate callback to the idea of brotherhood in *Sanguo* when the narration at the beginning of chapter three speaks openly about the beauty and power of swearing an oath of brotherhood.⁵⁴¹ In particular, it calls attention to the idea that the truest of sworn brotherhood, as in *Sanguo*, transcends time and

⁵³⁶ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.107.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pg.107.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., pg.106-107.

⁵³⁹ Luo attrib. *Three Kingdoms*, pg.1445-1146.

⁵⁴⁰ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pg.199.

⁵⁴¹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.30.

space, life and death, and lives on forever across all time, as “the bonds of the ancients were the bonds of hearts”.⁵⁴² Here brotherhood is thus shown to be a form of deep connection that serves to spiritually bind its participants together and thus makes their brotherhood true, even if they were not literally born as brothers.⁵⁴³ In a sense, Qian Cai, the author of *Shuo Yue*, can be seen as spelling out why the Oath of the Peach Garden in *Sanguo* resonates so powerfully in the popular imagination and in literature, all without directly referencing the event.⁵⁴⁴ In the case of Yue Fei, his brotherhood comes about as a result of his adoption and training under the tutelage of Zhou Tong.⁵⁴⁵ Because Zhou Tong feels sorry for Yue Fei’s loneliness and poverty that deny him companionship, he requests that his other pupils, Zhang Xian 張顯, Tang Huai 湯懷, and Wang Guei 王貴, later to be joined by the rambunctious Niu Gao 牛皋, swear an oath of brotherhood with Yue Fei to support him.⁵⁴⁶ In this way, the act of swearing an oath of brotherhood is reinterpreted as being part of Yue Fei’s training to become a legendary warrior and general, with the implicit understanding that to be successful in the pursuit of martial valor one must do so alongside companions whom one regards as one’s own family.⁵⁴⁷ However, this initial brotherhood formed by Yue Fei proves less reliable than the Three Brothers of *Sanguo*, as Yue Fei finds that his sworn brothers are ultimately too greedy and power hungry to be reliable companions, and ultimately ends his brotherhood with them.⁵⁴⁸ In this we can see how the notion of sworn brotherhood is one based around the pursuit of justice for all people, and support of one’s companions is a reciprocal relationship that requires constant adherence to the oath of

⁵⁴² Ibid., pg.30.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., pg.30.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., pg.30.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., pg.34-35.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., pg.34-35.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., pg.34-35.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., pg.242-243.

brotherhood, and does not allow for deviation.⁵⁴⁹ In this way, the type of sworn brotherhood created in the Peach Garden Oath is transformed into a more purely political relationship rather than a familial one.⁵⁵⁰

However, upon ending his first brotherhood, Yue Fei almost immediately creates a new sworn brotherhood with the pirate Wang Zuo 王佐.⁵⁵¹ However in this episode, Wang Zuo, knowing that Yue Fei would not accept the friendship of an active pirate, disguises himself as a traveler and uses Yue Fei's generosity to enter a sworn brotherhood before revealing his identity.⁵⁵² In so doing, brotherhood is exploited by Wang Zuo in order to protect himself, and while it may seem that this action is dishonorable, it becomes clear in the narrative that the act of forming a sworn brotherhood, even when abused, as here, has the potential to bring out the best in all involved.⁵⁵³ While Wang Zuo does trick Yue Fei into becoming a sworn brother, the two take their bond seriously.⁵⁵⁴ This act of creating a new brotherhood also helps to awaken Yue Fei from his depression caused by the loss of his first sworn brotherhood, and allows him to regain his drive to become a loyal general and great warrior.⁵⁵⁵ In addition, the bond formed between Yue Fei and Wang Zuo, though founded on deception, also serves to redeem Wang Zuo, as he later joins Yue Fei's army and even cuts off his own arm in order to help Yue Fei conduct an elaborate stratagem to defeat the Jin.⁵⁵⁶ Moreover, Yue Fei's return to action inspires his former brothers to renounce their greedy ways and come to the aid of Yue Fei when they hear that he has

⁵⁴⁹ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-107.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.106-107.

⁵⁵¹ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.244-246.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pg.244-246.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, pg. 245-247.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 246.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.247-248.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pg.641.

been falsely accused of treason.⁵⁵⁷ In showing their willingness to risk their lives for their friend, they successfully save Yue Fei and renew their oath of brotherhood, this time taking it seriously and devoting themselves to Yue Fei's vision of a reunited and prosperous China.⁵⁵⁸ In this action we see how the ideals of brotherhood can be revived and redirected towards the common good of the land and its people.⁵⁵⁹ However, unlike the sworn brotherhood in *Sanguo*, the brotherhood around Yue Fei is a larger group and primarily consists of friends and fellow commanders seeking to carry out Yue Fei's vision, an idea that appears to be borrowed from *Shuihu*'s interpretation of brotherhood, which will be discussed in detail.⁵⁶⁰ Specifically it is the primary cadre of officers in Yue Fei's army that act as his sworn brothers, meaning that all who serve Yue Fei in battle are his brothers.⁵⁶¹ *Shuo Yue*'s interpretation of the idea of brotherhood is important in understanding the tradition of emphasizing sworn brotherhood in these narratives, as it offers a synthesis of what we have seen above with the more intimate perception of sworn brotherhood found in *Sanguo* with the more universal perception of sworn brotherhood we shall see below in *Shuihu*.⁵⁶²

In contrast to more interpersonal form of sworn brotherhood found in *Sanguo* and *Shuo Yue*, *Shuihu* reimagines sworn brotherhood from being an action performed between a few close friends into one performed by a whole community.⁵⁶³ Within the 108 heroes, there are multiple incidents of members forming sworn brotherhood between individual heroes, but ultimately they are all functionally one massive sworn brotherhood.⁵⁶⁴ As observed by Yunhong Wang in her

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 285-287.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., pg.290.

⁵⁵⁹ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁵⁶⁰ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.289-290.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 290.

⁵⁶² Ibid., pg.290.

⁵⁶³ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.107-108.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., pg.108.

study of the translations of *Shuihu*, the principle of *yi* that lies behind the theme of sworn brotherhood is brought to the forefront by the Heroes of Liangshan, as they proclaim brotherhood to be the highest of virtues and use it as the driving principle behind all their actions to protect fellow companions, as well as using it to organize a coherent army.⁵⁶⁵ This notion of *yi* and brotherhood is seen most clearly when the Heroes of Liangshan finally assemble in full in chapter 71. Here, we receive a long interlude describing how despite the fact that the various assembled heroes all come from different backgrounds, some high born and some low born, they have all been united as equals and brothers by their actions and love for one another.⁵⁶⁶ This section describes how although the heroes may have achieved great fame, and performed mighty deeds in their own adventures, it is only through their shared union that they have been able to achieve their fullest potential.⁵⁶⁷ After this interlude, Song Jiang gathers all the heroes together and proclaims, “we must all swear an oath, that we will unhesitatingly live and die together, support each other through thick and thin, and fight to preserve the nation and protect the people.”⁵⁶⁸ The general idea of the oath Song Jiang has his fellow heroes swear is almost identical in goal and nature to that of the Peach Garden Oath, with emphasis on togetherness in life and death and in fighting for the sake of the empire and its people,⁵⁶⁹ but here the oath has been expanded to connect 108 people rather than just three.⁵⁷⁰ It is fitting then that the first major English-language translation of *Shuihu*, done by the American novelist Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), was titled *All Men Are Brothers* and brought this theme of universal brotherhood to the forefront of the text, downplaying the brutality of the Liangshan bandits in order to highlight

⁵⁶⁵ Yunhong Wang, *English Translations of Shuihu zhuan: A Narratological Perspective* (Berlin: Springer, 2020): pg. 171-172.

⁵⁶⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.157-158.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., pg.157-158.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., pg.158.

⁵⁶⁹ Luo attrib., *Three Kingdoms*, pg.11.

⁵⁷⁰ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.107-108.

their love and respect for one another.⁵⁷¹ Although the Heroes of Liangshan are definitely much more brutal than Buck interpreted them to be in her translation, it is undeniable that the idea that “All men are brothers” is the driving motivation behind these bandit heroes and ultimately what brings them together.⁵⁷²

While *Shuihu* by and large endorses a much more universal view of brotherhood than either *Sanguo* or *Shuo Yue*, there is still a brotherly relationship at the core of the novel. This relationship is the friendship between Song Jiang and Li Kui, which is just as narratively and thematically important as the bond between all 108 heroes is.⁵⁷³ Despite the fact that many regard the drunk and extremely violent Li Kui as a liability at best, and an active threat to the stability of Liangshan at worst, Song Jiang still loves and cares for Li Kui, and in return Song Jiang is the only person amongst the other 108 heroes that Li Kui seems to truly respect and admire.⁵⁷⁴ Li Kui goes on a drunken rampage upon hearing that Song Jiang’s ultimate goal is to get amnesty for all the 108 heroes, and for them to join the Song government. However, Song Jiang brushes off Li Kui’s drunken threats, saying, “When I got drunk in Jiangzhou I made a fool of myself...Under the influence today I composed that ode [for amnesty] and nearly destroyed a life!...He [Li Kui] is very close to me.”⁵⁷⁵ As demonstrated here, Song Jiang is willing to put himself on Li Kui’s level and empathize with him, telling him how he had also made reckless mistakes in the past while drunk in a similar (albeit less violent) manner to Li Kui.⁵⁷⁶ To Song Jiang, although Li Kui is a violent brute, he is best controlled not through force but through the

⁵⁷¹ Wang, *English Translations of Shuihu zhuan*, pg.177-178.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, pg.177-179.

⁵⁷³ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.110-111.

⁵⁷⁴ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.161-162.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg.161.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pg.161.

bonds of brotherhood and friendship, which Song Jiang provides for him.⁵⁷⁷ By the end of the novel, Song Jiang and Li Kui manage to accomplish what none of the other sworn brothers are able to manage, despite their oaths, namely the wish that they die together, albeit through unconventional means.⁵⁷⁸ When Song Jiang finds out he has been poisoned by rivals at court, he resolves to also poison Li Kui to prevent him from seeking revenge against the poisoners, an action which would force the surviving heroes back into banditry.⁵⁷⁹ While Song Jiang's poisoning of Li Kui is largely an attempt to remove a liability to the safety of the surviving Heroes of Liangshan, the manner through which he kills his friend is one that reinforces their bond of brotherhood by allowing them to die together and remain together in the afterlife.⁵⁸⁰ Yet Song also makes clear to Li Kui, when telling him of the plan, that he knows that Li Kui would not be able to live without Song Jiang around and that by dying together the two will be connected in death.⁵⁸¹ Li Kui not only understands and accepts this fate, but also requests that he be buried alongside Song Jiang, so that their bodies as well as their spirits can be together forever.⁵⁸² For Jin Shengtian in his commentary on *Shuihu*, the relationship between Li Kui and Song Jiang was more than just a friendship, but rather the emotional crux of the novel.⁵⁸³ To Jin, this relationship showed how the two men, so unlike in personality and morals, balanced one another's flaws and brought their best qualities forward, though Jin himself believes Li to be a purer and more heroic figure than Song Jiang (whom he despises).⁵⁸⁴ In this way, the love

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., pg.161.

⁵⁷⁸ Shi and Luo attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.456-457.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., pg.456.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., pg.456.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., pg.456.

⁵⁸² Ibid., pg.457.

⁵⁸³ Jin, "How to Read *The Fifth Book of Genius*", pg.137.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., pg.137.

between Song Jiang and Li Kui⁵⁸⁵ can be seen as highlighting the power of the universal sense of brotherhood promoted by the Heroes of Liangshan, that being by creating a wider sense of brotherhood amongst peers, it also allows for these sorts of highly productive and successful intimate relationships to blossom within.⁵⁸⁶

The dynamic of Song Jiang and Li Kui's relationship, with its contrast between the more kindly and scholarly Song Jiang and the rough and violent Li Kui,⁵⁸⁷ is likewise replicated in *Shuo Yue* through the relationship between Yue Fei and his former bandit companion and sworn brother Niu Gao.⁵⁸⁸ As with Song Jiang and Li Kui, the scholarly and gentle nature of Yue Fei is frequently contrasted with that of his more brutish companion, who is shown to be impulsive and ungraceful in his tactics.⁵⁸⁹ This often results in Yue Fei having to save Niu Gao from his own mistakes, even as these mistakes often come about from Niu Gao's own misguided attempts to help Yue Fei in his goal to save China.⁵⁹⁰ This contrast is seen in their fighting styles, with Yue Fei's fighting style being compared to the precision of an artist, while Niu Gao's is compared with that of a demon.⁵⁹¹ In a similar scene to when Li Kui throws a tantrum on hearing about Song Jiang's amnesty plan,⁵⁹² Niu Gao becomes enraged when he finds out that Yue Fei has decreed that he will execute any soldier who is excessively rowdy or drunk, two things which Niu Gao prides himself on being.⁵⁹³ Niu Gao sees these rules as personal attacks on his character and plans to deliberately break them to see if Yue Fei is willing to actually execute his own

⁵⁸⁵ This relationship be potentially interpreted as homoerotic but that is a subject beyond the scope of this specific thesis.

⁵⁸⁶ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.110-111.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.110-111.

⁵⁸⁸ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.285-287.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.301-302.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.301-302.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pg.301-302.

⁵⁹² Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.161-162.

⁵⁹³ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.440-441.

sworn brother.⁵⁹⁴ Fortunately, Yue Fei is smarter than that and is aware that he cannot execute his sworn brother despite his desire to maintain order and discipline in the army, so he resolves to send Niu Gao on a series of dangerous missions knowing that Niu will take these to get the chance to win glory for himself.⁵⁹⁵ As such, he takes advantage of his sworn brother's flaws and uses them to aid the army as a whole through using Niu Gao's impetuosity for good.⁵⁹⁶ At the end of the novel, following Yue Fei's execution, Niu Gao is given the opportunity denied to Li Kui to avenge his sworn brother, which is allowed for Niu Gao because the target of his vengeance is explicitly a foreign target rather than within the Imperial Court.⁵⁹⁷ In the second last chapter of the novel, Chapter 78, Niu Gao, with the help of Yue Fei's sons and companions, defeats and kills Prince Wushu of Jin, who orchestrated Yue's death.⁵⁹⁸ While Niu Gao himself also dies in the process of killing Wushu, he dies content and laughing knowing that he has avenged his sworn brother and defeated the Song Dynasty's most powerful enemy in the process.⁵⁹⁹ In this moment, although his triumph is short-lived, Niu Gao manages to accomplish what all sworn brothers in the Late Imperial historical literature desire, that being the ability to live and die according to the values upon which his oath of brotherhood was formed.⁶⁰⁰

Part 3: Understanding the Use of References and Allusions in a Metatextual Context

When we take a step back from the specifics of the recursion of characters and themes within the Late Imperial historical novels, we see that this sort of repetition and referencing of prior works was a key part of the construction of and discourse surrounding the Late Imperial

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., pg.441.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., pg.441-442.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., pg.441-442.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., pg.956-957.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., pg.956-957.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., pg.956-957.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., pg.957.

novel.⁶⁰¹ As mentioned previously, Jin Shengtian regarded the appearance of Guan Sheng as a direct reference to Guan Yu, as both a historical figure and in his role as a key hero in *Sanguo*, as one of the signs of the genius of *Shuihu*.⁶⁰² While elsewhere in his guide “How to Read the *Fifth Book of Genius*”, Jin denigrates *Sanguo* as an inferior text to *Shuihu*, criticizing it as too close to history and filled with too many characters,⁶⁰³ I interpret his praise of the appearance of Guan Sheng alongside members of the Yang family of generals 楊家將 amongst the 108 Heroes as a way of promoting *Shuihu*’s quality in comparison to its competitors.⁶⁰⁴ In other words, as part of his promotion of *Shuihu* as the “Fifth Book of Genius”, Jin can be seen as attracting potential readers of the novel by promising them appearances from characters similar to ones they are already familiar with but now being featured in a story, that in Jin’s opinion, is worthy of their caliber.⁶⁰⁵ This is reinforced by the fact that during the Liao campaign, when a Liao general attempts to use the various strategies and formations attributed to Zhuge Liang in *Sanguo*, the heroes of Liangshan recognize them immediately as “textbook” and are able to implement counterstrategies that defeat them with relative ease.⁶⁰⁶ In this way, the novel presents itself and its heroes as superior to *Sanguo* by having the very strategies that made Zhuge Liang, a legendary hero, be presented as nothing more than the standard curriculum for generals that can be defeated if replicated without consideration for adaptation.⁶⁰⁷ In this way, one can see Jin Shengtian’s argument that *Shuihu* is the superior text to *Sanguo* be reflected in the narrative of the novel through literary allusion.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰¹ Fusek, “A Fantastic History”, pg.192.

⁶⁰² Jin, “How to Read *The Fifth Book of Genius*”, pg.138.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., pg.132.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., pg.138.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., pg.138.

⁶⁰⁶ Shi and Luo, attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg.443.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., pg.443.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., pg.443.

This form of what I would describe as “recommendation by association” with the abovementioned example of Jin Shengtan’s comments can also be seen in the case of the comedic novel *San Sui ping yao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳 (The Three Sui Quash the Demons’ Revolt, hereafter shortened to *San Sui*), another Ming-era novel set during the mid/late Northern Song Dynasty.⁶⁰⁹ As Lois Fusek notes in her examination of the novel, *San Sui* as a novel about rebellion during the Song Dynasty is heavily indebted to *Shuihu*’s popularity and openly calls upon the reader to form connections to the larger epic.⁶¹⁰ In contrast to other novels we have discussed so far, this is accomplished less through the repetition of characters and more through the repetition of whole scenes, albeit with new characters, as well as featuring a scene that is alluded to in the prologue to *Shuihu* involving the meeting between the legendary Judge Bao Zheng 包拯(999-1062) and the official Wen Yanbo 文彥博 (1006-1097).⁶¹¹ Fusek argues that this form of repetition was a deliberate attempt by the author, who remains unknown, and the publishers of the novel to capitalize on the popularity of *Shuihu* and promote their own book as a similar work for marketability.⁶¹²

Fusek also argues that this also served as a form of metatextual critique and refutation of the pro-Bandit themes of *Shuihu* as the heroes of *San Sui* are the forces of the Song government and the villains are eccentric rebels.⁶¹³ Through this *San Sui* takes on a new role as a parody of *Shuihu* and repudiation of its themes by saying that rebellion is never justified and no rebels in the work are heroes but at best are clowns and worst irredeemable villains.⁶¹⁴ A key aspect of this

⁶⁰⁹ Fusek, “A Fantastic History”, pg.192.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., pg.189-191.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., pg.188.

⁶¹² Ibid., pg.189-191.

⁶¹³ Ibid., pg.190-191.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., pg.190-191.

is also found in the manner by which many of these works such as *Shuihu*, *Sanguo*, and *San Sui*, were traditionally attributed to the semi-fictional author and publisher Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (fl. 14th century).⁶¹⁵ Through this authorial connection, no matter how dubious due to the lack of proof that Luo Guanzhong had anything to do with any of these novels, or if he even existed, the attribution given for these novels to Luo served as a form of advertising by promising readers a similar experience to ones they found in other books attributed to Luo.⁶¹⁶ Jin Shengtang even criticized the later fifty chapters of *Shuihu*, the parts following the Liangshan heroes' pardon by the Emperor and their subsequent campaigns, as being clearly written by Luo Guanzhong, and therefore too similar to *Sanguo*, and thus removed them, attributing the first seventy to Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (c.1296-c.1372).⁶¹⁷ Despite Jin's criticisms of the alleged Luo "interference" in the making of *Shuihu*, the attribution of a common author between these works is important in understanding the manner by which books were marketed in Late Imperial China, and how although the actual author of the book (no matter who the real author was) did not matter compared to the author it was marketed as being written by.⁶¹⁸

This form of repetition from other works for the sake of gaining more attention from the public can be found in the later chapters of *Shuihu*, specifically in those focusing on the wars fought by the 108 Heroes in between their wars against the Liao and their war against Fang La, which C.T. Hsia argues were later additions created to build on the popularity of works like *Sanguo*.⁶¹⁹ In this context, Hsia relates the heavy use of stratagems, elaborate formations, and

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., pg.192.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., pg.192.

⁶¹⁷ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pg.38.

⁶¹⁸ Fusek, "A Fantastic History", pg.192.

⁶¹⁹ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.141.

magic to similar deeds by Zhuge Liang in *Sanguo*.⁶²⁰ However, I believe my thesis shows that such an argument by Hsia has room for more careful observation, given that magic and stratagems have always been a major part of the battles in *Shuihu* as noted in the previous chapters of this thesis in detail.⁶²¹ At the same time, it does fit with the aforementioned claims by Jin Shengtan that the last fifty chapters were added later and meant to attract an audience of readers more familiar with the battles of *Sanguo* than the character drama of *Shuihu*.⁶²² However, if applied to *Shuihu* as a whole, Hsia's argument can be made more convincing as it shows that the popularity of *Sanguo*'s focus on strategy as a form of magic inspired other authors within the genre, such as those who compiled *Shuihu*, to include these fantastical elements and attention to strategy and battle formations in order to attract new readers by promising them a similar fulfilling war epic experience to that found in *Sanguo*.⁶²³ This is reinforced by Robert Hegel's analysis of the genre. As he discussed in his book *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, the relative simplicity and focus on action in the military fiction genre of Late Imperial China meant that an easy way for publishers of the novels to seek out audiences was to promise them a similar experience to other novels of the same genre.⁶²⁴ I would argue this form of marketing was an extension of one of the other popular marketing techniques of the era as discussed by Maram Epstein, namely how critics and editors would emphasize the "historical" aspect of these works of historical fiction by comparing the novels favourably to the classic works of history such as the *Shiji* 史記 (The Records of the Grand Historian).⁶²⁵ Within this form

⁶²⁰ Ibid., pg.141.

⁶²¹ Shi and Luo, attrib., *The Scattered Flock*, pg.394.

⁶²² Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pg.38.

⁶²³ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.141.

⁶²⁴ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47-49.

⁶²⁵ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001): pg. 48.

of marketing, a key component included the guarantee that the readers would also see versions of their favourite characters appear again and again in the new novels.⁶²⁶ In this manner, interconnection of characters and themes in the military fiction of Late Imperial China can be seen as a key feature of the genre both narratively and commercially.⁶²⁷

A crucial point to the previous discussion of how these books were marketed and presented is understanding who the audience for these books was. The Late Imperial novels were highly commercial works intended to reach the widest audience possible.⁶²⁸ This in turn stems from the fact that many of these novels, such as *Shuihu* and *Sanguo*, had their origins in popular forms of entertainment such as theatre, public storytelling, and short stories written in the vernacular.⁶²⁹ Being based on these popular forms of storytelling, these works carried on this tradition of being accessible to the majority of people in the audience through the inclusion of illustrations in most editions of the works, offering help for those interested in the stories but not quite fully literate.⁶³⁰ Ultimately though the texts themselves were intended to be easily received and enjoyed by anyone, whether they be a member of the literati, a member of the growing middle class, or a commoner, with different editions appearing in circulation intended to appeal to different groups of readers.⁶³¹ As such, even if one was a literatus reading a scholarly edition or a commoner reading a simplified and heavily illustrated edition, one could still receive entertainment from the same story even if it appeared in different forms.⁶³² In this context,

⁶²⁶ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.47-49.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.46-48.

⁶²⁸ Scott W. Gregory, *Bandits in Print: The Water Margin and the Transformations of the Chinese Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023): pg. 2.

⁶²⁹ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg. 29-31.

⁶³⁰ Anne E. McLaren, "Ming Audiences and Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Uses of "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" *T'oung Pao* 81 (1) (1995): pg. 52-54.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 54-56.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, pg. 54-56.

Liangyan Ge argues that the popular and wide-reaching nature of these books must have been well known to their writers and editors since there are frequent incidents across the Late Imperial novel, such as in *Shuihu* and *Shuo Yue*, wherein the characters are shown attending public storytelling performances and thoroughly enjoying them, thereby replicating the feelings of the audiences into those of the characters.⁶³³ In his recent book *Bandits in Print*, Scott Gregory also argues that the mass appeal of these novels and the general audience that came to them is one of the reasons that editors and publishers would often attribute multiple novels to the same alleged author, most famously Luo Guanzhong, in order to draw in the widest possible crowd through popular association.⁶³⁴ This in turn ties in with the argument that the appearance of, or reference to, popular characters across multiple Late Imperial novels was a form of advertisement to their readership.⁶³⁵

Any discussion of the use of promotion based on association with regard to *Shuihu* would be remiss not to mention the most famous work to use *Shuihu*'s fame as a springboard for its own success: *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase).⁶³⁶ Written some time in the late Ming Dynasty, *Jin ping mei* used the popularity of *Shuihu* to create its story by taking one of the most popular episodes in *Shuihu*, that of Wu Song 武松 the Tiger-killer, and expanding a short section involving murder and adultery into a lurid and winding tale of lust, greed, and debauchery.⁶³⁷ In this, *Jin ping mei* can be seen as using the popularity of *Shuihu* and Wu Song, one of its most popular characters, in particular to explore other genres of literature with these characters, even if

⁶³³ Ge, *Out of the Margins*, pg. 153-154.

⁶³⁴ Gregory, *Bandits in Print*, pg.3-4.

⁶³⁵ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg. 46-48.

⁶³⁶ Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, pg.72-73.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 73.

only to use them as a gateway to exploring new characters and themes.⁶³⁸ Although Wu Song only appears in the early chapters of *Jin ping mei*, his presence and actions help serve as a major part of the inciting incident that the novel then builds off in its own new direction separate from Wu Song's story in *Shuihu*. While a full examination of the relationship between *Shuihu* and *Jin ping mei* is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is still important for us to note that this relationship between the two novels offers a different perspective on the way by which novels of Late Imperial China did not exist separate from one another historically and literarily but were highly interconnected, even when they existed in different genres, and often communicated with one another through metatextual references.⁶³⁹

Conclusion

In examining the recursion of characters and themes across three of the major works of Late Imperial historical fiction literature, *Sanguo*, *Shuihu*, and *Shuo Yue*, we are able to see the way in which a heroic mythos was constructed through anachronism and reference to earlier novels.⁶⁴⁰ Regarding the reimagining of characters such as Guan Yu and Zhuge Liang in periods not their own, the novels seek to highlight the nobility of their own characters through connections to similar characters from the past.⁶⁴¹ In addition, these new uses of characters help to provide closure to stories left unresolved in their previous iterations, such as the surviving heroes of Liangshan and their sons coming to the aid of Yue Fei and his family in their wars.⁶⁴² Moreover, the action of reusing old characters, either directly or through their descendants, was interpreted by commentators of the day as a way through which these heroes could live forever

⁶³⁸ Ibid., pg.73.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., pg. 73.

⁶⁴⁰ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-48.

⁶⁴¹ Jin, "How to Read *The Fifth Book of Genius*", pg.138.

⁶⁴² Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.474-475.

and continue to achieve glory with each passing generation.⁶⁴³ In relation to the theme of sworn brotherhood across these texts, both *Shuihu* and *Shuo Yue* can be seen as playing off the tropes and ideas of brotherhood as established by the Oath of the Peach Garden in *Sanguo*.⁶⁴⁴ While *Shuo Yue* largely follows *Sanguo*'s model of sworn brotherhood as a compact between a few close individuals, it adds an additional wrinkle to the idea by showing how multiple groups of sworn brothers can exist around a singular individual and their vision for the world, as seen with Yue Fei and his companions.⁶⁴⁵ By contrast, *Shuihu* shows how the concept of sworn brotherhood can be applied to a whole society through the fellowship formed between the 108 heroes, and the devotion they show to one another at all times.⁶⁴⁶ In the case of the *Shuihu* interpretation of brotherhood, while individual connections can be made, as seen with Li Kui and Song Jiang, it is ultimately the bonds formed by the group as a whole that allows the heroes to become as successful as they are.⁶⁴⁷ While one could dismiss these recursive elements as simply copying earlier texts, I seek to present these allusions to the past as a way through which authors and commentators of Late Imperial China were able to create new stories. In creating these new works, they also endeavoured to create something that could stand alongside the classics that came before and reinterpret the themes of the classics to show their adaptability and universality.⁶⁴⁸ Moreover, it was an equally important way through which the publishers and editors of the novels could better market the novels and find new audiences for them through association with more famous novels.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴³ Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, pg.199.

⁶⁴⁴ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁶⁴⁵ Qian, *The General Yue Fei*, pg.285-287.

⁶⁴⁶ Shi and Luo attrib., *Iron Ox*, pg. 157-159.

⁶⁴⁷ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg. 109-111.

⁶⁴⁸ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg. 46-48.

⁶⁴⁹ Fusek, "A Fantastic History", pg.192.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

In discussing and exploring the various ways through which *Shuihu* fits into the larger canon of Late Imperial Historical fiction literature, we as readers can see how the text exists in communication with its fellow novels set during the Song Dynasty.⁶⁵⁰ More specifically, what *Shuihu* and the other novels such as *Shuo Yue* and the tales of the Yang Family Generals accomplish through their setting is the creation of a series of shared tropes and themes pertaining to the military history of the Song Dynasty that in turn influence the popular perceptions of the era in the historical and literary imagination.⁶⁵¹

In the novels' interpretations of the Song's wars against their various foreign adversaries, namely the Liao and the Jin, we see three major trends that dominate these portrayals. The first is in the individualisation of warfare, in which warfare is reinterpreted as a contest between individual generals and strategists seeking to enact their will and demonstrate their loyalty to the state through violence.⁶⁵² The second of these trends is the way in which strategy is treated as a form of magic on the battlefield, with the study of strategy containing deep esoteric knowledge, and the proper use of magic only achieved by loyal servants of the Empire and not its enemies.⁶⁵³ This specific trend appears to have been as much influenced by contemporary (Ming Dynasty)

⁶⁵⁰ C.T. Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): pg. 141-143.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pg.141-143.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, pg.141-143.

⁶⁵³ Mark R.E. Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015): pg. 160-162.

practices, as much as it had any basis in historical practices of the Song Dynasty, bringing these historical tales closer to the eras in which they were written.⁶⁵⁴ The third and arguably most well-known of these trends is the way through which all of the heroes in these military tales of the Song Dynasty are not brought down in battle but rather are betrayed by the courtiers and officials back home, many of whom often are used as scapegoats by the text to avoid having to blame more systemic problems within the Empire.⁶⁵⁵ In blaming the officials for the downfall of the heroes of these stories, the novels are able to create a narrative wherein for all the benefits of the Imperial System, one must be vigilant against weak and corrupt individuals who place their own wealth above the good of the Empire.⁶⁵⁶ The novels likewise also offer catharsis for these frustrations about the tragedies of the heroes by often adding karmic punishments for the villains who schemed against the heroes, allowing the heroes to have the last laugh even in death.⁶⁵⁷

Turning inwards to these novels' portrayals of internal wars and rebellions, we see unique approaches to the previously established trends. The sense of superiority that the military stories often show towards foreign enemies is now replaced with a sense of respect and admiration for the rebellious foes, in particular in both *Shuihu* and *Shuo Yue*, with the text viewing many of these bandits and rebels as potential loyalists and patriots who just require the proper leadership to fulfill their potential.⁶⁵⁸ This perception of rebels as more worthy adversaries than “foreign barbarians” is further seen in the treatment of the magical strategists amongst the rebel armies in the later chapters of *Shuihu*, where they are presented as legitimate threats to our heroes and

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., pg.160-162.

⁶⁵⁵ Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pg. 144-145.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., pg.144-145.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., pg.144-145.

⁶⁵⁸ Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2023): pg. 189.

require all their might in order to defeat.⁶⁵⁹ Likewise, *Shuihu*'s treatment of the Fang La rebellion and the seeming hypocrisy of our heroes, former bandits themselves, hunting down other rebels is used as an object lesson for readers of the novel to know when rebellion is justified and when it is not.⁶⁶⁰ Within the novel, rebellion is only justified when it is meant to bring about change within the system while still keeping the system in place. However, rebellion loses its justification if the rebels seek to overturn the whole dynastic system.⁶⁶¹ Just as with the other novels' portrayal of the evil ministers, we see through this double standard the way by which these historical fiction novels are forced to be cautious and subtle with their social criticisms and presentation of rebellion.⁶⁶²

Moving now to the final section, we leave behind the trends that we had been examining in the first two chapters and instead see the ways through which the Late Imperial novels communicate with one another by way of intertextuality.⁶⁶³ Across the major works set in the Song Dynasty, we see the construction of a cast of recurring characters and families, each meant to evoke the stories they originated from, whether it is the presence of members of the Yang family amongst the 108 Heroes or the descendants of the 108 Heroes in Yue Fei's army.⁶⁶⁴ By including characters from multiple novels, whether they be set in a time contemporaneous to the novel the characters are appearing in or are descendants of great heroes from *Sanguo*, the novels draw attention to the similarities between the texts and provide the reader with new adventures

⁶⁵⁹ Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, attrib., *The Scattered Flock: Part Five of The Marshes of Mount Liang*, translated by John and Alex Dent-Young (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002): pg.394-396.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., pg.276-277.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., pg.276-277.

⁶⁶² Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.244-245.

⁶⁶³ Robert E. Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): pg.46-48.

⁶⁶⁴ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.150.

for their favourite characters.⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, the way in which these novels handle the recurring theme of sworn brotherhood also highlights the various ways that such a brotherhood can be formed, whether it be amongst a select group of individuals as in *Sanguo*, a communal bond amongst a large group as in *Shuihu*, or somewhere in between as in *Shuo Yue*.⁶⁶⁶

Overall, the goal of this study has been to highlight the different ways that intertextuality can be found within the military historical fiction novels of Late Imperial China, with themes recurring through shared plot points,⁶⁶⁷ characters,⁶⁶⁸ and motifs.⁶⁶⁹ Using *Shuihu* as the center point to examine these forms of intertextuality allows us to see how the novel draws upon previous works such as *Sanguo* in its construction of characters and themes while also going on to inspire later works such as *Shuo Yue*.⁶⁷⁰ In this, *Shuihu* can be seen as a lynchpin within the history of the novel in Late Imperial China, building on what came before and inspiring what came after.⁶⁷¹ Moreover, seeing how *Shuihu* often plays around with these recurring themes, whether it be the hero brought down by the corrupt minister or the idea of sworn brotherhood applied universally, allows us as readers and scholars to see these recurring elements as malleable tools rather than static objects.⁶⁷² Just as these Late Imperial novels themselves were edited and changed over the course of their history to the point that no single authentic version by a single author can be said to exist (in most cases), so do the themes that they display reflect this same malleability in their presentation, and interact with one another through variation on

⁶⁶⁵ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-47.

⁶⁶⁶ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁶⁶⁷ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.141-143.

⁶⁶⁸ Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, pg.46-47.

⁶⁶⁹ Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

⁶⁷⁰ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.150.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pg.150.

⁶⁷² Chang, *History and Legend*, pg.106-108.

the same themes.⁶⁷³ What I have sought to accomplish in this thesis is to bring together the scholarship surrounding these novels and the ways through which these works communicate with one another within the texts themselves. I also have sought to demonstrate how they were received as works of entertainment and works of popular historical representation about the Song Dynasty. It is from this perspective of intertextuality that I am interested in developing this project in future studies to serve as basis for further explorations of the larger history of the historical fiction genre in Chinese literature and how it has developed and changed from its earliest forms to the present day.

⁶⁷³ Hsia, *On Chinese Literature*, pg.163.

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