

CELEBRATION OF THE STRANGE: *YOUYANG ZAZU* AND ITS HORROR
STORIES

by

LIN WANG

(Under the Direction of Karin Myhre)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to uncover the artistic appeal and significance of horror tales in *Youyang zazu* with the assistance of Western concepts and theories. The study begins with an examination of the *Youyang zazu* collection in its textual and cultural context and argues that it is assembled according to the aesthetic principle of *qi* which rejects the normal and the familiar, and embraces the unusual, the special, the unique, the odd and the particularized. The study continues with a close analysis of selected horror tales in *Youyang zazu* using three different approaches—fantastic horror, monster horror and cosmic horror. By analyzing themes, structures and narrative techniques of these horror stories, I argue that these horror stories are integral components of the *Youyang zazu* collection. They add vitality and tension to the representation of the strange and advance the collection in its aesthetic pursuit of *qi*. These three approaches each emphasize a different aspect in the representation of the strange. From the literary mechanism that generates strangeness, to the very entity that embodies the strange and to the atmosphere that highlights the incomprehensibility and uncontrollability of the strange, each approach offers a unique perspective on how the effect of strangeness is conveyed and

amplified. By investigating the aesthetic issues at play in the medium of horror and in the context of *zhiguai* through the lens of Western concepts, my study also explores the possibility of examining *zhiguai* tales from new literary perspectives and provides fresh critical insights on the poetics of Chinese horror narrative in general.

INDEX WORDS: *Zhiguai*, *Youyang zazhi*, Horror, Fantastic, Monster, and Cosmic

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INTRODUCTION

Zhiguai 志怪, also known as “accounts of the anomalies” or “record of the strange” is a genre devoted to the representation of the anomalous and the supernatural. Flourishing during the period of the Six Dynasties (220-589), *zhiguai* can be traced back to the Warring States period (475 BC-221 BC) and is associated with many of the earliest collections and works in the tradition of Chinese narrative such as *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Shiji* 史記. *Zhiguai* has received an increasing amount of critical attention since the turn of the century. Chinese scholars have completed comprehensive surveys on the development of the genre and identified *zhiguai* of the Six Dynasties as the source for modern Chinese fiction.¹ This argument goes back to Lu Xun 魯迅 who in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* provides a panoramic overview and a detailed delineation of the development of Chinese fiction from the early myths and legends through the *zhiguai* stories of the Six Dynasties, the *chuanqi* stories of the Tang and Song, the vernacular short stories of subsequent dynasties, and to the novels of the late Qing period. Later scholars often adopt Lu Xun’s view on the significance of the *zhiguai* genre in the development of traditional Chinese narratives and elaborate upon his view in their studies.² The “birth of fiction” theory has been supported by Western scholars, such as

¹ See Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuoshi* 唐前志怪小說史 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1984); Zhou Ciji 周次吉, *Liuchao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu* 六朝志怪小說研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1986); Wang Guoliang 王國良, “Liuchao zhiguai xiaoshuo jianlun” 六朝志怪小說簡論, *Gudianwenxue* 古典文學 vol. 4, ed. Zhongguo gudian wenxue yanjiuhui 中國古典文學研究會 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 1982), 241-285.

² See Guo Zhenyi 郭箴一, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi* 中國小說史 (Hong Kong: Taixing shuju, 1961) and Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋 *Gudain xiaoshuo luncong* 古典小說論叢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959). Also see

Kenneth J. Dewoskin. In his article “On Narrative Revolution,” he contradicts Victor Mair’s claim that Chinese drama and fiction would not have arisen without intellectual stimulus from Indian philosophy and thematic borrowing from Indian sources.³ He argues that traditional Chinese narrative has never suffered from a lack of aesthetic consciousness; in fact, *zhiguai* resides at the center of this conscious pursuit because an early divergence from official historiography freed it from the burden of fact reporting and gave *zhiguai* writers the space to develop plots and indulge in fictionalization.

More recent scholarship, however, approaches *zhiguai* from the other end of the spectrum and focuses on the genre’s relationship with historiography. Robert Ford Campany in his monograph, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, counters the “birth of fiction” theory by arguing that *zhiguai*, in its formative stage from the Warring States period to the Six Dynasties, was practiced as an extension of the ancient cosmographic tradition, in which the strange was collected from the periphery and reported to the center as a way of ordering the world.⁴ Campany further explains how various groups with different religious and cultural perspectives—including Daoists, Buddhists, Confucians, and others—used the genre differently for their own purposes. Campany’s approach is shared by other scholars such as Glen Dudbridge who in his study of medieval *zhiguai* tales regards these texts as reliable historical records of the religious experience of the time. Alister David Inglis’s *Hong Mai’s “Record of the Listener” and Its Song Dynasty Context* builds upon the work of Robert Ford Campany

Shimura Ryoji, “Shōsetsu no hatsusei” in *Chūgoku bunka sōsho 5: Bungakushi*, ed. Suzuki Shōji et.al (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1967), 97-107; Takeda Akira, “Shikai, denki” in *Chūgoku bunka sōsho 4: Bungaku gairon*, ed. Suzuki Shōji et.al (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1967), 217-28; and *Chūgoku setsuwa to kōshōsetsu* (Tokyo: Daizō shōin, 1992).

³ Kenneth Dewoskin, “On Narrative Revolutions,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 5 (1983), 29-35.

⁴ Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 162.

and others to argue that the *zhiguai* tradition from which the *Record* stems is more closely related to the genre of history—constructed as the factual reporting of what people actually experienced and believed—than to fiction. Leo Tak-hung Chan in *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* takes a similar stance and demonstrates how Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805) —a Qing dynasty scholar and the author of the *zhiguai* collection *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記—combined the belief in the supernatural among the literati during eighteenth-century China with didactic purpose.⁵ Although these studies have different focuses, they share a common emphasis on the social, historical and religious perspectives of *zhiguai* and tend to overlook the literary qualities of the genre in general.

When discussing the writing of the anomalous during the Tang dynasty, one common consensus among scholars is that compared to *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmission of marvels)—a type of strange writing that emerged in the Tang period, *zhiguai* tends to be brief, unadorned in style, and simple in narrative structure. Despite the fact that *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* both deal with the strange and the extraordinary, *zhiguai* stories are considered by some scholars not as artistically sophisticated as *chuanqi* tales.⁶ With their better-rounded characters and fuller exploitation of narrative plots, *chuanqi* tales have been held by Western-trained scholars in higher regard in terms of “literariness” than the

⁵ Studies of pre-modern popular religions that rely on *zhiguai* material include: E.g. Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods of Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Robert Hymes, “Personal and Bureaucratic Hierarchy in Chinese Religion: Evidence from the Song Dynasty,” in *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*, ed. Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 37-69; Richard Von Glahn, “The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51.2 (1991), 651-714. Keith Knapp’s work on filial piety tales by contrast introduces the notion that strange tales may serve as performative models, as ritual in context, rather than historical reportage. See *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

⁶ See William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “Creativity and Storytelling in the Ch’uan-ch’i: Shen Ye-chih’s T’ang Tales,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (1998), 31-70; and Y. W. Ma, “Prose Writings of Han Yu and Ch’uan-ch’i Literature,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 7.2 (July 1969), 195-223.

majority of the *zhiguai*. As a result, more recent criticism has focused on the Tang *chuanqi*'s literary merits, but the aesthetic value of *zhiguai* narration in the Tang has not received due attention.⁷ This situation needs to be rectified because the *zhiguai* genre plays a more significant role in the development of the Tang narratives than many modern critics have acknowledged.⁸ According to Charles Hammond, many more *zhiguai* were written during Tang times and the term *chuanqi* only became a recognizable genre by late Tang times when Pei Xing 裴鏘 (active 860-880) entitled his story collection, *Chuanqi*.⁹ *Zhiguai* stories may appear less elaborate and adorned than *chuanqi* in both narrative and language; they are nevertheless the product of artistic construction and narrative manipulation.¹⁰

If the appeal of *chuanqi* lies in its treatment of extraordinary characters and depiction of human emotions, *zhiguai*'s appeal relies on the strangeness of its ghosts, spirits and other anomalies. The modern Chinese writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) in his essay "Talking About Ghosts" claims that he prefers the short stories by Ji Yun in *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 over the long tales by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1775) in *Liaozhai zhiqi* 聊齋志異. But even the pieces in *Yuewei caotang biji*, he argues, are not comparable with the *zhiguai* stories in *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, because the

⁷ For studies of Tang *chuanqi*, see Curtis Adkins, "The Hero in Tang Ch'uan-ch'i Tales," in *Critical Essays on Chinese Fiction*, ed. Winston L. Y. Yang and Curtis P. Adkins. (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1980), 17-46; Sarah Yim, "Structure, Theme, and Narrative in T'ang Ch'un-ch'i" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1979).

⁸ Karl Kao's introductory essay in *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) discusses in some detail the foundation of literary aspects of *chuanqi* in *zhiguai* works

⁹ Charles Hammond, "T'ang Stories in the T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1987), 16; for the usage of the term "chuanqi", see Miao Zhuang 苗壯, *Biji xiaoshuo shi* 筆記小說史 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1998), 457.

¹⁰ On manipulation of the reader's expectation in the *zhiguai* genre, see Karin Myhre, "The Appearances of Ghosts in Northern Dramas" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1998), 71-92.

former contains “prevailing customs and public morals” 世道人心. For him, *zhiguai* stories should be strange for strangeness’s sake and cannot be used as a vehicle for other purposes such as conveying moral messages and persuading the readers. The tales with moral orientation and persuasive ends although feature ornamental language and more convoluted plots, are little more than “contemporary tales” 時世小說 and are confined to their own time.¹¹ According to Zhou Zuoren, *Youyang zazu* has a more universal and timeless appeal precisely because of its non-persuasive approach to the strange. As Zhou points out, *Youyang zazu* is a *zhiguai* collection that focuses on creating and representing the strange itself for its literary aesthetic value rather than its moral or evidential value.

I argue that the apparent historical, cultural and religious values of the *zhiguai* genre should not confine its studies to the recognition and reconstruction of religion and society in ancient China. As a literary genre that contributes significantly to the development of the Chinese narrative, *zhiguai* deserves to be discussed on its own terms from a literary perspective. This dissertation seeks to reveal the artistic appeal of *zhiguai* stories by conducting a focused study of the *zhiguai* collection *Youyang zazu*. Compiled by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803-863) during arguably the most important period in the development of Chinese narratives, *Youyang zazu* is one of the highly regarded *zhiguai* collections extant today.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to study *Youyang zazu* as a literary work. I agree with Dewoskin that *zhiguai*’s apparent focus in the strange not only accommodates the creative needs of Chinese literati but also enriches the narrative tradition of Chinese literature by exploring topics and interests that are not taken

¹¹ Zhou Zuoren 周作人, “Tan gui lun” 談鬼論, *Zhou zuoren wenleibian huasha* 周作人文類編•花煞, ed. Zhong Shuhe 鐘叔河 (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 413.

seriously in other narrative forms. My approach to this argument, however, differs from Dewoskin's. While Dewoskin studies *zhiguai* from the perspective of the historical development of Chinese narrative, I intend to analyze the structure, narrative techniques, and aesthetic effect of *zhiguai* tales in *Youyang zazu* through the lens of Western concepts and theories.

This work has been largely ignored, particularly as a literary text, in both Western and Chinese sinology. Because of the miscellaneous nature of its content, previous studies have either treated this work as a useful resource for historical data or a collection of “hodge-podge”, and subsequently, many scholars fail to reveal the overall aesthetic pursuit of *Youyang zazu*.¹² I argue that the thirteen hundred entries included in this book are assembled with a consistent principle that guides the selection of the entries. The entries are composed and edited according to the thematic and aesthetic commitment of the book, which is to record the strange in pursuit of the aesthetic of *qi* 奇; the literary antithesis to what is ordinary, normal, commonplace, mediocre or typical. As a *zhiguai* collection, *Youyang zazu* focuses less on ideological premise or religious persuasion than entertaining the author himself and his audience. It is a work that celebrates the strange and the curious.

The emphasis of my textual analysis will be horror stories within *Youyang zazu*. Among thousands of records of the strange in the collection, horror stories deserve special attention because they enhance the representation of the fantastic, the monstrous and the supernatural by highlighting the unexpected, disturbing and dangerous aspect of the strange. They also intensify the reader's experience of the strange by provoking

¹² See Carrie E. Reed, “Motivation and Meaning of a ‘Hodgepodge’: Duan Chengshi's *Youyang zazu*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (2003).

strong emotions such as anxiety, disgust, fear and awe. By adding vitality and tension to the representation of the strange, horror tales contribute greatly to the aesthetic of *qi* and enhance the appeal of the collection.

The focus on the relatively short horror tales is not unique to this study. Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang in her *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, for example, invokes Freud's theory of the uncanny and argues that horror stories in *Liaozhai zhiyi* are integral components of the collection and serve to reflect the Qing literatus's hidden anxieties about his place in the socio-political order. "Horror fiction," as she defines, includes "not only stories that are consciously designed to provoke dread" but also "pieces where sublimated anxiety becomes the driving force of the narrative."¹³ My approach to horror tales in the *zhiguai* collection differs from Chiang's psychosocial framework in that I focus more on the literary features of narrative in horror tales by analyzing their themes, structures and narrative techniques. I define horror stories as narratives that describe men's close encounters with the strange that are threatening on either physical or cognitive levels. I agree with Chiang in that horror stories include not only accounts of horrifying attacks directly launched by malicious agents but also pieces in which uncertainty and anxiety become the core of the narrative. Still, such anxiety does not necessarily involve repressed desire and displaced identity. Anxiety and uncertainty can be the result of a literary construction that deliberately creates confusion in the reader's mind. From this perspective, horror tales exist throughout the *zhiguai* tradition, from Gan Bao 干寶 (fl.

¹³ Sing-Chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 2005), 61. To my knowledge, Chiang's study is the only one that examines *zhiguai* tales from the perspective of horror narrative.

317-322)'s *Soushen ji* 搜神記 to Dai Fu 戴孚 (fl. 757)'s *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 to Ji Yun's *Yuewei caotang biji*.

I will apply theoretical perspectives drawn from Tzvetan Todorov, Noël Carroll, Howard Phillips Lovecraft and other scholars to analyze the thematic concerns, narrative structures and literary techniques of these horror stories. Since horror stories are central to this dissertation, I have chosen to structure the study according to the various modes of horror elicited in *Youyang zazu*. My textual analysis is conducted under three thematic headings that will allow me to answer these central questions: 1) how can Western theories and concepts provide valuable insights on how to read and interpret *zhiguai* tales? 2) How does horror intensify the representation of the strange? 3) How do narrative techniques and literary motifs involved in horror tales help to create the aesthetic of *qi*?

This study, however, is not an end in itself; rather, it investigates the possibility of examining *zhiguai* from new literary perspectives. Although there has never been a lack of academic interest in applying Western research methods to Chinese *zhiguai* material, very few have examined *zhiguai* tales from the perspective of horror narrative that intends to provoke anxiety or fear. This study is an attempt to rectify such situation. By using Western concepts and theories of horror mentioned above, the study provides close analysis of horror tales in *Youyang zazu*, which not only uncovers the literary mechanism of these tales but also reveals the overall thematic commitment and aesthetic pursuit of the collection. Furthermore, my case study of horror tales in *Youyang zazu* offers wider implications for the readings of other *zhiguai* tales and sheds light on Chinese representation of the strange in general.

The Aesthetic of *Qi*

Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 defines *qi* 奇 simply as *yi* 異 which can be approximately translated as “different,” “unusual,” or “exceptional.” The word *qi* often appears in combination with its synonyms such as *guai* 怪 (strange), *yi* 異 (unusual), and *gui* 詭 (mysterious). These words, though not completely interchangeable with *qi*, are close to it in denotation. In *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典, for example, *guai* and *gui* both carry the meaning of *yi* and *yi* can be explained as *qi*. In my study, I treat *qi* as an aesthetic concept that refers to a quality or a state of being unusual, different, strange and extraordinary—the direct opposite of being ordinary (*chang* 常) or canonical (*zheng* 正).¹⁴ Many scholars have translated *qi* as “strange,” “unusual,” “fantastic”, etc., but since this term is central for my study, I choose to keep the original word *qi* to avoid likelihood of confusion.¹⁵

In his study of *qi* in traditional Chinese narrative, Liang Shi argues that although the concept of *qi* began to take full-fledged shape during the Tang dynasty, some of its essential elements can be traced back to the very beginnings of the Chinese narrative. Based on *Zuozhuan* 左傳, *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Liezi* 列子, he argues that the writing of the strange and unusual was already evident in the earliest stage of Chinese narrative. In fact, later writers of *zhiguai* often turn to *Zhuangzi* and *Liezi* as the ancestors of the *zhiguai* genre. The Qing critic Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮沅, for example, remarks that, “of all the excellent writing throughout history nothing surpasses *Zuozhuan* because it is the best

¹⁴ In this sense, the antonym of *qi* is *zheng* 正 (orthodox, canonical) or *chang* 常 (normative, ordinary).

¹⁵ Judith Zeitlin in her work *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* has discussed various terms used to refer to the anomalous and the strange, including *yi*, *qi* and *guai* 怪, see 5-7.

narrative of grotesques and anomalies” 千古文字之妙,無過左傳,最善敘怪異事。¹⁶

However, one should point out that although writing of the strange existed long before the third century, it did not take on a form of its own until *zhiguai* began to emerge as a distinctive genre during the Six Dynasties. At that time, the pursuit of the strange became the major characteristic of the *zhiguai*, which gradually separated this genre from historical writing. A quick glance at the titles of *zhiguai* collections during this period reveals that more than half of these works bear titles that contain words meaning strange, bizarre, unusual or mysterious.¹⁷ During the Tang dynasty, the word *qi* was officially associated with the writing of the strange and unusual which came to occupy a pronounced position in literary writing. Hu Yinglin famously remarks that, “when it came to the Tang dynasty, writers began to intentionally pursue *qi*, narrating it in the form of *xiaoshuo*” 至唐人乃作意好奇,假小說以寄筆端。¹⁸ What Hu Yinglin refers to is the Tang *chuanqi*, a genre by its definition committed to transmit *qi*. *Chuanqi* shares with *zhiguai* a common preoccupation with the strange, but its focus expands from the theme of the supernatural to extraordinary human characters and affairs. This expansion in content is a clear indication that what was considered strange was no longer confined to the supernatural elements of a story and that unusual mundane affairs could also render *qi*. During this period, the writing of the strange not only grew into a self-conscious practice but also became a much more pleasurable activity within the literate life. Yu Ji

¹⁶ Feng Zhenluan 冯镇峦, “Du Liaozhai zashuo” 讀聊齋雜說, in *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan* 中國歷代小說論著選 (Jiangxi: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 532.

¹⁷ Liang Shi, *Reconstructing the Historical Discourse of Traditional Chinese Fiction* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 74.

¹⁸ Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, *Eryou zhuiyi* 二酉綴遺, *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢 vol.2, ed. Zhonghua shuju shanghai bianjisuo 中華書局上海編輯所 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 486.

虞集 (1272-1348) of the Yuan dynasty 元 explains the Tang literati elite's love for the strange:

Among the literati of the Tang, not many had original insights into the classics, arts, the Dao, and scholarship. They only set their minds on composing embellished writings. When they had time on their hands and had nothing to occupy their minds, they would imagine mysterious creatures and extraordinary encounters and indulge in an entranced use of their talents. They then gave their idle fancies far-fetched meanings and used them as substitutes for poetry and prose intercourse. At places where they met, each of them produced a writing to amuse one another. What they wrote did not have to be true events. This is called transmitting *qi*.

唐之才人, 于經藝道學有見者少, 徒知好為文辭, 閒暇無所用心, 輒想像幽怪遇合, 才情恍惚之事, 作為詩章答問之意, 博會以為說. 盍簪之次, 各出行卷, 以相娛玩, 非必真有是事, 謂之傳奇.¹⁹

Yu Ji's comments suggest several observations with regard to Tang literati's attitude towards the strange. First, they were very interested in the strange in general. Second, the writing of the strange was so popular for literati during the Tang dynasty that exchanging tales became a normal activity during social gatherings. Finally, the writing of the strange was a great source of entertainment as well as amusement for the Tang literati. While the first observation explains the social and cultural context for Tang literati's passion towards the strange, the last two note that the Tang literati deliberately engaged in the writing of the anomalous in order to create an enjoyable experience in times of leisure.

¹⁹ Yu Ji 虞集, "Xieyun xuan ji" 寫韻軒記, *Daoyuan xuegu lu* 道園學古錄, juan 38.11a-b.

Tang literati's conscious pursuit of the strange during social events is most evident in the Tang *chuanqi* writers' own writing. Shen Jiji 沈既濟 (ca.750-800), the author of "Renshi zhuan" 任氏傳, claims that he wrote down the story of the fox lady Miss Ren when he was at a banquet with his friends on a boat, collecting strange tales from each other (浮穎涉淮, 方舟沿流, 晝宴夜話, 各征其異說). Li Gongzuo 李公佐 (ca.770-848) who wrote the famous Tang *chuanqi* tale "Nanke taishou zhuan" 南柯太守傳 also paints a similar picture in his work "Guyue dujing" 古岳瀆經: "During the Dingchou year of the Zhenyuan reign, Li Gongzuo of Longxi was traveling along the Xiaoxiang river and the Cangwu mountain where he accidentally ran into the assistant secretary of the South Yang Heng from Hongnong. We docked the boat next to a Buddhist temple. On the river under the moon, we collected strange tales from each other and talked about things that are *qi*" 貞元丁醜歲, 隴西李公佐泛瀟湘蒼梧. 偶遇征南從事弘農楊衡, 泊舟古岸, 淹留佛寺, 江空月浮, 征異話奇. In another tale "Lujiang Feng'ao zhuan" 廬江馮媼傳, Li mentions that he created this piece when he met with three friends and spent the night talking about the strange. (元和六年夏五月, 江淮從事李公佐使至京, 回次漢南, 與渤海高鉞, 天水趙儼, 河南宇文鼎會于傳舍. 宵話征異, 各盡見聞) These records show that during the time, Tang literati have already consciously pursuit the strange either in conversation or in writing as a way of entertaining themselves, especially during social gatherings. Although in the writing of the strange, Tang literati often claimed that their story were either based on personal experience or testimony of reliable informants, they clearly did not write these tales in the evidential mode, that is, to verify the existence of the strange. Their emphasis was rather on the

extraordinariness of the characters or the strangeness of the events. As Karl S.Y. Kao argues, “to most Tang literati who engaged in the writing of anomalous tales, whether the supernatural is real nor not has become a bracketed question, or was only of marginal literary concern. Even as they habitually tag a claim at the end of the text asserting the ‘documentary’ nature of the story, the primary interest of the writers has turned to giving literary representation to the subject.”²⁰ In other words, for the Tang literati, writing about the strange was no longer factually oriented, but rather a literary endeavor to represent the strange and experiment their writing skills.

Note that the unusual subject matters are not the only source of *qi*. As Liang Shi argues, narrative techniques can also engender the effect of *qi*. According to him, one important dimension of *qi* is concerned with “the way a story is narrated, weaving a plot, inventing a character, making up a conversation, upsetting the reader’s expectation and creating suspense.”²¹ Because such *qi* exists on the narrative level, Liang refers it as “narrative *qi*”. Here the effect of *qi* does not rely on the subject of the text, but on the skillful and intricate narrative manipulation that not only develops character and changes the flow of events but also creates suspense and tension in the text. In tales of the strange, narrative *qi* is as indispensable as unusual content as it not only conveys the strangeness of the content but also enhances the dramatic suspense in the narrative. As the Qing dynasty commentator He Changsen 何昌森 (n.d.) writes, “even if the event is *qi*, the character is *qi*, and the experience is *qi*, without a profound and exquisite writing talent to narrate the events, the text will not be unlike seven-character lines of scripture sung by blind artists. What does it have to offer for appreciation?” 即事奇, 人奇, 遭奇, 而無幽雋

²⁰ Karl S. Y. Kao, “Projection, Displacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*,” in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), 200.

²¹ Liang Shi, *Reconstructing the Historical Discourse*, 244.

典麗之筆以敘其事, 則與盲人所唱七字經無異, 又何能供賞鑒.²² Many scholars have argued that in Tang times classical tales reached a new level as a literary form. Lu Xun, for example, argues that the *chuanqi* is to be considered the first “consciously artistic” form of Chinese narrative. With well-rounded characters and plots that are more convoluted, Tang *chuanqi* are often considered fine examples of narrative complexity.²³

Narrative *qi*, however, is not confined to *chuanqi* or fictions of Ming and Qing dynasties; intricate narrative manipulation is also extant in earlier Chinese narratives. In his study of narrative structures in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 BC) *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), Joseph Roe Allen III argues that the narrative devices used in *Shiji* including “the direct quote”, “the comment” and “the anecdote” not only develop characters but also create a more complex plot and complicate point of view in *Shiji*, which subsequently give the text more flavor and wider appeal than dry facts.²⁴ Sima Qian may not necessarily be aware of the concept of narrative *qi*, but his writing displays a level of narrative quality that is considered by the Qing critic Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608-1661) to be the best example of narrative *qi*. In his comments of the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*), Jin compliments the novel by comparing the author with Sima Qian: “This is such a *qi* writing that I believe even if we brought the Historian Qian

²² He Changsen 何昌森, “Shuishiyuan Xu” 水石緣序, in *Shuishiyuan* 水石緣 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990).

²³ See William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “Creativity and Storytelling in the Ch’uan ch’i: Shen Ya-chih’s T’ang tangs,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (1998): 31-70 and James Robert Hightower, “Introduction”, in *Classical Chinese Literature: An anthology of Translation*, Volume I: *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, ed. John Minford, Joseph S.M. Lau, (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2000).

²⁴ Joseph Roe Allen III, “An Introduction Study of Narrative Structure in the *Shiji*,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3 (Jan 1981): 31-66.

back to life and showed it to him, he could not make it any better” 如此奇文, 吾謂雖起史遷示之, 亦複安能出手哉。²⁵

Skillful narrative manipulation can also be found in pre-Tang *zhiguai*. Although most pre-Tang *zhiguai* tales remain brief, a number of these tales also display comparable narrative sophistication to well-known Tang tales. Tales such as “Zhao Feiyan waizhuan” 趙飛燕外傳 attributed to Ling Xuan 伶玄 (fl. 6-1BC) of the former Han,²⁶ “Dinggu ci” 丁姑祠 in Gan Bao 干寶 (fl. 317-322)’s *Soushen ji* 搜神記, “Pang A” 龐阿 in Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444)’s *Youming lu* 幽明錄 all feature narrative techniques that contribute to their appeal as accounts of anomalies. Gu Mingdong in his book *Chinese Theories of Fiction: a Non-Western Narrative System* argues that these *zhiguai* tales differ from Tang *chuanqi* only in degree of sophistication, not in employment of narrative techniques. He continues to argue that no sudden and clear break occurred between the Tang *chuanqi* and the pre-Tang *zhiguai*: “there was no narrative revolution in the Tang; there was only the culmination of an evolutionary process.”²⁷ It is important to note that *zhiguai* was not replaced by *chuanqi*, it rather continued to thrive during the Tang. In other words, although *zhiguai* predates *chuanqi* in time and preludes it in subject matter, *zhiguai* should not be reduced to *chuanqi* during the Tang. Some Tang *zhiguai* tales were indistinguishable from their predecessors in the Six Dynasties in both content and form; others developed into longer stories that, in Reed’s words, “fell between the cracks—

²⁵ Jin Shengtan 金聖歎, “Diwu caizishu shuihu diqishihui zongping” 第五才子書水滸第七十回總評, in *Shuihu ziliao huibian* 水滸資料彙編, ed. Ma Tiji 馬蹄疾 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 137.

²⁶ For a discussion of the text and authorship of the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, see Zhang Xincheng 張心澂 (1887-1973), *Weishu tongkao* 偽書通考, (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1957), 680-681.

²⁷ Gu Mingdong, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: a Non-Western Narrative System* (NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 73.

neither barebones reportage nor highly sophisticated Tang tales.”²⁸ In *Youyang zazu*, we can see both types of *zhiguai* tales. These tales are often equipped with vivid description of scenes, careful reconstruction of dialogue and intricate plot that intends to upset the reader’s expectation. With narrative techniques as such, these pieces are among the most intriguing ones in the collection.

In *Youyang zazu*, *qi* is also displayed in the representation of strange events and objects. In the introduction of *Chinese Chronicles of the Strange: the “Nuogao Ji”*, Carrie E. Reed argues in that the “Nuogao” *juan* is “the only section of the *Youyang zazu* whose specific focus and content is ‘strange accounts.’”²⁹ I disagree with Reed on this claim and argue that the rest of *Youyang zazu* is also concerned with the representation of the strange. Reed is correct in pointing out that *Youyang zazu* does include a considerable amount of materials that deal with mundane matters, but these matters are by no means “everyday life” of common Chinese. Such materials include description of ancient customs, court etiquette, spiritual activities of monks and priests, exotic lands, undocumented wildlife, etc. I argue that Reed’s definition of “strange” is too narrow and fails to describe the full complexity of the word. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “strange” as a word that may include any of the following meanings: 1. of or belonging to another country, foreign, alien; 2. belonging to some other place or neighborhood; unknown to the particular locality specified or implied7. unknown, unfamiliar; not known, met with, or experienced before; 8. of a kind that is unfamiliar or rare; unusual, uncommon, exceptional, singular, out of the way. As such, “strange” carries a wide

²⁸ Carrie E. Reed, “Motivation and Meaning of a ‘Hodgepodge’: Duan Chengshi’s *Youyang zazu*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (2003), 130.

²⁹ Carrie E. Reed, *Chinese Chronicles of the Strange* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 15.

spectrum of meanings, including not only the supernatural marvelous, the extraordinary mundane but also the unfamiliar every day.

The wide range of the meaning and the more flexible usage of the term “strange” make it a preferred choice in the academic discussion of *zhiguai*. In her study *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, Judith Zeitlin deliberately use the term “strange” as the counterpart of the three characters, *yi*, *guai* and *qi*, which she respectively defines as “different”, “anomalous” and “marvelous. As Zeitlin insightfully points out, in Chinese tradition, anything that is out of the ordinary or deviates from the norm (*chang* 常) or the orthodox manner (*zheng* 正) can be considered strange.³⁰ Inglis traces the early usage of the character “strange” (*guai*) to the description of tributary objects collected from the periphery. In the *Yu’s Tribute* (*Yugong* 禹貢) of the *Shangshu* 尚書, Inglis argues that *guai* usually referred to tributary objects and unusual local customs. These examples testify that in ancient China, *guai* had at least two sets of meanings “on the one hand *guai* referred to phenomena of a cosmological nature and included ghosts, deities, animistic spirits, legendary creatures, and ‘supernatural’ entities in general—in short, matters about which the Master did not speak and which post-Enlightenment, Western-trained scholars would understand as paranormal. Yet, on the other hand, *guai* also referred to rare objects and customs.”³¹ Inglis accurately points out the broader connotations of *guai*. This observation is also valid in *Youyang zazhi*, in which strangeness comes not only from the supernatural and the otherworldly but also from the

³⁰ Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 5-6.

³¹ Alister David Inglis, *Hong Mai’s “Record of the Listener” and Its Song Dynasty Context* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 113-114.

peripheral, the foreign, the uncommon and the extraordinary. The representation of the supernaturally strange and the mundanely strange both contribute to the aesthetic of *qi*.

In addition, the combination and juxtaposition of strangeness of different kinds and from multiple sources also help to create a sense of incongruity and unfamiliarity, which is, in many cases, an integral part of creating the effect of *qi*. An analysis of the content and organization of entries in each *juan* 卷 also shows that *Youyang zazu* is compiled and organized on the principle of rejecting the generalized patterns of experience and embracing the unusual, the special, the unique, the odd and the particularized. Such principle directly reflects the thematic and aesthetic commitment of the book, which is to represent the strange and construct the effect of *qi* in the *Youyang zazu* collection.

Overview of Content

Chapter One offers an overview of the *Youyang zazu* as a *zhiguai* collection. It first addresses the textual and reception history of the text. It shows that the collection has been noticed throughout ages for its unique style, strange content, obscure language as well as its wide scope of topics. The chapter continues with an analysis of the structure and content of the collection. I argue that the content of *Youyang zazu* ranges from the mundanely strange to the supernaturally strange. While the supernaturally strange includes phenomena that are strange because of their contradiction to the presumed order in the realm of worldly life, the mundanely strange features events or objects which seem well-embedded in abundant details of worldly environments but are too rare to be part of the everyday human experience. To better understand the composition of content in each *juan* and the difference among various *juan* in their focus of the strange, a table is created

to reflect the percentage of various modes of representing the strange in each *juan*. The strangeness of the collection is manifested through not only the content but also through the seemingly random arrangement of these entries. The apparent lack of organization combined with the unusual nature of the content makes the text not only a collection of strange accounts, but more importantly a strange collection of *zhiguai*.

Chapter Two discusses *Youyang zazu*'s prefaces and the author's attitude towards his own work. In the prefaces, Duan constructs a unique literary tradition for his own *zhiguai* writing and suggests that his work does not belong to the traditional category of historiography. Rather his work is a continuation of two fundamental classics *Shijing* 詩經 and *Yijing* 易經 in which the strange content and the playful style are at the heart of their aesthetic appeal. Duan's arguments in the prefaces place *Youyang zazu*—a work of familiar genre—into an unfamiliar context and underscore the unique perspective of the work. In other words, Duan has already tried to establish the unusualness of the work through his arguments in the prefaces. The preface also demonstrated the influence of ancient-style prose movement 古文運動 on Duan's view regarding the writing of the strange in general.³² I argue that Duan inherited from Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819)—the two pillars of the ancient-style prose movement a more relaxed attitude towards writing, a love for the strange, and a conscious pursuit for the aesthetic of *qi*.

Chapter Three employs Todorov's theory of the fantastic to explore the narrative structure of horror stories in *Youyang zazu*. Todorov defines the fantastic in relation to its

³² During the Tang dynasty, literati advocated for reform in prose style and content. Scholars such as Han Yu criticized the popular parallel prose style for its overly ornate language at the expense of content and called for a return to the classic writing style found in Confucian Classics. This movement is known as the ancient-style prose movement.

two neighboring genres: the marvelous and the uncanny. If the narrated events accord with the laws of post-Enlightenment scientific common sense, we reside in the realm of the uncanny; if they contradict these laws, we have entered the realm of the marvelous. Only when the reader hesitates between the natural and the supernatural explanation are we in the realm of the fantastic. One problem with applying a Todorovian schema to the Chinese literature of the strange is that the term “supernatural” carries a post-enlightenment scientific undertone: what is considered natural and supernatural depends on modern scientific study of the laws of nature. However, the fundamental concept that the term stands for was employed long before the rise of modern natural science.³³ Every culture and historical period has phenomena or objects that contradict its presumed order in the realm of worldly life. In the case of Chinese literature of the strange, broad continuities exist in the territory of “supernatural” that span historical periods: what was considered a violation of normality in the human world in the pre-modern period, to a large extent, overlaps with what is considered as “supernatural” in modern time. For instance, phenomena that are not directly amenable to sensory perception or human control and omens and magical manifestations related to Taoist priests and Buddhist monks; or things that cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, human and nonhuman, animated and unanimated were all considered anomalies in the ordinary course of nature in medieval China. In modern times, these are still regarded by some people as postulated forces or entities whose effects surpass the possible achievement by human capabilities; that is, they are supernatural in nature. Such overlapping between medieval anomalies and the modern supernatural enables a Todorovian study of the

³³ For a detailed discussion on the developmental history of the term “supernatural” in Western tradition, see Benson Saler, “Supernatural as a Western Category,” *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology* 5.1 (1977): 31-53.

medieval Chinese *zhiguai* tales. Therefore, I will continue using the term “supernatural” in my study. But I shall avoid any modern scientific implication which accompanies the word and use it strictly in reference to concepts or phenomena that are in contradiction of the observable patterns that give the worldly life coherence. More specifically, I use “supernatural” to refer to gods, fairies, spirits, demons, ghosts, metamorphic plants or animals, and all sorts of magical experiences associated with Taoist priests and Buddhist monks. I argue that the fantastic—hesitation within the reader between two opposed interpretations of the same ambiguous events—is useful for us to fully appreciate a certain type of horror stories in *Youyang zazhi*. This type of horror stories thrives on the tension and suspense created by opposing interpretations. They reflect the overlapping relationship between the fantastic and horror and can be suitably labeled “fantastic horror”. In fantastic horror stories, ghosts, spirits, and demons are not represented as directly as in other types of horror stories; their existence is strongly suggested but not definitively clarified or substantiated. In fantastic horror tales, the reader is led to ambiguous events open to varying interpretations and does not have comprehensive information or a satisfying conclusion. In fantastic horror tales, the anxiety of uncertainty becomes the primary driving force of the narrative.

Chapter Four employs Noël Carroll’s theory of horror and focuses on monsters and their fear-provoking role in representing the strange. After I introduce Carroll’s theory of horror as a cognitive approach and explain his ideas of monster, I argue that Carroll’s cognitive approach to horror and the notion of monsters are illuminating because they provide a useful tool for the analysis of the mechanism of horror stories and assist to the explanation of the aesthetic experience of disgust, revulsion and fear elicited

by these horror narratives. Monster horror deals with the most explicit intrusion of the supernatural in a perfectly mundane world. Many stories in *Youyang zazu* are comparatively short, lacking sophisticated plot and identifiable characters, yet they are fascinating and compelling to even modern readers. The major appeal of these short horror narratives lies in the representation of strange monsters that are uniquely dangerous and impure. During the analysis of the stories, I invoke Carroll's concept of impurity, including how a monster is constructed to explain the transgressive nature of strange entities in *Youyang zazu*. I will also employ Andrew Tudor's schema of the invasion narrative to discuss textual patterns within monster horror stories. I acknowledge that Carroll's theory of horror is entity-based. That is, his definition of horror "involves essential reference to an entity, a monster, which then serves as the particular object of the emotion of art-horror".³⁴ Many critics find his definition of monsters too restrictive because it fails to explain texts that do not clearly present the source of horror and depend on mysterious, unexplained events rather than a specific monster. With this concern, I will progress to the next chapter that deals with cosmic horror.

Chapter Five will rely on H.P. Lovecraft's ideas of cosmic fear to interpret a specific type of horror stories in *Youyang zazu* that deal with ambiguous evil and withhold obscure monstrous agencies rather than clearly represent them. The focus of these stories is, in fact, that some hidden, mysterious force is at work behind certain phenomena through a process unknown to us. The law and order of the human world become insignificant when contrasted against the background of unknown spheres and powers. For Lovecraft, such alien contact evokes a profound sense of dread and a subtle attitude of awe. In *Youyang zazu*, contact with unknown forces often takes the form of a

³⁴ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 41.

distinctive narrative structure: a strange event takes place, and then after a certain length of time something horrible happens. No explicit interpretations are offered with regard to the connection of the two incidents; however, an accompanying relationship between them is implied through their juxtaposition. I will argue that these stories are not motivated by political, religious, or moral purposes; rather, they are more appropriately subject to what Lovecraft has described as “literature of cosmic fear” which features phenomena beyond our comprehension—whose scope extends beyond the narrow field of the mundane. The mysterious nature of the causal agent, the process and the surprisingly meaningful outcome can be better understood in terms of the fundamental thesis that Lovecraft developed in the cultivation of cosmic fear: the human microcosm is contained in the magnitude and malignity of the macrocosm. According to Lovecraft, what cosmic fear confirms is the simple fact that the world contains vast unknown and unknowable forces. I will compare stories of cosmic fear with tales that operate under other principles such as the principle of karma to show similarities and differences. I argue that tales of cosmic fear more adequately convey the incomprehensibility and the uncontrollability of the strange.

Chapter Six is the concluding chapter that offers a few examples of how one story can be approached from various perspectives. I argue that the reading of horror stories should not be confined to a single theory or limited to a specific point of view, as the stories have many layers of components that are subject to multiple interpretations. Each reading provides a unique perspective on the representation of the strange. The conclusion argues that *Youyang zazu* is a book devoted to the representation of the strange and the pursuit of *qi*. Through the review of the collection’s content and structure

in Chapter One and the analysis of its prefaces in Chapter Two, we show that the *Youyang zazu* collection is intentionally constructed to stress strangeness from various perspectives. It not only includes the supernaturally strange, but also emphasizes unfamiliarity within the familiar and the extraordinary among the ordinary. In addition to many informative and descriptive pieces that simply present strange objects or phenomena, *Youyang zazu* also encloses a great number of sophisticated narrative pieces that focus on eliciting emotions such as fear and anxiety in their reader. These horror stories recount one's intense experience with the strange and magnify the reader's emotion towards the strange by adding vitality and tension to the representation of the anomalous through plot, theme and narrative technique. These stories are essential to the aesthetic pursuit of *Youyang zazu*—a collection assembled according to the principle of *qi* that rejects the normal and the familiar, and embraces the unusual, the special, the unique, the odd and the particularized. Overall, my study provides an alternative perspective for the analysis of *zhiguai* tale, which does not focus on its religious, political or didactic purposes but rather shows how its unique literary features and aesthetic value can be appreciated today by both general readers and academics.

CHAPTER ONE

THE *YOUYANG ZAZU* COLLECTION

Textual History

The *Youyang zazu* as we see it today consists of thirty *juan* 卷 (volumes) that are divided into two parts: the twenty-*juan qianji* 前集 (initial collection) and the ten-*juan xuji* 續集 (sequel). But as a work that was written and compiled during the late Tang period, this collection went through considerable changes in terms of both structure and organization.

Since its completion, *Youyang zazu* went through numerous editions. Some of the editions remain only in fragments. In addition, historians, bibliographers, critics and publishers throughout the centuries often provide inconsistent and sometimes contradictory information about the collection. The loss of material evidence and the discrepancies among written records complicate the textual history of the *Youyang zazu* text. The issue of the sequel (*xu* 續), in particular, makes the study of the textual history more complex.

A number of scholars who study *Youyang zazu* have, to various extents and from various perspectives, discussed the textual history of the work. Fang Nansheng's 方南生 "A Discussion regarding the Editions of *Youyang zazu*" 酉陽雜俎版本流傳的探討³⁵; Li Jianguo's *Annotated Catalogue of Anomaly Accounts and Romances of the Tang and*

³⁵ Fang Nansheng 方南生, "Youyang zazu benben liuchuan de tantao" 酉陽雜俎版本流傳的探討, *Fujian shida xuebao* 福建師大學報 3 (1979).

Five Dynasties 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄³⁶; Chen Lianshan's 陳連山 "The Block-printed Editions of *Youyang zazu* during King Seongjong of Joseon's 成宗(1457 - 1494) Reign" 酉陽雜俎在李朝成宗時代的刊刻³⁷; Zhao Shixian's 趙世暹 "The Serial Picture Book Carved in the Southern Song Dynasty and a Discussion of the Bowdlerization of *Youyang zazu* before the Chenghua Period 成化 (1465-1487)" 南宋刻的一種連環畫——兼論今本酉陽雜俎在成化前遭刪改³⁸; Pan Jianguo's 潘建國 "The Early Ming Editions of *Youyang zazu*" 酉陽雜俎明初版本考³⁹; Imahori Seiji's 今堀城二 "Yūyō zassoshōko" 酉陽雜俎小考⁴⁰; Imamura Yoshio's 今村與志雄 "酉陽雜俎刊本の沿革" in his Japanese translation of *Yūyō zasso* 酉陽雜俎⁴¹ and Carrie E. Reed's *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang zazu* ⁴² all offer valuable and detailed information on the development of the text. This study therefore remains relatively brief.

One of the major discrepancies among different editions and records of *Youyang zazu* is the number of *juan* included in the collection and how the *juan* are distributed among the different sections. In terms of records of *Youyang zazu* in history, bibliography and anthology, there are four groups of opinions based on the number of *juan* listed under *Youyang zazu*. The first group listed *Youyang zazu* as a 30-*juan* work. The "Yiwen zhi"

³⁶ Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (Tianjin: nankai daxue, 1993).

³⁷ Chen Lianshan 陳連山, "Youyang zazu zai lichao chengzong shidai de kanke" 酉陽雜俎在李朝成宗時代的刊刻, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 2 (1998).

³⁸ Zhao Shixian 趙世暹, "Nansong ke de yizhong lianhuan hua—jianlun jinben youyangzazu zai chenghua qian zao shangai" 南宋刻的一種連環畫——兼論今本酉陽雜俎在成化前遭刪改, *Wenhui Bao* 文匯報, 6.23, 1962.

³⁹ Pan Jianguo 潘建國, "Youyang zazu Mingchu banben kao" 酉陽雜俎明初版本考, *Wenxue yichan Online* 文學遺產網路版 2 (2010).

⁴⁰ Imahori Seiji 今堀城二, "Yūyō zasso shōko" 酉陽雜俎小考, *Shigaku kenkyu* 12.4 (Jan.1942): 52-90.

⁴¹ Imamura Yoshio, *Yūyō zasso* 酉陽雜俎 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1980), 313-331.

⁴² Carrie E. Reed. *A Tang Miscellany, An Introduction to Youyang zazu* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 25-42.

藝文志 of *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1067) and the *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 by Wang Yaochen 王堯臣 (1001-1056) are among the first group.

The second group listed *Youyang zazu* as a work that included the 20-juan *qianji* 前集 (initial collection) and the 10-juan *xuji* 續集 (sequel). This group includes the *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 by Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (ca.1105-1180); the *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 by Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (ca.1190-post 1249); the *Shaoshi shanfang bicon* 少室山房筆叢 by Hu Yinglin (1551-1602); the *Jindai mishu* 津逮秘書 by Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599-1659); the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 by Ji Yun (1724-1805) and the *Bisong lou changshu zhi* 皕宋樓藏書志 by Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 (1834-1894).

The third group identified *Youyang zazu* as having only twenty juan, including Gao Ru's 高儒 (fl.1540) *Baichuan shuzhi* 百川書志, Zhu Muxie's 朱睦㮮 (1518-1587) *Wanjuan tang shumu* 萬卷堂書目 and Chen Di's 陳第 (1541-1617) *Shishan tang cangshu mulu* 世善堂藏書目錄.

The fourth group only mentioned the name of *Youyang zazu* or cited from the work without specifying the number of its volumes. Yan Zhu's 宴珠 (991-1055) *Yanyuan xiangong leiyao* 宴元獻公類要 preserved in Xie Jin's 解縉 (1369-1415) *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典, for example, quoted passages from *Youyang zazu*, but it did not state how many volumes it had. The *Suichutang shumu* 遂初堂書目 by You Mao 尤袤 (1127-

1194) and the Ming bibliographical catalogue *Wenyuange shumu* 文淵閣書目 by Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1364-1444) are also examples of the fourth group.

In addition to records found in history, bibliography and anthology, the numerous woodblock editions of *Youyang zazu* also note different numbers of volumes. For example, several editions published during the Song dynasty offered inconsistent information about how many *juan* the *Youyang zazu* collection included. The 1214 edition prefaced by Zhou Deng 周登 (n.d.) only mentioned a twenty-*juan* *Youyang zazu*. Nine years later, Deng Fu 鄧復 (n.d.) added the ten-*juan xuji* 續集 (sequel) to a version he saw and republished the work in thirty *juan*. In 1250 *Youyang zazu* was reorganized and published by an anonymous scholar with the help of Peng Kuishi 彭奎實 (n.d.). Because this version emerged during the Chunyou 淳祐 period (1241-1252), it is often referred as the “Chunyou” edition. This version did not mention the number of *juan*. Unfortunately, all these Song editions have been lost.

The woodblock editions we can see today are from the Ming and Qing dynasties. They can be grouped into two categories. The first consists of the twenty-*juan* editions that include the “Xindu” edition 新都 by Wang Shixian 王士賢 (n.d.) of Xindu county (in Sichuan province) and the edition compiled by Shang Jun 商浚 (n.d.).⁴³ Neither edition had a record of the ten *juan* sequel. In 1492 Li Shigao 李士高 (n.d.) published a twenty-*juan* *Youyang zazu* in Korea. According to Lee Shuntak 李盛鐸 (1860-1927), one of the Japanese editions of *Youyang zazu* was based on this 1492 Korean edition. Li also argued that the Korean edition appeared more than one hundred years before than Ming

⁴³ Because this latter edition is included in the *Baihai* 稗海 collectanea, it is also known as the “Baihai” edition.

dynasty official Li Yunhu's 李雲鵠 (n.d.) version, so it must have come from the Song or Yuan dynasty editions.⁴⁴ The second group includes thirty-*juan* editions, such as the Ming bibliophile Zhao Qimei's 趙琦美 (1563-1624) "Maiwang guan" 脈望館 edition, Li Yunhu's *Wuxu* 五序 edition⁴⁵, the "Jindai" 津逮 edition in Mao Jin's 毛晉 (1599-1659) *Jindai mishu* 津逮秘書 and the "Xunjin" 學津 edition which was included in Zhang Haipeng's 張海鵬 (1755-1816) collectanea *Xuejin taoyuan* 學津討原.

In addition to these twenty and thirty-*juan* editions, there are also a number of works that quoted extensively from *Youyang zazu*, such as the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 edited by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), the *Shuo Fu* 說郛 completed in 1368 by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (fl. 1360-1368), the *Tangdai congshu* 唐代叢書 printed during the Qianlong period 乾隆 (1736-1796), the *Longwei mishu* 龍威秘書 published in 1796 by Ma Junliang 馬駿良 (fl.1796) and the *Yiyuan junhua* 藝苑掇華 by Gu Zhikui 顧之逵 (1753-1797).

The most influential modern edition was edited by Fang Nansheng 方南生 who based his version on the Ming "Maiwang guan" edition (also known as the "Zhao" edition). He also used various other editions, including the "Baihai" edition, the "Xuejin" edition and the "Jindai" edition as his references. Because Fang Nansheng's edition is commonly considered by scholars the most accurate and comprehensive modern edition, my study uses this version as the primary source.

⁴⁴ See Pan Jianguo 潘建國, "Youyang zazu" 2 (2010).

⁴⁵ It is called the *Wuxu* edition because it contains five prefaces including Li's own 1608 preface, Zhao Qimei's preface, the "Chunyou" preface of 1205, Deng Fu's preface of 1223 and Zhou Deng's preface of 1214.

The discrepancies in the number of *juan* noted by various editions of the text and numerous bibliographies throughout history become more puzzling because Duan Chengshi himself claimed in the preface that this work had thirty *pian* 篇 which were divided into twenty *juan*. Thus discrepancies exist not only among various historical records but also between Duan's own preface and many later editions. Reed provides two explanations for this discrepancy. The first is that Duan's preface was only a preface to the *qianji*. According to Imamura, in a Southern Song encyclopedia *Hailu suishi* 海錄碎事, compiled by the governor of Quanzhou 泉州 Ye Tinggui 叶廷珪 (n.d.), Duan Chengshi was said to have written a preface to the *Xu zazu* 續雜俎 (*Sequel to the zazu*). Ye also quoted a line from Duan's preface that stated, "The strange is not the discussion of ghosts, and erudition differs from divine messages" 怪非鬼議博異神緘.⁴⁶ Brief as it is, this line suggests that Duan's concept of the strange is beyond the supernatural. According to Reed, although this preface to the sequel is no longer extant, such evidence shows that Duan did write a sequel some of which was still circulating by the Southern Song. But the fact that this is the only record of the preface to the sequel also suggests that by the time of Ye Tinggui, the sequel was not only less well-known but also physically scattered.⁴⁷ This scenario helps explain why some bibliographies had the record of the ten-*juan* sequel or considered the text as a total thirty-*juan* work while others only identified twenty *juan* in *Youyang zazu*. The second explanation suggests that some *juan* we see today in the sequel were originally part of the *juan* in *qianji*. For example, *juan* one to three in the sequel may have been the latter parts to *juan* fourteen

⁴⁶ Ye Tinggui 叶廷珪, *Hailu suishi* 海錄碎事 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1969), 18.2103.

⁴⁷ Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 27-40.

and fifteen in the *qianji*; *juan* eight to ten in the sequel could have been intended to be parts of *juan* sixteen to nineteen. These materials were initially lost. When subsequent scholars recovered them through other works, they did not replace them where they initially belonged; rather they made them into separate *juan*. In the process, they also selected various *pian* in the *qianji*, combined them with the newly recovered material, and labeled them as supplements in the sequel.⁴⁸

Reed is in favor of the first explanation because the second explanation is “intriguing but perhaps not as plausible,” since it suggests that the later editors of *Youyang zazu* deliberately undermined the initial structure of the *qianji* just to “make an even number of *juan* for the *qianji* and *xuji*”.⁴⁹ After carefully comparing the differences between *qianji* and *xuji*, Reed argues that the first explanation has stronger evidence. She finds that in the *qianji*, the percentage of dated entries is much lower than in the *xuji*: in fact, only forty-three percent of entries mention specific time as opposed to sixty-three percent in the *xuji*. Compared to *qianji*, *xuji* has a much larger portion of entries that focus on the Tang. Another significant difference between *qianji* and *xuji* is that in the former only seventeen percent of all pieces have specific sources; however, in the latter fifty-four percent of entries mention sources, many of which involve Duan’s own circumstances. Reed concludes that because of the differences in specificity and contemporaneity between *qianji* and *xuji*, *xuji* is very likely to be a separate piece that was finished later by Duan and added to the main collection.⁵⁰ Reed’s argument points out that *Youyang zazu* as a whole collection must have gone through a long writing and editing process. This view is shared by Zhou Xunchu’s 周勳初 who in his study of Tang

⁴⁸ Ibid., 40-41.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 42.

stories states that Duan experienced several phases of writing *Youyang zazu* and the completion of the work must have required a life-long effort.⁵¹

This point can be further illustrated if we look into individual entries in both *qianji* and *xuji* to determine the approximate completion time of each part. The latest date specified in the *qianji* is during the Huichang reign 會昌 (841-846). The “Chong pian” 蟲篇 (Insects) entry 723 notes that in the year of Renxu 壬戌 (the second year of the Huichang reign, i.e. 842), Duan found bee nests the size of chicken eggs in his orchard. In the “Mu pian” 木篇 (Woods) entry 745, Duan once again identified the year as *jiazi* 甲子 (the fourth year of the Huichang reign, i.e. 844). “Xi zhao” 喜兆 (Auspicious Portents) entry 201, “Wu yi” 物異 (Unusual Things) entry 422, and “Mao pian” (Furs) 毛篇 entry 644 all refer to the sub-editor Zhang Xifu 張希復 (n.d.) in the Jixian yuan 集賢院 (Academy of Scholarly Worthies) as the source of information. According to Imamura Yoshio, Duan also worked in the Jixian yuan during the beginning of the Huichang reign.⁵² Working with Zhang Xigu as a colleague, Duan probably acquired knowledge that he found interesting and strange during his conversations with Zhang and conveniently recorded what Zhang told him. During his stay in the academy, Duan had access to books that he had likely never read before (予職在集賢, 頗獲所未見書).⁵³ These books must have been great references for Duan to expand his horizon and enrich

⁵¹ Zhou Xunchu's 周勳初, *Tangren biji xiaoshuo kaosuo* 唐人筆記小說考索 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 257-258. Zhou argues that based on evidence found in *Shuo Fu* and *Xin Tang Shu*, the completion of *Youyang zazu* went through at least 3 phases: during the first phase, Duan completed his earliest work *Yulu* 語錄, in the second phase, he started working on *Youyang zazu* and *Luling guanxia ji* 廬陵官下記 and incorporated the content of *Yulu* into *Luling guanxia ji*; during the last phase, he incorporated some content from *Luling guanxia ji* into *Youyang zazu*.

⁵² Imamura Yoshio, *Yūyō zasso*, v.5, 291.

⁵³ *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎. *Xuji* 4.80

his work. Based on these dates, we can assume that the *qianji* was completed between the end of the Huichang reign and the beginning of the Dazhong reign 大中 (847-860). As for the *xuji*, “Sita ji” 寺塔記 (Temples and Pagodas) entry 122 is a brief author’s preface in which Duan mentions that the two *juan* on temples and pagodas were finished around the seventh year of the Dazhong reign (853). In fact all dated entries in the *xuji* are before 853, the year Duan returned to Chang’an 长安 from his previous post. In the preface, Duan also discussed that he organized and compiled these two *juan* to pass them on to Buddhist monks. Judging from this preface, it is likely that these two *juan* were written as independent pieces. This fact suggests that by 853, the content of the *xuji* was probably completed by Duan, but the material had yet to take the form of a supplement to the main book. We can then suppose that the addition to the *Youyang zazu* in the form of the *xuji* must have occurred after 853. Thus, the time difference between the completion dates of the two parts is at least five or six years. This analysis supports Reed’s speculation that the *qianji* and the *xuji* were written during different times and only later were they collected into a single work.

The textual history of *Youyang zazu* shows how *Youyang zazu* as a text develops over time. It not only provides us with important information regarding the text’s original structure but also helps us understand the writing and compiling process of the collection.

A Brief History of Reception

Throughout the ages, editors and commentators of *Youyang zazu* have constantly commented on its strange subject matter and abstruse language, but their remarks about the strangeness of the subjects are often coupled with acclaim of the incredibly wide scope of knowledge and topics included in the collection. A few commentators, however,

do focus on the literary merits of the work. They praise the entertaining quality of the work and the author's boldness in dealing with his subject matter.

In the 1214 woodblock edition of *Youyang*, Zhou Deng 周登 wrote a postface in which he remarked that “this book is where many accounts of the divine, the bizarre and the strange as well as hidden scriptures and secret records come from. As for exploring and analyzing the principles of things, *juan* such as “Qi qi” 器奇 (Marvelous Objects), “Yi jue” 藝絕 (Consummate Art), and “Guang dongzhi” 廣動植 (An Expanded Recording of Animals and Plants) all have what the previous sages did not know about” 其書類多仙佛詭怪, 幽經秘錄之所處. 至於推析物理, 《器奇》, 《藝絕》, 《廣動植》等篇, 則有前哲之所未及知者.⁵⁴ For Zhou Deng, the most impressive feature of the *Youyang zazu* collection is that the work includes not only strange subject matter but also a wide range of information and knowledge that was unknown to previous readers. The Southern Song bibliophile Deng Fu 鄧複 in the preface to his 1223 woodblock edition praised Duan Chengshi for the breath and diversity his work: “Historians talk about Duan's erudition and incredible memory, as well as his many strange accounts and secret records. Now I have studied his work and believe that some scholars could never catch up with him even if they studied for their whole lives. He was indeed erudite” 而史氏稱其博學強記, 且多奇篇秘笈. 今考其論撰, 蓋有書生終身之所不能及者, 信乎其為博矣.⁵⁵ Like Zhou Deng, Deng Fu's comment focuses on the content and erudition of *Youyang zazu*. The Ming bibliophile Mao Jin 毛晉 followed Deng Fu and Li Yunhu's comments about the extensiveness of the collection and said that “From heaven to earth,

⁵⁴ Fang Nansheng 方南生, ed., *Youyang zazu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 291.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

from within the realm and without the real, there is nothing that it does not have. Kegou (Duan's courtesy name) had many strange collections and secret records, and he was well-learned and possessed an incredible memory; therefore, most of what he wrote was beyond the reach of one's eyes and ears" 天上天下, 方內方外, 無所不有. 柯古多奇編秘笈, 博學強記, 故其所撰多天上天下, 方內方外, 無所不有. 柯古多奇編秘笈, 博學強記, 故其所撰多非耳目所及也.⁵⁶ Other critics such as Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (ca.1190-post 1249) praised the unique language style that Duan employed. In his *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題, Chen points out that what the text recorded is mostly strange and weird and that even its titles are bizarre and odd, such as "Tian zhi" 天咫 (The Little We Know of Heaven), "Yu ge" 玉格 (Jade Frame), "Hu shi" 壺史 (The Jug Chronicles), "Bei bian" 貝編 (Leaf Plait), "Shi xi" 屍窆 (Tomb of the Corpse).⁵⁷ Duan's use of abstruse language, or in Reed's words, "purposeful linguistic difficulty", is not accidental; rather it is part of a conscious and deliberate effort to create a sense of unfamiliarity in the well-known genre of *zhiguai*.⁵⁸

Duan's passion for the strange did not pass unnoticed by critics. In 1250, the editor of the "Chunyou" edition compared Duan to Sima Qian in his love of *qi*: "in the past, the Great Historian loved *qi*, so he travelled around the world, made friends from all four seas and returned to write his book. But with regard to this book, isn't it also the embodiment of Duan's love of *qi*? ...How strange and multifarious its records are" 昔太史公好奇, 周遊天下, 取友四海, 歸而為書. 然則是書也, 其亦段氏寓其好奇之意歟?

⁵⁶ Ibid., 296.

⁵⁷ Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 (Shanghai: shanghai guji, 1987), 321

⁵⁸ Carrie E. Reed, "Motivation and Meaning," 137.

… 嗚呼, 何其記之奇且繁也.⁵⁹ Li Yunhu 李雲鵠 in his 1608 edition of the *Youyang zazu* commented, “There is nothing that it does not include, and there is nothing that is not strange. Sometimes it makes the reader suddenly break into happy laughter; sometimes it makes the reader’s hair stand up straight; sometimes it makes him dizzy and astonished, and cannot help but keeping staring in surprise” 無所不有, 無所不異, 使讀者忽而頤解, 忽而發沖, 忽而目眩神駭, 愕眙而不能禁.⁶⁰ Once again, the *Youyang zazu* collection is praised for its extensive collection on the strange. But Li Yunhu’s comments also point out something more important, that is, the effect of Duan’s work on his reader: his work not only attracts the reader’s attention but also moves him and gives him pleasure through reading. Another Ming scholar Gu Yuanqing 顧元慶 (1487-1565) in his postscript to *Boyi Zhi* 博異志跋 argued that the “Nuogao” *juan* in *Youyang zazu* is the best in terms of strangeness and obscureness among all writing of the strange in the Tang dynasty: “the Tang literati often wrote about love affairs and created *qi* to express themselves. Their talents were unmatched by later generation. But in terms of strangeness and obscureness, nothing surpassed ‘Nuogao’ and ‘Boyi’. They are the Han Yu and Li He in their genre” 唐人小史中, 多造奇豔事為傳志, 自是一代才情, 非後世可及。然怪深幽渺, 無如《諾皋》, 《博異》二種, 此其厥體中韓昌黎, 李長吉也.⁶¹ By comparing the “Nuogao” *juan* with Han Yu and Li He—two most well-regarded poets who were famous for their unconventional and strange style—Gu suggests that *Youyang zazu* is the best in creating strangeness. Later scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) in his *Shaoshi shanfang leigao* 少室山房類稿 (*Manuscript from the Cottage of Mount of*

⁵⁹ Fang Nansheng 方南生, ed., *Youyang zazu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 296.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 294.

⁶¹ Quoted in Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 v.2, 750.

Shaoshi) also praised *Youyang zazu* as the most marvelous work among thousands of *zhiguai* collections. He particularly noted the literary merits of the collection by exclaiming its bold writing style and unrestrained treatment of strange topics: “its facts are bizarre and unrestrained; they move about freely from this world and the world beyond. Its style is characterized by the unusualness and boldness of its writing. Among many *zhiguai xiaoshuo*, it is the most fantastic piece among the fantastic” 亡慮數十百家而獨段氏酉陽雜俎最為迥出.其事實譎宕亡根, 馳騁于六合九幽之外, 文亦健急瑰邁稱之.其視諸志怪小說, 允謂奇之又奇者也.⁶² For Hu Yinglin, *Youyang zazu* represents the best a *zhiguai* work can offer with its broad content and eccentric literary style.

Unfortunately, the Qing critic Ji Yun only appreciated the work as a source of information and disapproved the very literary features that previous critics had acclaimed. In his *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (*Imperial Catalogue of the Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature*), Ji Yun, the chief editor, acknowledged the historical importance of the collection for its extensive coverage, while criticizing its “ridiculousness” and “strangeness: “The book has many ridiculous and preposterous words as well as absurd and false things; however, lost texts and secret passages are often mistakenly included. Although commentators criticize its triviality and exaggeration, they have to cite from it. Since the Tang dynasty, it has been regarded as the most outstanding piece of *xiaoshuo*” 其書多詭怪不經之談、荒渺無稽之物, 而遺文秘籍亦往往錯出其中, 故論者雖病其浮誇而不能不相徵引, 自唐以來推為小說之翹

⁶² Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, *Shaoshi shanfang leigao* 少室山房類稿, v.83, in *Xu jinhua congshu* 續金華叢書, ed., 胡宗懋 (永康胡氏夢選樓刊, 1924), ce 冊 103-118.

楚.⁶³ It is interesting to note that although Ji Yun disapproved *Youyang zazu*, he wrote *zhiguai* tales himself. One would assume that as a *zhiguai* writer he would adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards *Youyang zazu* and its strangeness. Ji Yun's harsh criticism, however, clearly indicates that he has a more conservative view on *zhiguai*. Leo Tak-hung Chan who studies Ji Yun and his *Yuwei caotang biji* argues that Ji Yun takes an evidential approach to the supernatural in his own writing, valuing accuracy and didactic content of *zhiguai* tales. According to Chan, the didactic value of a work is the primary concern for Ji Yun when judging *zhiguai*.⁶⁴ Ji Yun's conservative view is also reflected through his critical appraisal of Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiji*.⁶⁵ Judging from Ji's comments, *Youyang zazu* has also failed to meet Ji's criteria because of its preposterous words and exaggerated style.

From Song to Qing dynasty, commentators of *Youyang zazu* have responded differently towards the work: some emphasize its abstruse language style, others stress its inclusion of ample strange material; some acclaim the comprehensive nature of the work, others complain about the unrestrained use of inaccurate material; some notice the literary value of the work, others treat it as an important source of historical records. Despite differences among these commentators, they share a consensus to consider *Youyang zazu* an impressive and unusual collection devoted to the strange.

To a large extent, the modern scholar Lu Xun's analysis of *Youyang zazu* coincides with previous comments. In his famous *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu

⁶³ *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1933), vol.27, *juan* 142, *zibu* 子部 52, *xiaoshuo jia lei* 小說家類 3:68-69.

⁶⁴ Leo Tak-hung Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 187-245.

⁶⁵ See Kang-I Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 254-256.

Xun included every important feature that has been noticed before. He acknowledged the author's erudition and the broad scope of topics included in the collection by tracing the form of *Youyang zazu* back to the Western Jin dynasty scholar Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300)'s *Bowu zhi* 博物志 (*Treatise on Curiosities*)—a book deals with “broadening learning of the phenomena” as its title indicates. He also acclaimed *Youyang zazu* for its unique place in the Tang dynasty as a new development of an old genre and its eccentric content and style:

[The book] sometimes records anecdotes from rare books and at other times narrates strange occurrences. From immortals, Buddhist deities, humans, ghosts to animals and plants, everything was recorded in great detail. The book groups entries of similar nature together and is organized in the manner of an encyclopedia. The origin of this form perhaps comes from Zhang Hua's *Treaties on Curiosities*, but in the Tang dynasty, this book was an original creation. Every section has its own title that often is unique and obscure. For example, the section on Daoist magic is called ‘the Jug Chronicles, the section on Buddhist lore ‘the leaf plait’, the one on burials ‘Tomb of the Corpse’, and the one on the anomaly ‘the Records of *Nuogao*’. What [the book] selected and described is also as archaic, bizarre and as strange as the titles.

或錄秘書, 或敘異事, 仙佛人鬼以至動植, 彌不畢載, 以類相聚, 有如類書, 雖源或出於張華《博物志》, 而在唐時, 則猶之獨創之作矣。每篇各有題目, 亦殊隱僻, 如紀道術者曰“壺史”, 鈔釋典者曰“貝編”, 述喪葬

者曰“屍笮”，志怪異者曰“諾皋記”，而抉擇記敘，亦多古豔穎異，足副其目也。⁶⁶

Lu Xun's comments about the broadness, uniqueness and strangeness of *Youyang zazu* is echoed by his brother, another well-known Chinese writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人. In his memories, he called *Youyang zazu* one of the “new books” that opened his mind. Because of the comprehensive nature of the book, he said, “it touched on every subject I felt to be interesting... There was nothing it did not contain, and it was an introduction to every kind of interesting knowledge.” Zhou also quoted from a verse he had written praising it as “better than the novel *Shuihu* 水滸 (*Water Margin*) at transporting the reader to marvelous places.”⁶⁷ What Zhou Zuoren points out here is the vividness in *Youyang zazu*'s representation of the strange and the use of the representation for bringing the effect of *qi* to the reader.

While Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren's remarks follow the path of previous comments made by early scholars such as Li Yunhu and Hu Yinglin, more recent Chinese critics' approaches towards *Youyang zazu* are as diverse as the topics of the collection itself. Their various interests result in a rich and complex background for our current research. Some scholars tend to use *Youyang zazu* as an example in their overview and systemization of the Tang dynasty's *zhiguai*, *chuanqi* and other miscellaneous works. Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋, for example, combines *Youyang zazu* and collections of *chuanqi* and calls *Youyang zazu* “xiaoshuo gushi lei de biji” 小說故事類的筆記 (the kind of memorabilia literature that deals with stories). According to him, scholars often referred to short

⁶⁶ Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2001), 60.

⁶⁷ Zhou Zuoren 周作人, *Zhou Zuoren huiyi lu* 周作人回憶錄 (Changsha: Hunan renmin wenxue, 1982), 128-129.

narratives of non-parallel, non-rhyming, classical prose since the Six Dynasties as “biji xiaoshuo” and other brief notes in unregulated prose as “biji”.⁶⁸ Zhou Xunchu 周勳初 also categorizes *Youyang* as “biji xiaoshuo” 筆記小說 in his influential study of Tang collection of stories and miscellany.⁶⁹ Li Jianguo 李劍國 in his *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (*Annotated Catalogue of Anomalous Accounts and Romances of the Tang and Five Dynasties*) does a more thorough study of *Youyang zazu*, including information regarding its various editions and a summary of its content.⁷⁰ More importantly, he argues that Duan’s *Youyang zazu* is not intended for didactic or evidential use. Duan’s purpose is rather to “entertain one’s heart” 娛心 and create the unique flavor of strangeness.⁷¹ Li’s comments show that he is fully aware of the difference between *Youyang zazu* and some other *zhiguai* collections that focus more on ideological premise or religious persuasion.

A number of studies are devoted to the biography of Duan Chengshi and various editions of the text. For example, Zhang Fuxin’s 張福信 “Duan Chengshi and his father and son” 段成式及其父子 published in 1989 focuses on the life of Duan Chengshi and his family members and does not provide detailed information on *Youyang zazu*.⁷² Zhao Shixian 趙世暹 in 1962 published “The Serial Picture Book Carved in the Southern Song Dynasty and a Discussion of the Bowdlerization of *Youyang zazu* before the Chenghua Period 成化 (1465-1487)” 南宋刻的一種連環畫——兼論今本酉陽雜俎在成化前遭刪改

⁶⁸ Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋, *Lidai biji gaishu* 历代筆記概述 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 1.

⁶⁹ Zhou Xunchu 周勳初, 唐人筆記小說考索 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 243.

⁷⁰ Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 v.2, 715-52.

⁷¹ Ibid. 749.

⁷² Zhang Fuxin 張福信, “Duan Chengshi jiqi fuzi” 段成式及其父子, *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知識 3 (1989).

in which he discusses the editions that circulated before the early Ming Dynasty.⁷³ Pan Jianguo 潘建國 in 2001 published “The Early Ming Editions of *Youyang zazu*” 酉陽雜俎明初版本考. He examines several early Ming editions of *Youyang zazu* and compares them to the Korean edition and argues that the Korean edition was in fact copied from editions of the Song or Yuan dynasty.⁷⁴ Zhao and Pan’s studies both provide important information on the development of the *Youyang zazu* text.

Others study *Youyang zazu* for the historical, cultural, religious and linguistic information it contains. Yang Xu 楊序 uses the entries regarding tattoos in *Youyang zazu* to explore the cultural significance of ink on the human body during the Tang dynasty. Liang Hao 梁浩 studies the use of oral expressions and dialect vocabulary in *Youyang zazu* and argues for the importance of the work from a linguistic perspective.⁷⁵ Zhang Chaofu 張朝富 in his “Buddhism in the Tang Military Reflected in *Youyang zazu*” attempts to reconstruct the religious system in the Tang military using *Youyang* as his primary source of evidence.⁷⁶ Xia Guangxin 夏廣興 examines Buddhist lore and tales in *Youyang* to study the influence of Buddhism on the writing of *zhiguai* during the Tang dynasty.⁷⁷ Xue Keqiao’s 薛克翹 “The Cultural Communication between China and India in *Youyang zazu*” discusses the influence of Indian culture on Chinese culture during the

⁷³ Zhao Shixian 赵世暹, “Nansong ke de yizhong lianhuan hua”

⁷⁴ Pan Jianguo 潘建國, “*Youyang zazu*”.

⁷⁵ Liang Hao 梁浩, “Cong *Youyang zazu* kan bijiyuliao de tese he jiazhi” 从《酉陽雜俎》看筆記語料的特色和价值, *Zhongguo lishi wenxian yanjiu* 中國歷史文獻研究23 (2004): 202-209.

⁷⁶ Zhang Chaofu 張朝富, “*Youyang zazu* suofanying de tangdai jundui fojiao xinyang” 《酉陽雜俎》所反映的唐代軍隊佛教信仰, *Qiqihar daxue xuebao* 齊齊哈爾大學學報 6 (2008): 5-8.

⁷⁷ Xia Guangxin 夏廣興, “Duan Chengshi *Youyangzazu* yu fojiao” 段成式《酉陽雜俎》與佛教, *Journal of Qinzhou Teachers College* 欽州師範高等專科學校學報 17 (2002): 12-16.

Tang dynasty.⁷⁸ Yan Jianzhen 顏建真 studies the influence of *Youyang zazu* on later *zhiguai* writing such as *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 in terms of aesthetic style, choice of topics, and textual inheritance. She argues that although certain stories of *Liaozhai* originated in *Youyang*, they differ from their textual origins in terms of emphasis because of the difference in authorial motivation: Duan generally wrote *zhiguai* for self-entertaining but Pu Songling wrote *zhiguai* as serious self-expression.⁷⁹ Li Xiaoxia 李曉霞 focuses on the culture of the ghosts in the Tang dynasty and explores the complex relationships between the living and the dead as well as between ghosts and gods in *Youyang zazu*.⁸⁰ What these scholars have in common is their tendency to overlook *Youyang zazu* as a literary work and focus solely on the part of knowledge that is external to the text—author, cultural influence, as well as historical background and implications. While their studies give diverse perspectives to the text, they do not address the literary aspects of tales in the collection.

While most scholars study *Youyang zazu* for its historical and cultural value, recently a number of scholars have begun to notice the literary significance of the collection. In an essay published in 2002, Shi Lin 石麟 concentrates his study on the relatively long pieces in *Youyang zazu*. He classifies these pieces into four categories: magic 法術, knight-errant 奇俠, mundane affairs 世態 and karmic retribution 因果 and

⁷⁸ Xue Keqiao 薛克翹, “Cong Youyang zazu kan zhongyin wenhua jiaoliu” 从酉陽雜俎看中印文化交流, *Nanya yanjiu* 南亞研究 2 (1992).

⁷⁹ Yan Jianzhen 顏建真, “Kao xianzhi yu zaiji—Youyang zazu dui Liaozhai zhiyi shumian sucai lai yuan de yingxiang” 考先志于載籍-酉陽雜俎對聊齋志異書面素材來源的影響, *Pusongling yanjiu* 蒲松齡研究 3 (2006): 80-86.

⁸⁰ Li Xiaoxia 李曉霞, “Youyang zazu zhong de gui wenhua qiantan” 酉陽雜俎中的鬼文化淺探, *Journal of Liaoning Technical University* 遼寧工程技術大學學報 11.2 (2009): 184-186.

discussed their narrative features.⁸¹ Unfortunately, Shi Lin's study only describes the general characteristics of some tales such as the vividness of the dialogue and does not provide in-depth analysis. An Zhengfa's 安正發 two-page essay "*Youyang zazu* and its Narrative Characteristics" in 2008 briefly touches on several prominent features of the collection such as its erudition and tendency to create *qi* through narrative, but he does not elaborate on the subject.⁸² Liu Yifang 劉宜芳's master thesis focused on the supernatural stories in *Youyang zazu* to explore Duan's construction of "the other world".⁸³ She argues that in *Youyang zazu* the human world and the other world are closely connected and the other world is in fact the projection and extension of human emotion and psychology. Her study is particularly relevant to current research in that she points out the role of human emotion such as fear plays in representing the supernatural.

Japanese scholarship is of special significance in the study of *Youyang zazu* because it not only provides the most detailed analysis on the textual history of the *Youyang zazu* collection but also offers the only complete translation of the work. In 1942, Imahori Seiji 今堀城二 published his influential "Yūyō zasso shōko" 酉陽雜俎小考 in which he discusses the textual history and variants of the work.⁸⁴ In 1980 Imamura Yoshio 今村與志雄 translated the entire collection into Japanese along with a list of different editions and a brief biography of the author.⁸⁵ Their works provide reliable

⁸¹ Shi Lin 石麟, "Lun Duan Chengshi Youyang zazu zhong de chuanqi zuopin" 論段成式《酉陽雜俎》中的傳奇作品, *Journal of Huanggang Normal University* 黃岡師範大學學報 22.5 (2002): 1-5.

⁸² An Zhengfa 安正發, "Lun Youyang zazu jiqi xushi tezheng" 論酉陽雜俎及其敘事特徵, *Dianying pingjie* 電影評介 20 (2008): 107-109.

⁸³ Liu Yifang 劉宜芳, "Youyang zazu shenmi gushi yanjiu" 酉陽雜俎神異故事研究 (MA thesis, Guoli chengong daxue 國立成功大學, 1998).

⁸⁴ Imahori Seiji 今堀城二, "Yūyō zasso shōko" 酉陽雜俎小考, *Shigaku kenkyu* 12.4 (Jan.1942): 14-34.

⁸⁵ Imamura Yoshio 今村與志雄, *Yūyō zasso* 酉陽雜俎, 1980.

references for current study especially when dealing with textual variations of particular *zhiguai* tale.

In the West, Bruno Belpaire in his *T'ang Kien Wen Tse—Florilège de Littérature des T'ang* translated the seventh *juan* of the sequel section “Jingangjin jiuyi” 金剛經鳩異 (Collections of Lost and Unusual Tales about the Diamond Sutra) into French.⁸⁶ Edward Schafer in the same year studied the culture of falconry during Tang dynasty and translated the twentieth *juan* “Roujue bu” 肉攫部 (Predators of the Flesh) as one source of his textual evidence.⁸⁷ In 1963, Schafer wrote “Notes on Duan Chengshi and his Writing” which provides some general information regarding Duan’s intellectual life.⁸⁸ Alexander Soper translated some entries from *juan* five and six in the sequel which are entitled “Sita ji” 寺塔記 (Temples and Pagodas) in his “A Vacation Glimpse of the T’ang Temples of Ch’ang-an” and explored the artistic features of the major Buddhist temples at the Tang capital.⁸⁹ As early as 1947, Arthur Waley published “The Chinese Cinderella Story” in which he translated the story of “Ye Xian” in *Youyang zazu* and identified it as the earliest version of the Cinderella story in the world.⁹⁰ André Lévy in “À Propos de Cendrillon en Chine” also compared “Ye Xian” with the European version of the Cinderella story for similarities.⁹¹ Their studies help to situate the text in a broader cultural context, but they do not engage directly with the literariness of the work.

⁸⁶ Bruno Belpaire, *T'ang Kien Wen Tse—Florilège de Littérature des T'ang* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1957-1959).

⁸⁷ Edward H. Schafer, “Falconry in T'ang Times,” *T'oung Pao* 46 (1959): 293-338.

⁸⁸ Edward H. Schafer, “Notes on Duan Chengshi and His Writing,” *Asiatische Studien* 16 (1963): 14-34.

⁸⁹ Alexander Soper, “A Vacation Glimpse of the T’ang Temples of Ch’ang-an. The Ssu-t’a chi by Tuan Ch’eng-shih,” *Arbitus Asiae* 23 (1963): 15-40.

⁹⁰ Arthur Waley, “The Chinese Cinderella Story,” *Folklore* 58 (1947): 226-238.

⁹¹ André Lévy, “À Propos de Cendrillon en Chine,” *T'oung Pao* 81 (1995): 153-164.

A more detailed and influential study on the collection did not appear until 1995 with the completion of Carrie E. Reed's doctoral dissertation, "Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang" in which she not only provided a general introduction to the work, but she also translated hundreds of selected entries from the collection.⁹² Some of her later publications grew out of her dissertation. In 2001, Reed translated five *juan* of *Youyang zazu* including two *juan* of "Records of Nuogao" 諾皋記 and three *juan* of "Supplements to Records of Nuogao" 支諾皋記 in the sequel, which makes these *juan* accessible to Western readers for the first time. In 2003, she published the first monograph on Duan Chengshi and his book, *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang zazu*. It provides a biographical sketch of Duan Chengshi, a textual history of the collection, a description of the content of the text, and selected translation of 145 entries. In addition, she also translated twenty-five entries about tattoos found in *Youyang* and used them as primary source for her study on tattoo practices in early China.⁹³ In her "Motivation and Meaning of a 'Hodge-podge': Duan Chengshi's *Youyang zazu*", Reed examines the variety of subject matter, the mixed styles, and the combination of narrative forms, and argues that although *Youyang zazu* "assumes familiarity with the long *zhiguai* tradition that preceded it", the collection aims at breaking any associated expectations to make the reading experience unique. It is thus "a strange book on strange topics."⁹⁴ Reed's studies not only provide a more comprehensive overview of the text but also exemplify a literary approach that is crucial to my analysis of *Youyang zazu*.

⁹² Carrie E. Reed, "*Youyang zazu*: Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1995)

⁹³ Carrie E. Reed, "Tattoos in Early China," *JAOS* 120.3 (2000) and "Early Chinese Tattoo," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 103, (June, 2000).

⁹⁴ Carrie E. Reed, "Motivation and Meaning," 123.

The broad range of criticism on *Youyang zazu* reflects the complexity of this work. While the text is often studied for the valuable historical and culture information it contains, there is no lack of attention to its literary perspective. Scholars throughout the ages have noticed its unique style, strange content, obscure language as well as the rare scope of its topics. These features are not only characteristics of the work but integral components of the aesthetic goal of the text.

The Structure and Content of the Collection

Youyang zazu as we see today consists of thirty *juan*, and each *juan* is composed of a different number of entries that depict various things that are, in some sense, strange. This section examines the content of each *juan* and the organization of these entries to investigate the thematic and aesthetic concerns of *Youyang zazu*, especially the strange aspect of *Youyang zazu* in terms of content, organization and style.⁹⁵

With its wide array of topics, the *Youyang zazu* collection covers an enormous range of observations and knowledge that rivals *lei shu* 類書 (classified books or encyclopedias) in breadth. The miscellaneous nature of the book often leads to the impression that there is no coherent message or hidden principle that guides the collection and compilation of *Youyang zazu*. I argue that this understanding is superficial and that *Youyang zazu* is compiled and organized on the principle of rejecting the generalized patterns of experience and embracing the unusual, the special, the unique, the odd, and the particularized.

In terms of content, *Youyang zazu* in general accentuates the strange aspect of its subject matter. The majority of entries within the collection involve things or events that

⁹⁵ A more detailed description of these *juan* can be found in Carrie Reed's ground-breaking study, *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang zazu*.

are strange in certain aspect. These entries can be broadly grouped into two types based on their focus on the strange: entries that represent mundane strangeness and those that manifest supernatural strangeness.⁹⁶

In *Youyang zazu*, mundane strangeness derives from objects, beings, or phenomena that remain within the realm of human experience, but possess some characteristics that distinguish them from the ordinary and the familiar in everyday life. Objects, beings, or phenomena can become anomalous because they are distant, rare, excessive, ancient, exotic, unknown, exquisite, deviant or subversive. In Campany's words, they "belong to a certain 'normal' category, but are anomalous because positioned at its outer edge or limit due to some special feature."⁹⁷ Prominent motifs of this category include unusual objects, extreme virtues and abilities, consummate skills, unconventional practices, folk beliefs, special customs, ancient documentation, exotic lands, distinct species and remarkable coincidence. One entry in *juan* one, for example, relates a piece of exotic wood presented by a foreign nation as a tribute, whose pleasant aroma can be smelled from ten steps away. A piece of wood is certainly not anomalous by any means, but when this piece of wood possesses a certain unusual attribute, such as an exceptionally strong scent, it becomes rare and thus, extraordinary. Even the emperor who received the tribute deemed it precious and presented it only to his favorite consort. Another entry in *juan* seven records a general whose extraordinary culinary skills can turn mud into delicacy.

⁹⁶ Even for entries that are ambiguous in their focuses, a tendency is usually still discernible. Tales that contain elements of the fantastic, for example, are susceptible to both the supernatural explanation and the mundane explanation. By the end of their narrative, however, one interpretation is usually more promising than the other. The only exceptions are some cases of pure fantastic where the reader cannot decide whether the tale is supernaturally strange or mundanely strange. Their highly ambiguous nature makes them potentially fit in both categories.

⁹⁷ Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*, 239.

Supernatural strangeness, however, derives from anything that is above, beyond or outside the worldly experience of human life. Based on the main ways by which persons, things or phenomena are represented as beings anomalous, entries of supernatural strangeness can be roughly divided into four subcategories: anomalous by sacredness, anomalous by attribute, anomalous by contact, anomalous by causation.⁹⁸

The first subcategory includes entries that deal with deities and their world as well as religious information. Entries that describe local deities, Daoist and Buddhist pantheon, heavens, mountains, medicine, or contain esoteric knowledge of religion all belong to this category because they reveal the world of the immortals and disclose secret knowledge which is sacred and unattainable to ordinary mortals.

The second subcategory comprises mostly entries that deal with beings or objects that possess certain supernatural attributes and abilities. One popular motif in this category is individuals with esoteric skills. Buddhist monks, Daoist priest, shamans and recluses who can interpret dreams, predict future, assess human character, cure the incurable, achieve longevity or immortality, or overcome one's physical limitations by flying, passing through solid objects or becoming invisible are often featured in these accounts. In *juan* five, for instance, a dead victim of snakebite is brought back to life by a monk with magic power. In *juan* two, a recluse is able to predict a stranger's incoming disaster in great detail. His prediction turns out to be true with convincing specificity. Other featured motifs in this category include hybrid creatures, animated inanimate objects, and things that produce marvelous effects. A walking status in *juan* one, a luminous plant whose fruits can illuminate the orifice of one's heart in *juan* ten and a sore

⁹⁸ The subcategories are inspired by Robert Campany's study on modes of anomaly in his *Strange Writing*, see 237-271.

on a merchant's body that resembles a person's face and consumes human food with its mouth in *juan* fifteen are some examples of these motifs.

The third subcategory consists of entries that describe contacts across boundaries. This kind of anomaly accounts, according to Campany, relies on two conditions: first, "beings on either side of this boundary do not, under ordinary circumstances, have direct, unmediated dealings with one another"; second, the boundary is relatively well established and mere contact across it is irregular enough to be regarded as an anomaly.⁹⁹ Within *Youyang zazhi*, primary motifs of this category include contact with deities, spirits and monsters, contact with the dead, contact with hidden world, and contact with alternative reality through dream. Contact with deities, spirits and monsters is one of the most popular motifs in the collection. Tales that feature this kind of unusual contacts are often narrative in nature as they all basically tell a story. The outcome of such encounters varies. In general, contacts with deities and transcendentals are often beneficial to human protagonists. Contacts with spirits and monsters, however, can be beneficial, neutral or harmful, depending on the nature of the supernatural being and the interaction between the human and the spirit. If a contact is harmful, it is usually depicted as causing sickness and death. Examples of such deadly encounters will be discussed in Chapter Four. Contact with the dead, usually takes the form of a ghost story or a resurrection experience. In *juan* thirteen, a villager's daughter returned home three years after she was buried and talked about being married to a general. She also mentioned that the dead can avoid suffering if he is buried with red bean and soybean. The woman in the story has clearly entered the realm of the dead and her return is a violation of the boundary between the living and the dead. There are also numerous entries in the collection that

⁹⁹ Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*, 259.

deal with the reality of dream. In *juan* eight, a young man dreamed of a girl feeding him cherries. When he woke up, he discovered cherry pits aside his pillow.

The fourth subcategory primarily deals with certain mysterious underlying connection between two or more seemingly random events. The focus of this kind of anomalous accounts is not the occurrence of certain unusual events or the appearance of some supernatural entities, but the causal agent and process behind such phenomena. In other words, the strangeness of these tales do not derives from the question of “what”, but “why” and “how”. Entries that contain omens and portents fit readily in this category, as they often deal with mysterious signs and their outcomes without specifying the reason behind these occurrences. It should be noted that tales that describe spontaneous responses to human virtue or vice are also included in this category. According to Campany, this kind of tales illustrates what might be termed moral causation. More specifically, these tales usually connect human actions and intentions with corresponding consequences through either a morally responsive cosmos or the impersonal law of karma. But such moral causation only appears reasonable for readers who are susceptible to the concept of cosmic reward and retribution. In other words, although a responding cosmos or the principle of karma may be seen as the operating force behind certain phenomena, linking morality with strange occurrences is still an anomalous process from the perspective of skeptics.

Since most entries in the collection can be grouped into these categories based on the most obvious way by which what they describe becomes strange, I break down the content of the collection by dividing its entries into the various categories mentioned above. The following table is thus created to reflect the composition and the percentage

of various modes of representing the strange in each *juan*. It should be noted that while the categorization of the strange accounts for most of entries within the collection, there are some entries that cannot be categorized based on the modes of anomalies they describe or narrate either because they do not feature anomalies in their content or they adopt a writing form that is completely different than the rest of the text. Some entries in *juan* five and six of the *xuji*, for example, take the form of poetry rather than the mode of prose found in the rest of the collection. These entries are grouped as “others” in the table. The existence of “others” in the collection, however, does not change the overall aesthetic purpose of the collection. First, entries that do not feature anomalies deliver a sense of normality that not only reflects the complexity and the heterogeneity of the collection but also serves as a necessary contrast from the high frequency of abnormality displayed in the collection. Second, the inclusion of poetic entries in the text adds a twist to the classic form of brief narration and description that prevail in the collection, and consequently brings a sense of unfamiliarity to the familiar style of the *zhiguai* genre. With the help of the table, we will have a better understanding of the collection’s content composition, thematic structure, and the difference among various *juan* in their focus of the strange.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ This table is meant to reflect the general tendency of each *juan* in their representation of the strange; for more detailed information on the content of each *juan*, see appendix.

<i>juan</i> 卷	Mundane Strangeness	Supernatural Strangeness				Others
	Anomalous by feature	Anomalous by sacredness	Anomalous by attribute	Anomalous by contact	Anomalous by causation	
One	77%	5%	8%	10%	—	—
Two	4%	50%	22%	24%	—	—
Three	13%	76%	10%	—	1%	—
Four	75%	2%	7%	—	16%	—
Five	31%	—	56%	13%	—	—
Six	70%	—	18%	12%	—	—
Seven	64%	—	8%	—	4%	24%
Eight	52%	—	23%	23%	2%	—
Nine	45%	—	38%	—	17%	—
Ten	81%	2%	13%	3%	1%	—
Eleven	85%	15%	—	—	—	—
Twelve	36%	—	8%	—	—	56%
Thirteen	60%	6%	—	34%	—	—
Fourteen	10%	33%	10%	42%	5%	—
Fifteen	3%	—	29%	54%	14%	—
Sixteen	93%	1%	6%	—	—	—
Seventeen	97%	—	3%	—	—	—
Eighteen	97%	—	3%	—	—	—
Nineteen	93%	4%	3%	—	—	—
Twenty	100%	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Xu</i> one	5%	—	12%	71%	12%	—
<i>Xu</i> two	19%	—	16%	59%	6%	—
<i>Xu</i> three	17%	—	28%	41%	14%	—
<i>Xu</i> four	67%	—	—	6%	3%	24%
<i>Xu</i> five	40%	—	9%	4%	6%	41%
<i>Xu</i> six	45%	—	6%	—	—	49%
<i>Xu</i> seven	—	—	—	33%	67%	—
<i>Xu</i> eight	82%	—	13%	2%	—	3%
<i>Xu</i> nine	88%	—	—	—	—	12%
<i>Xu</i> Ten	91%	—	—	—	—	9%

A few general observations can be made based on the information showed in the table. First, despite the heterogeneity of materials included in the text, *Youyang zazu* is overwhelmingly populated with people, objects or phenomena that are in some sense

strange. In fact, judging from the percentage of entries that represent various modes of strangeness, almost every *juan* within the collection deals primarily with anomalies of some kind. This means that in terms of content, the foreign, the other, the marginal and the fantastic dominate the collection. This fact shows that *Youyang zazhi* is first and foremost a work that explores and celebrates the strange quality of our world and the world beyond.

Second, Duan is obviously very interested in finding strangeness within mundane circumstances, as entries that contain mundane anomalies appear in almost every single *juan* and contribute a pronounced percentage in most *juan*. The fact that mundane strangeness can be found everywhere, even in the most familiar areas of daily life suggests a purposeful selection process where material is gathered and distributed to reflect the aesthetic taste of the author and his vision of the work.

Third, the supernatural content is most noticeably concentrated in several *juan* including *juan* two and three which deal with Daoism and Buddhism related matters, and five other *juan* that share the title of “Nuogao” 諾皋 (*juan* fourteen and fifteen in the *qianji* and *juan* one, two and three in the *xuji*). The exact meaning of the term “Nuogao” is still under debate, but the common consensus is that the term is a form of interjection and is used in the beginning of an incantation to call a god’s attention to the prayer and ward off the evil spirits.¹⁰¹ The obscure title perfectly reflects the content of these *juan* as the entries included in these *juan* have an obvious orientation towards the otherworldly. As the table shows, many of these entries deal with contacts across boundaries. A lot of

¹⁰¹ Reed has provided a detailed study on the meaning of “Nuogao”, see *A Tang Miscellany*; also see Chen Sipeng 陳斯朋, *Jianbowenxian yu wenxue kaolun* 簡帛文獻與文學考論 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 124-125.

these contacts are horrifying encounters between human protagonists and dangerous monsters that produce life-threatening ill-effects.

Fourth, almost every *juan* has an identifiable focus in its representation of the strange. Some *juan* clearly emphasize mundane anomalies; others are more concerned with certain mode of representing the supernatural. The different focuses of these *juan* generally (but not necessarily) correlate with their subject matters. *Juan* that have difficult or obscure titles often have a higher percentage of supernatural strangeness such as the five *juan* of “Nuogao” mentioned above, whereas *juan* that deal with material matters that have effect on people’s everyday lives usually have a higher percentage of mundane anomalies. *Juan* seven, for instance, mostly involves wine, food, and medicine. Its entries, consequently, concentrate on representing the unusual aspect of such common matters.

Fifth, entries that are termed “others”, that is, entries that cannot be categorized based on their representation of the strange appear in multiple *juan*. *Juan* seven of the *qianji* and *juan* four, eight, nine and ten of the *xuji* all contain considerable amount of entries that do not concern the different and the unusual. But these entries occupy only a small fraction of each *juan*. Such portion of the non-strange content is sufficient to provide a contrast for the intensive representation of the strange but not large enough to shift the *juan*’s focus on the strange. The “others” appear noticeably more frequent in *juan* twelve of the *qianji* and *juan* five and six of the *xuji*. In *juan* twelve of the *qianji*, the none-strange content constitutes approximately half of the entire *juan*.¹⁰² The high percentage of non-strange content, however, by no means makes this *juan* less strange

¹⁰² Entries 469, 470, 471 and 474, for example, depict conversations among diplomats of Liang 梁 and Wei 魏 during banquets. The topics discussed include drinking, poetry and music, etc.

than the rest of the text. In fact, such high frequency of normality is what exactly makes it seem “out of place” in a *zhiguai* collection. Unlike most *juan* which have an identifiable orientation in terms of content, the almost equal percentage of normal content and strange content make *juan* twelve of the *qianji* lack a distinctive focus. The combination of abnormality and normality thus creates a sense of inconsistency and contradiction between this *juan* and the majority of the text. The internal incoherence of content is consistent with Duan’s effort evident in the text to make *Youyang zazu* a complex and strange collection. In *juan* five and six of the *xuji*, such inconsistency has been presented to us not through content but rather through the very form of the entries. As mentioned above, many entries in these two *juan* are written in the form of poetry rather than the traditional narrative or descriptive prose common to *zhiguai* literature of all periods. These entries therefore entail a poetic reading in which the relation between word and object is called into question. Unlike descriptive or narrative entries, the words of these entries no longer give realistic representation to events or phenomena; rather they are linguistic units used foremost for their aesthetic and evocative qualities. The introduction of poetry into a collection otherwise composed of narratives and informational pieces is itself a noteworthy practice. The mixture of poetic form and classic prose certainly makes the *juan* five and six of the *xuji* stand out by the very style of their entries. It also creates stylistic and formal incoherence among the entries that is crucial to the making of a strange reading experience.

Duan’s effort in generating the strange in the collection is manifested through not only the content and style of entries but also through the seemingly random arrangement of these entries. First, entries are arranged differently from *juan* to *juan* and there is no

consistent effort in organizing the entries within individual *juan*. Some *juan* progress in a roughly chronological order; some begins with short expository or descriptive pieces and concludes with longer narratives; others, however, do not display any clear pattern in their organization of content. Long, polished tales may be followed by short anecdotes. Practical pieces about daily activities are found next to those that concern immortals, spirits and monsters. Experiences of common people are placed next to legends of outlaws. The inconsistency in the way entries are arranged in various *juan* makes it difficult for the reader to predict the content or the form of the next entry, thus reinforcing the sense of discontinuity in one's reading experience.

Second, the organization of *juan* also lacks a sense of cohesion. *Juan* that center on the supernatural and the otherworldly are often juxtaposed with *juan* that focus on the mundane. *Juan* one, for example, primarily concerns mundane strangeness, whereas *juan* two and three deal mostly with the sacred and the eternal. *Juan* that feature informational notices and lists are placed next to those contain mostly narrative pieces. *Juan* fourteen and fifteen are overwhelmingly populated with stories, *juan* sixteen through nineteen, however, comprised mostly of descriptive entries on flora and fauna. This seemingly randomness is certainly an important feature of the text and it is by no means a natural result of casual writing. The contrast and disjointedness displayed through the arrangement of various *juan*, are rather results of a purposeful effort to disturb the reader's expectation of a coherent and unified structure in a work by a single author. The apparent lack of organization also has its significance in reinforcing the effect of *qi* that is created through the unusual nature of the content. As Reed has pointed out, "the oddness

of the entries' topics is thus accentuated by the oddness of their organization.”¹⁰³ The unusual nature of the content combined with the incoherence in its style, form and organization makes the text not only a collection of strange accounts, but more importantly a strange collection of *zhiguai*.

The overview of the thirty *juan* shows that *Youyang zazhi* is not a collection of “hodge-podge”; rather it is assembled with a special interest in the strange and a principle which stresses unfamiliarity within the familiar and the extraordinary among the ordinary. In addition to entries that involve supernatural beings or events, Duan makes a deliberate effort to emphasize the unusual aspects of the mundane elements in many descriptive entries that deal with the everyday life of human existence. Thus, the reader sees not only the strange generated in the supernatural-oriented sections such as “Nuogao”, “Ming ji” and “Zhi Nuogao”, but also the strange engendered in the more mundane-focused sections such as “Jiu shi”, “Yi jue” and “Guang dongzhi”.

In the following chapters, Duan's endeavor in pursuing *qi* is even more evident through the narrative pieces included in the collection in which sophisticated narrative structures, techniques and literary themes are explored to underscore various aspects of the strange. The following study includes a number of narrative pieces that are closely read, analyzed and interpreted in the frameworks of various theories and concepts, but it is by no means an attempt to categorize all narrative pieces in *Youyang zazhi*, because as the conclusion will show that many of these tales have layers of components that are subject to multiple interpretations which defy rigid categorization in general. It rather provides alternative perspectives on how *zhiguai* tales in *Youyang zazhi* can be read and why they are integral to the overall aesthetic pursuit of the collection.

¹⁰³ Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 53.

CHAPTER TWO

***QI* THROUGH ARGUMENT: *YOUYANG ZAZU*'S PREFACES**

In the rather brief preface of *Youyang zazhu*, Duan Chengshi not only declares the nature of his work and classifies it as *zhiguai* but also establishes a unique genealogy for his collection by tracing two characteristics of his work—strangeness of the content (*guai* 怪) and playfulness of the style (*xi* 戏)—to two of the most fundamental classics in Chinese literary tradition. Such an argument although legitimizes his interest and writing style, immediately puts *Youyang zazhu* into a different set of tradition which separates this work from most *zhiguai* works. In his preface to *juan* fourteen, Duan continues to argue that his work is not meant to provide information on important political matters; it rather aims at providing entertainment for his readers during leisure hours. His argument differs greatly from his predecessors who often claim the significance of their *zhiguai* works either because their work recover fragments of ancient textual tradition and preserve contemporary phenomena or because such works provide glimpse into the otherwise mysterious world of the spirits. Duan's argument in the prefaces places *Youyang zazhu*—a work of familiar genre—into an unfamiliar context and underscores the unique perspective and quality of the work. In other words, Duan has already tried to establish the unusualness of the work through his argument in the prefaces.

In the preface to the whole book, Duan Chengshi follows the footsteps of previous authors of *zhiguai* in defending the marginal nature of his work against those who may

have found it useless or even harmful. But his strategy differs from that of his predecessors. The preface reads:

The *Book of Changes* speaks of “the carriage of ghosts”¹⁰⁴, these words are close to being strange; the poets in the *Book of Odes* use the simile of the constellation of the Winnowing Basket¹⁰⁵, their analogy is close to being playful. So for people who wear a gentleman’s gown to casually write of the strange and the playful does not undermine his role as a Confucian. Unlike the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents* that can be compared to the flavor of bland meat stew, history is like sacrificial meat and philosophy is rather seasoned meat paste. But if one has [only heavy meat] dishes, such as roasted owl and small turtles, how could one start eating? Therefore, what I have been laboring over without apology is a work of *zhiguai xiaoshuo* [as a side dish]. My knowledge is limited, and my writing is long and I have not given [the work] any deep thoughts. I do not have the talent of Cui Yin¹⁰⁶ who provoked the admiration of a real

¹⁰⁴ This is an allusion to the thirty-eighth Hexagram Kui 睽 of *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*) which reads: “(In the subject of the third line, he seems to) see a pig bearing on its back a load of mud, (or fancies) there is a carriage full of ghost.” James Legge, trans., *I Ching: Or, the Book of Changes* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2007), 135.

¹⁰⁵ *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) 203 “Da Dong” 大東 (“Great East”), in “Xiao Min Zhi Shi” 小旻之什 (“Decade of Xiao Min”) of the “Xiao Ya” 小雅 (“Minor Odes of the Kingdom”).

¹⁰⁶ Cui Yin 崔駰 (?-92) was a prominent writer and scholar during the Eastern Han. His literary skill was admired by the Emperor who recommended him to General Dou Xian 竇憲 (d.92). The Emperor said that for Dou Xian who loved poetry to ignore Cui Xin’s work was like to love dragons only on paper, i.e., Cui Xin is the “real dragon”. See *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (*The History of the Later Han Dynasty*) 52, “The Biography of Cui Yin”. The comment is based on the story of “Shegong hao long” 葉公好龍 (“Mr. She’s Love for Dragons”) which was recorded in “Miscellaneous Matters” 雜事 *juan* 5, *Xin Xu* 新序 (*A New Compilation*) by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BC). The story tells that a man loved dragons and he painted dragons at every opportunity. But when the real dragon revealed itself in front of him, he trembled with fear and hid himself.

dragon, and I can be laughed at for being like Kong Zhang¹⁰⁷ who failed to draw the likeness of a tiger. Taking the time when I have a full stomach, I jot down things I have remembered and call them *Youyang zazu* which includes thirty *juan* and is divided into twenty volumes, but I fail to record their flavor.

夫《易》象一車之言，近于怪也；詩人南箕之興，近乎戲也。固服縫掖夫肆筆之余，及怪及戲，無侵于儒。無若詩書之味大羹，史為折俎，子為醯醢也。炙鴟羞鼈，豈容下箸乎？固役而不恥者，抑志怪小說之書也。成式學落詞曼，未嘗覃思，無崔駰真龍之歎，有孔璋畫虎之譏。飽食之暇，偶錄記憶，號《酉陽雜俎》，凡三十篇，為二十卷，不以此間錄味也。¹⁰⁸

First of all, it is worth noting that Duan officially declares his work to be a book of *zhiguai* and associates *zhiguai* with the highly ambiguous term “*xiaoshuo*” for the first time in the history of Chinese narrative.¹⁰⁹ Such an explicit claim is especially intriguing because the official connection between *zhiguai* and *xiaoshuo* in the traditional Chinese bibliography was not established until centuries later with the completion of the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (*New History of the Tang Dynasty*) in 1060. In this new official dynastic history of the Tang dynasty, Ouyang Xiu removed *zhiguai* from of the category of

¹⁰⁷ This refers to the story of Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217) whose courtesy name is Kong Zhang 孔璋. He was a politician, scholar and poet during the late Eastern Han dynasty in China. Because of his literary achievement, he was ranked among the Seven Scholars of Jian'an Era (196-220) 建安七子. His talent was, however, questioned by another famous poet Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) who mentioned in a letter that Kong Zhang often compared himself to the great poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117). Cao Zhi made fun of such comparison by arguing that Kong Zhang's talent was such that he intended to draw a tiger but ended up with a dog. See Cao Zhi, “Letter to Yang Dezu” 與楊德祖書 (Yu Yang Dezu shu), in *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Selections of Refined Literature*), *juan* 42.

¹⁰⁸ Duan Chengshi, Preface to *Youyang zazu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Cheng Yizhong 程毅中, “Lun Tangdai xiaoshuo de yanjin zhi ji” 论唐代小說的演进之迹, *Wenxue yichan* 文学遗产 (5) 1987: 46.

miscellaneous accounts under the division of history 史 and placed them instead under the *xiaoshuo* category in the division of philosophy 子. Duan's decision to link his work to the *xiaoshuo* category shows that Duan detects a close connection between *zhiguai* and *xiaoshuo*—a category which was traditionally placed under the division of philosophy. In Ban Gu's *Hanshu yiwenzhi* 汉书艺文志 (*Treatise on Belles-lettres in the Han History*), *xiaoshuo* was placed last in a list of ten “schools of the various masters” (*zhuzi jia* 诸子家). This tradition of book classification established in *Hanshu yiwenzhi* was faithfully transmitted and closely observed by scholars of later dynasties in their compilation of bibliographies for the official history. In *Suishu* 隋书 (*History of the Sui Dynasty*) compiled by Wei Zheng 魏征 (580-643), for example, the *xiaoshuo* category was also placed under the division of philosophy. More importantly, it is here that some historical writings, which were mixed up with miscellaneous writings in *Hanshu yiwenzhi*, were removed from the *xiaoshuo* section. This situation suggests that by the time Duan took on the project of *Youyang zazhu*, *xiaoshuo* had already begun to emerge as a category independent of historical writings. By affiliating his work of *zhiguai* with *xiaoshuo*, Duan seems to indicate to readers that his book should not be read as history. Duan's view is in accordance with DeWoskin's observation about the separation process between *zhiguai* and history. He argues that as early as during the Six Dynasties, *zhiguai* was recognized by their author and reader as something different from history.¹¹⁰ This divergence, he argues, is important in the development of Chinese fiction because deviation from traditional historiography freed writers “to indulge the conscious fictionalizing that is the

¹¹⁰ Kenneth DeWoskin, “The Six Dynasties Chih-Kuai and the Birth of Fiction,” *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew Plaks (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 39.

distinct feature of late Six Dynasties *chih-kuai* and the T'ang *ch'uan-ch'i*.”¹¹¹

DeWoskin's argument explains the formal necessity for official historian to relocate *zhiguai* from the division of history to the category of *xiaoshuo*.

Secondly, Duan begins his preface by constructing a literary tradition for his work that is different from other *zhiguai* works. Duan's predecessors— early *zhiguai* writers— often appeal to the historiographic tradition to legitimize their work. Gan Bao, for example, in his preface to the *Soushen ji*, compares his work to historical writing and argues that it should be accepted as evidence of the past despite of its unique subject matter.¹¹² Such argument is not surprising because the *zhiguai* genre has a strong tie and an ambiguous relationship with historiography from the very beginning. Robert Campany argues that *zhiguai* was an extension of historical writing that stepped out an ancient tradition that he describes as “cosmographic collecting”. By cosmographic collecting, Campany refers to a process in which the center defines its own relationship to the periphery by collecting information about the periphery. The information about the anomalous objects, creatures, customs and events is then written down and classified according to the existing system and then preserved as historical writing. *Zhiguai* works thus were “dedicated to preserve endangered fragments of historical accounts and record popular customs, justified by appeal to ancient cosmographic precedent.”¹¹³ Even Kenneth DeWoskin who identifies the divergence between *zhiguai* and historical writing acknowledges the close affinity between the two. He argues that “the recording of anomalies had a legitimate precedent and precise formal model in the dynastic history

¹¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹¹² Gan Bao, Introduction to *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*, trans. Kenneth DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), xxvi-xxvii.

¹¹³ Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*, 157.

tradition” and the techniques employed to create these accounts were, to a large extent, those of the historians.¹¹⁴ DeWoskin’s analysis and Company’s study highlight the compelling need that *zhiguai* authors felt to justify their interest in collecting and documenting the strange against Confucian suspicion or any ambivalence towards discourse on anomalies in general. In his characterization of *zhiguai* works such as *Shishuo xinyu* 世说新語 and *Soushen ji*, Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721) claims that “what they tell are either jests and trivial arguments, or deities, ghosts and monsters. Their events are not related to sages, and therefore Yang Xiong would not read them; their statements concern disorder and deities, and therefore Confucius would not talk about them” 其所載或談諧小辯, 或神鬼怪物. 其事非聖, 揚雄所不觀; 其言亂神, 宣尼所不語.¹¹⁵ Placing *zhiguai* works alongside historical writing is one strategy to defend the accounts of the anomaly against such charge.

Zhiguai writers also tended to use certain intertextual markers that self-identified their work as part of the genre. Company argues that one of the characteristics of the *zhiguai* genre is that they often link their own text to a predecessor’s such as Tao Qian’s 陶潛 (365-427) *Soushen houji* or explicitly quote from other texts in the genre.¹¹⁶ The Tang *zhiguai* collection *Mingbaoji* 冥報記 (*Miraculous Retribution*), for example, cited similar *zhiguai* works, such as *Xuanyanji* 宣驗記 (*Records in Proclamation of*

¹¹⁴ Kenneth DeWoskin, “The Six Dynasties Chih-Kuai “, 40-42.

¹¹⁵ Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721), “Caizhuan” 采撰, *Shitong tongshi* 史通通釋, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 116.

¹¹⁶ Robert Company, *Strange Writing*, 30.

Manifestations) and *Mingxiangji* 冥祥記 (*Records of Signs from the Nether World*) to locate a proper place within the genre.¹¹⁷

Duan Chengshi, however, does not adopt either approach to legitimize his work; rather, he claims a pair of unusual ancestors for his work, i.e., the *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*) and *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*), two of the most fundamental classical texts. With such a genealogy for his collection, Duan focuses on two aspects of these texts that are applicable to his work: the strange content and the playful style. He argues that even the classics contained tales of the strange and the practice of Confucianism should not prevent one from being playful in his writing. His stories, which have been likened to side dishes, give flavor to a meatier main course.

Duan's attitude towards his *zhiguai* writing is also evident in his preface to *juan* fourteen and fifteen "Nuogao ji". He starts the preface by arguing that ancient sages established the art of divination and the tradition of shamans to examine signs of prosperity and rectify disaster (乃聖人定璿璣之式, 立巫祝之官. 考乎十輝之祥, 正乎九黎之亂). But since the signs are always changing, the examination only seeks to make sure that ghosts are not harmful and deities are managed (徵祥變化, 無日無之, 在乎不傷人, 不乏主而已). Here Duan seems to resort to the conventional argument about how recording the strange is about collecting portents and using them as important references for state affairs. But he also admits that this mission is almost impossible due to the ever-changing strange phenomena. What one can hope for is that by recording the signs, the strange could be properly controlled. Duan's following statement, however, quickly shows that he does not have the ambition to achieve such goal. Rather, he seems to

¹¹⁷ Donald E. Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution: A Study and Translation of T'ang Lin's Ming-pao chi* (Berkeley: Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1989), 156–57.

suggest that his work is not worthy of political purpose. He first states the causal nature of his writing by claiming that his “Nuogao ji” is only the product of random jotting as a result after reading numerous books on the strange.¹¹⁸ He then argues that his records are street talk of vulgar language and are not sufficient to provide instruction on state affairs. But in terms of providing entertainment for his readers during leisure hours, his writing is more than sufficient: “[Nuogao ji] includes street talk, vulgar expressions, public opinions and accounts of disturbances. One would find them insufficient in differentiating the symbols of the nine tripods¹¹⁹ and in generalizing the responses of the seven vehicles.¹²⁰ But in times of leisure, they are worthy of advocating for” 街談鄙俚, 輿言風波, 不足以辨九鼎之象, 廣七車之對, 然游息之暇, 足為鼓吹耳。

One could argue that Duan’s description of his work is only a humble gesture—as may be seen in many *zhiguai* prefaces such as Gan Bao’s *Soushen ji* and Duan does wish his work to be seen as the continuation of the cosmographic tradition that helps the imperial center to govern its social, cultural, political and spiritual periphery. This argument, however, neglects the fact that in the general preface Duan has clearly linked

¹¹⁸ The exact meaning of the term “nuogao” is still under debate, but the common consensus is that the term is a form of interjection and is used in the beginning of an incantation to call a god’s attention to the prayer and ward off the evil spirits. Reed has provided a detailed study on the meaning of “nuogao”, see *A Tang Miscellany*; also see Chen Sipeng 陳斯朋, *Jianbowenxian yu wenxue kaolun* 簡帛文獻與文學考論 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 124-125.

¹¹⁹ Nine Tripods symbolize legitimacy of rulership. According to *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo’s Commentary*) Duke Xuan, 3rd year, the legendary sage king Yu 禹 had nine bronze vessels made of the metal he received from the nine provinces of his kingdom. The tripods were inscribed with the images of demons and spirits in order to obtain control of them. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, comm., *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 670. On the ritual function of the tripod in relation to political power, see Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of Rolf A. Stein*, II, ed. M. Strickmann. (Bruxelles, Institut belge des hautes études chinoises), 291-371; on the nine tripods of Emperor Yu, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 269-70.

¹²⁰ It is unclear what the sentence means. Carrie Reed suggests that it is a reference to the seven stars in the Big Dipper Constellation because *Shijing* mentions that these stars are the chariot of the Heavenly Emperor. See *Chinese Chronicles*, 55.

his writing to *Shijing* and *Yijing* rather than ancient cosmographic precedents. Duan's mention of ancient sages here shows that he is fully aware of the tradition of cosmographic collecting and its political significance. But as he points out in the general preface, he does not intend his work to assume any serious undertaking. In fact, Duan has purposefully distanced his work from the role of classics and history by comparing them to main courses and his work to side dishes. In the preface to "Nuogao ji", he explicitly claims that his work is intended only for leisure reading. Judging from the two prefaces, although Duan admits that *zhiguai* is a peripheral genre compared to classics and history, he is not apologetic for his practice of writing and compiling the strange. For him, different genres should assume different roles. While classics and history constitute the majority of a gentleman's reading and represent his serious pursuit, *zhiguai* is useful in providing reading pleasure in times of relaxation. His *Youyang zazu* is precisely intended for such purpose.

Duan's arguments in the prefaces of *Youyang zazu* may appear untypical for *zhiguai* genre; they are, nevertheless, influenced by the cultural and historical discourse of their time. Duan was not the first one who used flavors of food as metaphors for writings, nor was he the first one who advocated recreational writing. The distinguished Tang literatus Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) who lived about 30 years before Duan argued in an essay that the sages did not condemn light-hearted writing because such literature is a necessary form of relaxation and diversion for scholars who were involved in tedious research. He then compares different tastes of food to styles of writing:

Bland meat soup, sacrificial water and sacrificial meat represent the ultimate flavor. There are, however, also rare worms, water plants,

hawthorn fruits and oranges. Bitter, salty, sour or spicy, they sting your mouth, dilate your nostrils, make your tongue shrink and agonize your teeth, yet each has its addicted lovers. Sage King Wen's orris roots, Qudao's water caltrops, Zengxi's dates, [one] tries every exotic flavor in the world to satisfy the mouth. How is writing different?

大羹玄酒, 體節之薦, 味之至者; 而又設以奇異小蟲、水草、楂梨、橘柚, 苦咸酸辛, 雖蜚吻裂鼻, 縮舌澀齒, 而咸有篤好之者。文王之昌蒲菹, 屈到之芰, 曾皙之羊棗, 然後盡天下之味以足于口, 獨文異乎?¹²¹

For him, although some dishes are classics, strange and exotic food has unique appeal and merit. They bring relief to the otherwise monotonous and boring tastes of regular main courses. Liu Zongyuan's argument was intended as a defense of the prominent writer Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) who was under attack for writing "The Biography of Mao Ying" ("Mao Ying zhuan" 毛穎傳), which featured a personified writing brush as its protagonist. This piece relies heavily on wordplay and allusion and was considered by some of Han Yu's contemporaries unsettling and scandalous. Zhang Ji 張籍 (768-830?), a student of Han Yu in the "ancient style" (*guwen* 古文) prose movement, criticized him for "often making miscellaneous and meaningless statements and presenting them as amusement" 多尚駁雜無實之說, 使人陳之于前以為歡. For him, composing literature that was so lighthearted was a harmful and shameful departure

¹²¹ Liu Zongyuan, "Du Hanyu soushu Maoyingzhuan houti" 讀韓愈所著毛穎傳後題 (*Postface After Reading the 'Biography of Maoying' by Han Yu*), *Hanyu ziliao huibian* 韓愈資料彙編 vol.1, ed. 吳文志 Wu wenzhi, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 16-17.

from “the *dao* of the sages” 聖人之道.¹²² Han Yu defended himself in a letter against such accusations also by invoking the authority of the classics and Confucius. He argues that his practice is like a literary game, a play on words and a humorous amusement for the writer himself and his friends. Since “in the past, even Confucius himself sometimes played games...how harmful can it be for *dao*” 昔日夫子猶有所戲...惡害于道?¹²³ For Han Yu’s supporters like Liu Zongyuan, the relationship between the classics and playful works is similar to the relationship between the main course of meat and delicacies. While the main course constitutes the core of the meal provides the basic nourishment, the delicacies enrich the meal with a variety of flavors. Liu concluded that playful writing is “beneficial for the world” 有益於世也.¹²⁴ Liu Zongyuan’s view, according to William Nienhauser, was more concerned with the pleasure of writing itself than the allegorical meaning and moralistic significance it carried.¹²⁵ The fact that Duan inherited Liu Zongyuan’s flavor metaphor to justify his own writing suggests that Duan adapted Liu’s attitudes towards recreational writing in general. Although *zhiguai* works cannot replace the classics, they are nonetheless valuable to Confucian scholars—contrary to what some critics have claimed. They bring amusement and pleasure to the otherwise bland experience of reading and writing and are entertaining to both the reader and the writer.¹²⁶

¹²² Zhang ji 張籍 (768-830?), “Shang Han changli shu” 上韓昌黎書 (“A Letter to Han Changli”), in *Hanyu ziliao huibian* 韓愈資料彙編 vol.1, ed. Wu Wenzhi 吳文治, 8-9.

¹²³ Han Yu 韓愈, “Chong Da Zhangji shu” 重答張籍書, in *Quantangwen* 全唐文, vol.12.7080.

¹²⁴ Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, “Du Hanyu soushu Maoyingzhuan houthi,” in *Hanyu ziliao huibian* 韓愈資料彙編 vol.1, 16-17.

¹²⁵ William H. Nienhauser, “An Allegorical Reading of Han Yu’s ‘Mao Ying Zhuan,’” *Oriens Extremus* 23.2 (1976): 172.

¹²⁶ Duan was not alone in adopting Liu’s metaphor. 高彥休 (854-?) wrote in the preface to *Tang qieshi* 唐闕史 (*Omissions from Tang History*) “after studying and researching the classics and history, you can take a look at this now and then. It is like besides the ultimate flavor there is also fermented meat paste.” 討尋

Duan was not only familiar with Liu's essay and its context but also endorsed the strategy and point of view used by Liu in defending Han Yu's playful writing. His knowledge of Liu Zongyuan and Han Yu is hardly surprising given the fact that both of them were among the most prominent literary figures during the mid-Tang dynasty and any well-versed literatus at the time must have studied both of their works from the beginning of his education. Duan's endorsement of Liu's point of view was echoed by one of Duan's closest associate Wen Tingyun 温庭筠 (812-870) who also adopted the analogy of food in the preface to his *zhiguai* collection *Gan sunzi* 乾驥子. Although the collection is lost, fragments of its preface can be found in other works. According to *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志, Wen's preface claims that the purpose of speaking of the strange is to entertain the guests and it is not different from eating cooked meat to please one's mouth (語怪以悅賓, 無異膳味之適口). The use of such analogy suggests the Wen may also draw inspiration from Liu Zongyuan's comparison of writing to flavor of food. Whether Wen chose to adopt Liu's metaphor through Duan's influence is unknown, but it is clear that both Duan and Wen shared a similar appreciation towards the entertaining effect of the strange which was justifiable according to Liu Zongyuan's metaphor of flavor.

What Duan inherited from Liu Zongyuan's generation is more than the metaphor of flavor and a more relaxed attitude towards writing; he also acquired a conscious pursuit of the aesthetic of *qi*. Li Zhao 李肇 (fl.820s) in his preface to *A Supplement to the History of the Tang* (*Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補) made the following comments about the

經史之暇,時或一覽,猶至味之有菹醢也。See *Tang wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 1327.

style of the Yuanhe era (806-820): “Since the era of Yuanhe, in prose writing, people have tried to follow Hanyu’s strangeness and abruptness, and Fan Zongshi’s awkwardness and obscurity... The general tendency of the Yuanhe era is to value strangeness” 元和以後, 為文筆則學奇詭于韓愈, 學苦澀于樊宗師... 元和之風尚怪。¹²⁷ According to him, the formation of the Yuanhe trend was largely attributed to Han Yu’s unique aesthetic expression. Han Yu was certainly aware of his style and its aesthetic effect. He constantly referred to his own work as being *qi*. In “The Letter to the Vice-Minister of the Military Division”, he described his work as having “strange rhetoric and obscure purport” 奇辭奧旨。¹²⁸ In his famous “Explication of ‘Progress in Learning’” (“Jinxue jie” 進學解), he wrote that “although my writing is strange, it is not useful.”¹²⁹ In “Farewell to Poverty” (“Songqiong wen” 送窮文), he spoke of the literary demon that possessed him as “not being able to excel on one subject; always strange; not applicable and only good for self-entertaining” 不專一能, 怪怪奇奇, 不可時施, 只以自嬉。¹³⁰ For Han Yu, the aesthetic of *qi* concerned a confrontation of the literary mainstream and adopting unconventional literary practices. In his epitaph for a scholar in the imperial university “Guozizhujiao hedong xuejun muzhiming” 國子助教河東薛君墓誌銘, Han Yu emphasized this scholar’s achievements by describing his writing as *qi* which as he explained, is mainly about “being different from the norm” 以不同俗為主。¹³¹ Han Yu’s pursuit of strangeness grew out of his awareness of the cliché in Mid-Tang literature and

¹²⁷ Li Zhao 李肇, *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 184.

¹²⁸ Han Yu, “Shang bingbu Li Shilang shu” 上兵部李侍郎書, in *Hang changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 vol. 8 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 143.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 570.

¹³¹ Han Yu, “Guozizhujiao hedong xuejun muzhiming” 國子助教河東薛君墓誌銘, in *Hang changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 vol. 6, 359.

was consistent with his own literary theory which held that one must “get rid of clichés” 惟陳言之務去。¹³²

As Han Yu’s friend and a loyal follower of the “ancient style” movement, Liu Zongyuan shared Han Yu’s preference for the unusual. The Qing dynasty critic Liu Kai 劉開 (1784-1824) once said that “Liu’s devotion to language resembles Han’s and his love for *qi* is also similar...therefore Liu wanted to compete with Han and would not take it slowly” 柳之致力於文辭也與韓同, 其好奇亦同...急欲與之角力而不敢懈。¹³³ Liu not only wrote articles and letters to defend Han Yu’s style, but he also sought to strike similar notes in his own prose. His “The Biography of Crimson Li” 李赤傳, “The Biography of the Child Ou Ji” 童區寄傳 and “An Account of Hejian” 河間傳 all recorded unusual characters or events. Wu Xiaolin 吳小林 in his *The Aesthetic of Chinese Prose* describes the style of Liu’s biography writing as *qigui* 奇詭 (strange and bizarre).¹³⁴ Kang Yunmei 康韻梅 in “The Interplay between Classical Chinese Prose and Fiction in the Tang Dynasty—A Study of Works by Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan” argues that both Han and Liu intentionally pursued the aesthetic of *qi* and their conscious practice expanded the range of artistic expression for classical prose. Their taste for strangeness nurtured the development of *chuanqi*—a genre centered on *qi*.¹³⁵

¹³² For a study of Han Yu’s poetry, see Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yu* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) and Charles Hartman, *Han Yu and the T’ang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1986)

¹³³ *Liu Mengtaji-mengtui wenji* 劉孟塗集-孟塗文集 vol.1, cited in *Tangsong badajia* 唐宋八大家, ed. 吳小林 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991), 242

¹³⁴ Wu Xiaolin 吳小林, *Zhongguo sanwen meixue* 中國散文美學 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1995), 148.

¹³⁵ Kang Yunmei 康韻梅, “Tangdai guwen yu xiaoshuo de jiaoshe—yi Hanyu, Liu Zongyuan de zuopin wei kaocha zhongxin” 唐代古文與小說的交涉—以韓愈、柳宗元的作品為考察中心, *Humanitas Taiwanica* 台大文史哲學報 86 (2008.5): 105–133. For a study on the relationship between the “ancient-style” prose movement 古文運動 and the development of Tang *chuanqi*, see Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, “Han

The influence of *guwen* movement on the Tang writing of the strange is evident through the quality and quantity of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* works during and after the *guwen* movement. Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 in his “Han Yu and The Tang Novel” argues that the prosperity of Tang *guwen* was accompanied by the flourishing of the Tang novel: “The periods Zhenyuan 貞元 and Yuanhe 元和 (785-805, 806-820) were the golden age of Tang *guwen* and they were also the golden age of the novel.”¹³⁶ His definition of novel is “mixed, untrue tales” which include material that “dealt with divinities and ghosts or with strange phenomena which were rare in human experience”.¹³⁷ According to Li Jianguo, single pieces of Tang *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* were at their peak during 780-827.¹³⁸ In his *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄, Li listed nearly 70 *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* works written or composed during the time, most of which are single pieces. The list includes some of the most well-regarded *chuanqi* pieces such as “Renshi zhuan” 任氏傳 by Shen Jiji and “Yingying zhuan” 鶯鶯傳 by Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831). The Tang *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* collections, however, reached its peak of prosperity during 828-879 when both Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan had died and the *guwen* movement fell into a decline. Almost 40 *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* collections and 20 single pieces were listed during this period. Among them were Duan’s *Youyang zazhu*, Niu Sengru’s 牛僧孺 (780-849) *Xuanguan lu* 玄怪錄, Zhang Du’s 張讀 (834-886?) *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志. The sheer quantity of these works suggests that although by the end of Yuanhe era the *guwen*

Yu and the T’ang Novel,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1 (1936):39-43 and Y.W.Ma, “Prose writing of Han Yu and Ch’uan-ch’i Literature,” *JOS* 7 (1969): 195- 223.

¹³⁶ Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, “Han Yu and the Tang Novel”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1.1 (Apr. 1936): 43.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁸ See Li jianguo 李劍國, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄, vol. 1, 263.

movement gradually lost its vitality, the passion for strangeness ignited by the movement still remained. With regard to this cultural context, Duan's *Youyang zazhi* can be seen as a continuation of the trend of advocating strangeness during the Yuanhe period.

CHAPTER THREE

***QI* THROUGH AMBIGUITY: FANTASTIC HORROR**

This chapter discusses how the effect of *qi* is achieved through the literary-constructed hesitation by analyzing the narrative plot of a number of horror stories in *Youyang zazu*. Specifically, this chapter examines the literary operation of providing two contrastive interpretations for the same event in these horror stories and the hesitation engendered by such practice. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the hesitation experienced by the reader is the hallmark of the fantastic when he is presented with two explanations for the same event: a natural explanation and a supernatural one.

One might argue that given the widespread belief in the supernatural in pre-modern China, the Tang reader must tend to adopt the supernatural explanation of events described with regard to the tales of *Youyang zazu*. However, such tendency does not mean that skeptics did not exist during the Tang dynasty and the hesitation described by Todorov was an impossible reading experience for the Tang reader. Throughout history, there has never been a lack of skeptics of the supernatural among Chinese literati. One of the early skeptics of the supernatural was the Han philosopher Wang Chong 王充 (27-91) who in his *Lunheng* 論衡 openly challenged popular supernatural beliefs. The belief in ghosts, he argued, is absurd. He asked, for instance, why should only human beings have ghosts, not other animals? Besides, if the dead all become ghosts, they would surely outnumber living people and we would see them everywhere. In order to discredit the belief in ghosts, Wang also offered a rational explanation for the circle of life: “A man

before birth resides in the primary vital force and returns also to it after death...Before birth a man has no consciousness; upon death a man returns to the origin of no consciousness” 人未生, 在元氣之中既死, 複歸元氣...人未生無所知, 其死歸無知之本.¹³⁹ Through such arguments, Wang refuted the existence of the supernatural in light of the more physical or mechanical scheme of *qi* 氣. In the Six Dynasties, Ruan Zhan 阮瞻 (210-310), the nephew of the celebrated poet Ruan Ji 阮籍, was also famous for his disbelief in ghosts (*wu gui lun* 無鬼論).

In the Tang dynasty, skeptics continued to attack supernatural beliefs and dismiss supernatural occurrences as untrue or unfounded. In his preface to *Guoshi bu* 國史補, a book devoted to the anecdotes from the later part of Xuanzong's 玄宗 reign into the 820s, Li Zhao 李肇 noted several principles for anecdote-collecting:

Whatever tells of retribution, gives account of ghosts and spirits, or shows dreams and prognostications coming true, I have entirely excluded. If it is a record of something factual, investigates the principles behind things, shows encouragement or warning, selects customs, or provides aid in genial conversation, I have written down.

言報應, 敘鬼神, 徵夢蓍, 近帷箔, 悉去之; 紀事實, 探物理, 辯疑惑, 示勸戒, 採風俗, 助談笑, 則書之.¹⁴⁰

Here Li Zhao justified his exclusion of the supernatural content in the collection by suggesting that the supernatural was neither factual nor useful. Li Zhao was certainly not

¹³⁹ Wang Chong 王充, *Lunheng* 論衡, *juan* 20. See Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 874-875.

¹⁴⁰ Li Zhao 李肇, *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 (Taipei: Yiwen shuju, 1965), 1.

the only Tang literatus who was suspicious of the supernatural. In *Fei Guoyu* 非國語, Liu Zongyuan dismantled the supernatural stories recorded in the *Discourses on the States* 國語 which supposedly recorded Heaven's interventions in human affairs. Liu rejected the idea of Mandate of Heaven (*tian ming* 天命) and its moral impact on human history, arguing that Heaven is not an ethical existence.¹⁴¹ In his letter to Han Yu, “Yu Han Yu lun shiguan shu” 與韓愈論史官書, Liu Zongyuan criticized Han for his advocacy of the idea of Mandate of Heaven and once again denied the traditional beliefs about Heaven as a purposeful and moral presence. He also urged against discussing supernatural phenomena such as deities and ghosts because they were unfounded. He famously claimed that, “When it comes to ghosts and spirits, things are obscure, absurd and groundless. The wise do not speak of them” 又凡鬼神事, 渺茫荒惑無可准, 明者所不道.¹⁴² Although Liu Zongyuan's attack mainly focuses on the use of supernatural elements in history, his arguments show that he did not support supernatural beliefs in general.

Such skepticism had a long tradition and it continued over the course of centuries despite the widespread belief in supernatural occurrences. However, it is somewhat arbitrary to assume that Tang literati only adopted two polarized positions with regard to the supernatural: they are either zealous believers of the supernatural or avowed disbelievers. The fact that skepticism and supernaturalism coexisted at the same time suggests that there was room in between for readers who were neither absolute skeptics nor absolute supernaturalists. They are probably the disbelievers of the supernatural who

¹⁴¹ Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, *Liu Hedong ji* 柳河東集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974), 746-869.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 498-500.

at times admit their limit in providing rational explanations for certain strange events or the believers who at times accede to the views of skeptics. Even Liu Zongyuan who was generally suspicious of the supernatural, was tempted to invoke the supernatural when incidents were too strange for rational explanations. In his “Li Linfu yi du nue nung zheng qua” 李吉甫以毒虐弄正權, he reported a prostitute who was struck dead by thunder in the marketplace. On her side was written in red: “Li Linfu manipulated political power with malevolence, so the Lord ordered transcendents to smite him altogether three times.” He suspected that the prostitute was Li Linfu’s reincarnation and commented that he found this incident so strange and frightening.¹⁴³ This shows that although Liu Zongyuan was an avid skeptic of the supernatural, he was at times at a loss to explain strange phenomena and forced to subscribe to a supernatural explanation. For the Tang reader who held an ambivalent or a relatively flexible attitude towards the supernatural, a moment of hesitation was not impossible when facing an ambiguous event.

While the actual Tang reader may hesitate over whether an event is supernatural or not, it is important to point out that when Todorov proposes the concept of the fantastic, he reminds us that the reader under discussion is not an actual reader, but the reader implicit in the text.¹⁴⁴ The reactions of the actual reader are largely bounded by the specific historical and cultural context the reader lives in and his personal experience; the implied reader’s perception, however, is always given in the text. According to Wolfgang Iser, the implied reader is essentially a component of the structure of a text. The concept

¹⁴³ Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, “Li Linfu yi du nue nung zheng qua” 李吉甫以毒虐弄正權, in *Hedong xiansheng Longcheng lu* 河東先生龍城錄, in *Baidu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成, ed. Yan Yiping 嚴一萍 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965).

¹⁴⁴ Todorov Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. trans. Richard Howard, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 31.

of implied reader “designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text”.¹⁴⁵ In other words, the actual reader inevitably modifies his reading of the text based on his existing experience. The implied reader, however, is controlled by the text, because his knowledge and activities are confined within limits set by the literary work.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the ambiguous vision inherent in the text itself which enables the implied reader to hesitate over two contrastive interpretations. To better illustrate such ambiguous vision in these *zhiguai* tales, in this chapter, Todorovian hesitation is expanded to include cases in which the reader hesitates not necessarily over whether the described event is supernatural or not but simply over two opposed interpretations which are both supported by the narrative. In other words, the fantastic is defined in a broader sense here as the hesitation of the reader simply between two opposing interpretations of the same ambiguous events. To understand the term fantastic, let us now return to Todorov’s study.

In *A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Todorov defines the fantastic by the fact that it produces in the reader hesitation between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. According to Rosemary Jackson, this fantastic hesitation, however, is not limited to a particular genre, but rather “can assume different generic forms.”¹⁴⁶ Although what Todorov defines as “the fantastic” does not necessarily coincide with the horror genre, its exploration of otherworldly and supernatural narratives resonates with much that is commonly understood as ‘horror’. Modern scholars who

¹⁴⁵ Wolfgang Iser, “Readers and the Concept of the Implied Reader.” *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1978. 27-38. Rpt. in *Contexts for Criticism*, ed. Donald Keesey. 3rd edition (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1998), 163.

¹⁴⁶ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 35.

study horror often consider horror as a literary product unique to Western culture.¹⁴⁷ This view is partly true because Western civilization gave birth to the horror genre in its modern form. However, this view fails to acknowledge that every society has its own tales of supernatural menace and horror stories that can be found across ages. In the vast corpus of Chinese *zhiguai*, the existence of horror is evident in the overwhelming quantity of narratives that are filled with ghosts, demons, spirits and life-and-death struggle between man and supernatural adversary. The relevance of Todorov's theory to both Western and non-Western horror narrative makes it a useful approach in many scholarly works. Critics have applied his theory to various forms of horror, including horror cinema, biblical literature and *zhiguai* tales.¹⁴⁸

Since this section draws heavily upon Todorov's concept of the fantastic, it will be helpful to look at his descriptions of the fantastic in more detail:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work— in the case of naive reading, the

¹⁴⁷ Jason Colavito, *Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge and the Development of the Horror Genre*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008, p.12.

¹⁴⁸ For fantastic in cinema, see Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*; and Michael Grant, "The Modern Fantastic," *Necronomicon: The Journal of Horror and Erotic Cinema*, Book Three, ed. Andy Black, (London: Creation Books, 1999), 51-72; for fantastic in literature, see Terry Heller, *The Delight of Terror: An Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); for fantastic in biblical studies, see Georgia Aichele and Tina Pippin, eds. *The Monstrous and the Unspeakable: The Bible as Fantastic Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 11-18; for fantastic in *zhiguai*, see Company, *Strange Writing*, 205-236.

actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third actually constitute the genre.¹⁴⁹

As Carroll points out, since the second attribute is optional and the third one is negative, the only positive attribute of the fantastic is the fact that the reader remains undecided between two possible interpretations of ambiguous events through the reading experience.¹⁵⁰ Based on his definition of the fantastic, Todorov proposes four neighboring categories: uncanny, fantastic/uncanny, fantastic/marvelous and marvelous, with the distinction lying in the attitudes taken with regard to phenomena beyond our everyday experience. Todorov finds that the uncanny is a vague genre: “events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction which works of the fantastic have made familiar.”¹⁵¹ In the uncanny, there is never a serious suggestion that the supernatural is operating in the story, yet the experience of uneasiness is not unlike that of reading the fantastic. The character is often hunted by powers that, though natural, seem almost supernatural in their power to destroy. In the fantastic/uncanny, we might wonder if some event is the result of a supernatural force, and we find a natural explanation to disprove the supernatural. The fantastic/marvelous is—as the obverse of the fantastic/uncanny, “the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end

¹⁴⁹ Todorov Tzvetan, *The Fantastic*, 33.

¹⁵⁰ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 146.

¹⁵¹ Todorov Tzvetan, *The Fantastic*, 46.

with an acceptance of the supernatural.”¹⁵² In the marvelous, the existence of the supernatural is not to be called into question. Whatever it is, it simply is. For Todorov, the fantastic is the duration of uncertainty between the uncanny and the marvelous, and once the uncertainty is resolved, we enter its neighboring genre of fantastic-uncanny or fantastic-marvelous. The episode in a literary work that provokes hesitation on the part of the reader can be described by the term “fantastic”, but the moment that the hesitation is resolved, “the fantastic” ends. Thus, as Heerak Christian Kim points out, “for Todorov, fantasy is not a stagnant category and can even be described as genre elements rather than a genre...even if the novel or a literary work is not a fantasy as a whole, it can contain genre elements of the fantastic or fantasy.”¹⁵³ As such, the fantastic can exist in many works of different genres such as epic, tragedy, horror story and crime fiction.

Todorov’s work on the fantastic is potentially very useful for analyzing the strange and the supernatural in *zhiguai*, for he provides a descriptive poetics of the fantastic and four neighboring genres that cooperatively explain many tales of the strange. Sinologists, however, disagree on the relevance of his concept. Some scholars find it illuminating especially with regard to the literary language and structure of *zhiguai*. Robert Campany, for instance, draws inspiration from the concept that the fantastic is a kind of contra-writing that plays upon the difference between two contrastive worldviews and explores how the anomaly is represented through structures of expectation in various writing modes of *zhiguai* tales. Some scholars are aware of the difficulty in applying Western notions to Chinese texts, but still cautiously adopt Todorov’s classification system of fantastic literature to categorize *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*.

¹⁵² Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 52.

¹⁵³ Heerak Christian Kim, *Intricately Connected: Biblical Studies, Intertextuality, and Literary genre* (Lanham: University of America, 2008), 92.

In his introduction to *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic*, Karl Kao claims that “some of the tales here may be considered as belonging to the category of the supernatural in that they represent phenomena that exist beyond the observable world or occurrences that apparently transcend the laws of nature; while other tales are fantastic because their stories involve what is supranormal or so highly extraordinary as to become unnatural, though not necessarily supernatural.”¹⁵⁴ Here, Kao’s supernatural corresponds to Todorov’s concept of marvelous, his fantastic to Todorov’s uncanny; but he does not offer an equivalent of Todorov’s fantastic. Other scholars, such as Judith Zeitlin questions the applicability of a Western theoretical framework for studying Chinese literature of the strange. One of the problems with applying a Todorovian schema, she argues, is that Todorov offers no definition of “supernatural”—a term crucial to his definition of the fantastic. The term “supernatural” as we understand today carries a post-Enlightenment scientific undertone and depends on the laws of science: “we cannot assume that the same laws of commonsense reality are always operant in other cultures or during other historical periods.”¹⁵⁵ Zeitlin’s point of view is valuable because it reminds us that “supernatural” is a culturally and historically constructed term and the application of a concept in a context that differs from the one in which the concept originated needs careful consideration.

Such considerations, however, do not necessarily exclude the possibility of applying the concept of “supernatural” in a different temporal and cultural context. Although the term “supernatural” is a fairly new construction, the fundamental concept

¹⁵⁴ Karl S.Y. Kao, ed., *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 7

the term stands for was employed long before the rise of modern natural science.¹⁵⁶ Every cultural and historical period has had phenomena or objects that have contradicted a presumed order in the realm of worldly life. Supernatural, in a broader sense, is a concept describing existence that stands antithetically to the observable patterns that give the worldly life coherence. Medieval writers, such as Duan Chengshi did not have an equivalent idea of the supernatural as moderns do, but they had a sense of the customary course of nature and things contrary to it and responded spontaneously to the wonder that the extraordinary evoked. In the case of Chinese literature of the strange, there are broad continuities in the territory of “supernatural” that span historical periods: what was considered a violation of normality in human world in pre-modern period, to a large extent, overlaps with what is considered as “supernatural” in modern time. For instance, phenomena that are not directly amenable to sensory perception or human control and understanding, such as omens and magical manifestations related to Taoist priests and Buddhist monks; or entities that cross boundaries between the living and the dead, human and nonhuman, animated and unanimated were all considered anomalies in the ordinary course of nature in medieval China.¹⁵⁷ Similarly in modern times, they are still considered postulated forces or entities whose effects surpass possible achievement within human capabilities, that is, supernatural in nature. Such overlapping between medieval anomalies and the modern supernatural enables a Todorovian study of the medieval Chinese *zhiguai* tales, especially of *Youyang zazhi* in which portents, gods,

¹⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion on the developmental histories of the term “supernatural” in Western tradition, see Benson Saler. “Supernatural as a Western Category” *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology* 5.1, (1977): 31-53. Scholars also employ the term in the field of sinology, for instance, see Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁷

fairies, spirits, monsters, ghosts, metamorphic plants and animals inhabit its horror narrative.

To use the concept of the fantastic to its full analyzing potential in the Chinese context, in this study Todorovian hesitation is broadened to include cases in which the reader hesitates between two opposed interpretations that are both supported by the narrative. In other words, the opposition that generates the required hesitation can be simply constructed through two mutually exclusive interpretations and does not necessarily reside between a supernatural and a natural explanation. In this chapter, we employ the concept of the fantastic in such a broader sense—the hesitation of the reader between two opposing interpretations of the same ambiguous events—to approach a certain type of horror story in *Youyang zazu*. This type of horror story thrives on the tension and suspense created by contrastive interpretations and reflects the overlapping relationship between fantastic and horror and can suitably be labeled “fantastic horror”. In this section, I seek to focus on the fantastic feature of certain horror narratives in *Youyang zazu*. The following story illustrates how the fantastic is in fact integral to horror narratives:

When Li Gongzuo¹⁵⁸ held office in Luzhou during the Dali period (766-779), one of the government clerks Wang Geng asked for a leave of absence to go home. When he arrived at the outer city at night, suddenly ceremonial guards were riding on horses, urging that the commoners give way. The clerk hid behind a large tree and peeked, wondering who it might be since there was no high-ranking official in this area. Behind the

¹⁵⁸ Li Gongzuo 李公佐 (ca.770-848) was a Tang dynasty official and famous writer whose works include “Nanke taishou zhuan” 南柯太守傳 (“The Governor of Nanke”) and “Xie Xiao’e zhuan” 谢小娥傳 (“Story of Xie Xiao’e”)

guiding guards, there was a man dressed in purple whose honor guards were in accordance with those of a regional military government. The carriage was just crossing the river when the driver approached the man, saying “the harness of the carriage is broken.” The man in purple said: “Check the register.” Wang Geng then saw several clerks checking the register and they replied, “We can take the tendon from the back of the wife of Zhang so-and-so who lives in such-and-such place of Luzhou”. The person they referred to was none other than the aunt of Wang Geng. The clerk came back a moment later, holding two strips of something white, each of which was a few *chi* long. They then crossed the river and went away. When Wang Geng arrived at home, his aunt was fine. The night passed and she suddenly suffered a severe back pain. She died half a day later.¹⁵⁹

李公佐大曆中在廬州，有書吏王庚請假歸，夜行郭外，忽值引驪呵辟，書吏遽映大樹窺之，且怪此無尊官也。導騎後一人紫衣，儀衛如節使，後有車一乘，方渡水。禦者前白：“車鞵索斷。”紫衣者言：“檢簿。”遂見數吏檢簿曰：“合取廬州某裡張某妻脊筋修之。”乃書吏之姨也。頃刻吏回，持兩條白物，各長數尺，乃渡水而去。至家，姨尚無恙，經宿忽患背疼，半日而卒。¹⁶⁰

The story opens with a narrative style which resembles that of historiography, in which identifiable information, such as who, when, and where are specified. Readers who are

¹⁵⁹ My translation. For Reed's translation, see *Chinese Chronicles of the Strange: The "Nuogao ji"* (New York: Peter Lang publishing 2001), 47.

¹⁶⁰ Fang Nansheng 方南生, ed., *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, 14.564 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 136.

familiar with traditional Chinese narratives can readily recognize this feature in the *zhiguai* tradition. *Zhiguai* tales often start by developing an ordinary setting where characters and events are located within a historical and social context that is not only intelligible but also plausible to its audience. By doing so, a *zhiguai* tale underscores both the familiarity of its setting and the verisimilitude of its account. For a story that deals primarily with the strange, a mundane setting is most beneficial because it intensifies the story's horrifying effect by offering a false sense of security and familiarity only to be violently shattered by the incoming eruption of abnormality. The story also employs a third-person narrative that eliminates the personal subjectivity of a first-person narrator, which in turn avoids possible confusion caused by the narrator. However, this arrangement does not affect the level of ambiguity in the story. By eliminating other sources of ambiguity, the text highlights the ambiguity that results from the two possible interpretations of the story.

It is worth noting that although suspense is created from the beginning of the narrative, it does not peak until the end of the story. What Wang Geng has seen that night is indeed unusual, bizarre and highly suspicious, but at the moment, the reader can only suspect the involvement of non-human elements because of the lack of confirmation of the supernatural. As the carriage and the guards leave and Wang Geng safely returns home, the reader learns that his aunt is alive and well. Thus, the reader's suspicion over the nature of the incident can seemingly be alleviated. But when the last sentence reveals what happens half a day later, the reader's suspicion is raised to a higher level. Even at this point, the text still does not offer us any definitive evidence that links the death of Wang Geng's aunt to the previous incident. Startling as these events may appear, the

story does not conclude with certainty as to whether the man in purple dress is responsible for the fatality, leaving the story to be constructed by the reader as a potentiality, an “as if” or “maybe.” In other words, even though the story strongly suggests the supernatural occurrence through the juxtaposition of the two events, the possibility of an uncanny coincidence is not completely ruled out due to the lack of further information with regard to the death of Wang’s aunt. Thus the reader faces two distinctly different yet plausible readings of the story: the reader can either acknowledge a cause and effect relation between the events, or interpret them as separate, unrelated incidents.

The ambiguity of the narrative helps to create suspense that is crucial to horror stories. According to Noël Carroll, suspense arises when “a well-structured question—with neatly opposed alternatives—emerges from the narrative.”¹⁶¹ In the story, questions have been raised by scenes and must be answered by the reader before he can opt for one of the two possible readings. Is the man in purple a human? What is on the register? Does the clerk bring back the aunt’s spinal tendons? Throughout the story, some clues are given to suggest the strange nature of the event and the possibility of transcendent involvement. However, the narrative does not really exclude the possibility that these clues may be explained within the realm of human experience. When the most crucial evidence linking the death of the victim to Wang’s sighting occurs at the end of the story, no authorial comment or outsider’s testimony is offered. That is, though the reader may prefer to consider the fatality as the intervention of a transcendent being, perhaps a ghost or a deity, he does not have any kind of confirmation to support his judgment. And the lack of definitive evidence prevents the reader from confidently adopting any explanation

¹⁶¹ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 137.

of the narrative. And that withdrawal from a complete conviction leaves room within the reader's mind for uncertainty and suspense to linger. The interplay between two plausible yet contrastive interpretations of the same event has an important role in many horror narratives. Often, horror narratives unfold in the same manner as the fantastic, preserving evidence as indecisively as possible. Information must be dispensed in such a way that hesitation is not only provoked but also sustained.

The process of withholding key narrative information often culminates in a significant narrative twist as the ending of a story provokes the reader to reinterpret and possibly reject all that he has previously perceived. In some instances, hesitation is not inevitably linked to the majority of the narrative. Quite to the contrary, the hesitation that characterizes the fantastic may be generally absent for both characters and audiences until the narrative's abrupt turning point in which what was assumed to have happened may be subject to a complete different interpretation. This sudden twist of structure works as a form of narrative shift by questioning the reader's perspective of comprehension. And the fantastic hesitation and anxiety may only occur for the first time at the end of a narrative. Another short story will well serve our point:

When Yu Di was in charge of the safety of Xiangyang, a person named Liu was sent off to the capital. On his way, he met a provincial graduate who was in his twenties and well-spoken. Traveling together for several miles, they really hit it off, so they sat down on the grass. Liu had some wine and poured several glasses. It was getting dark, and the graduate pointed to the fork in the road, saying, "My residence is only a few miles away, would you please come?" Liu declined the invitation with the

excuse that he had to hurry on with his journey. The graduate then recited a poem: “Trickling, tinkling water running; the watercress is sprouting; nesting birds are flying side by side and travelers are returning home. There is nobody in the desolate village to celebrate the cold food festival; the tomb palace faces blossoms in vain. On the next day, when Liu returned to Xiangyang, he looked for the graduate. Only a tomb stood there.

于襄陽頓在鎮時, 選人劉某入京, 逢一舉人, 年二十許, 言語明晤, 同行數裡, 意甚相得, 因藉草. 劉有酒, 傾數杯. 日暮, 舉人指支徑曰: “某弊止從此數裡, 能左顧乎?” 劉辭以程期, 舉人因賦詩曰: “流水涓涓芹努(一曰吐)牙, 織烏雙飛客還家. 荒村無人作寒食, 殯宮空對棠梨花.” 至明旦, 劉歸襄州. 尋訪舉人, 殯宮存焉.¹⁶²

For the most part, this story seems like a simple account about a casual and friendly encounter between two travelers. The whole narrative is brief and bare-boned. Just when the reader may be getting bored and wondering what the point of the story is, the ending is abruptly presented and reveals the shocking nature of this seemingly innocent encounter. The withholding of key textual information leads us to assume that the provincial graduate is a living character, until the narrative twist in the end suggests that he may have been long-dead. This sudden reversal of the previous interpretive framework, according to Matt Hills, can achieve ontological horror: “that is, the shock and disorientation that can be provoked in characters and audiences alike when an accepted/interpreted narrative ‘reality’ is instantaneously revealed to be either one

¹⁶² *Youyang zazu*, 13.497, 121.

subjective level nested within an alternative, ‘objective’ reality or a radical misinterpretation of diegetic ontology.”¹⁶³ In other words, the new release of information shifts the whole perspective of comprehension by presenting a radically different interpretation and causes in the reader a profound sense of shock.

Throughout the story, the narrative is deliberately constructed to misguide the reader by directing their attention at one level of narrative reality and immediately reveals the event that requires a radically different interpretation at a different level of diegetic reality. In so doing, the fantastic hesitation that was not experienced by the protagonist or the reader initially is incited at the moment of revelation. Some narratives we regard as straightforward may now need a second look. Many questions therefore arise: Is the graduate trying to be friendly or does he have something else in his mind when he invites Liu to his home? Is the poem meant to indicate his identity as an apparition? Like the previous story, no conclusion is offered in the narrative. Both stories end abruptly with the termination of the accounting of events. Nothing is explained and there is no authoritative figure that completes the circuit of knowledge for the reader. Importantly in the second story, the reader’s hesitation is not shared by the character and is not reflected within the text. Unlike the first story in which the protagonist has a moment of wondering with regard to the origin of the man in purple, Liu in this case does not even have a chance to hesitate. All is left unsettled for him. The reader is now confronted with two entirely different interpretations for the story, both of which depend on the reader’s understanding of the information provided by the last sentence of the narrative: whether to take the last sentence literally and regard the Liu’s follow-up visit as a vain effort that yields little about the graduate but the elusive nature of friendship, or to consider it

¹⁶³ Matt Hills, *The Pleasure of Horror* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 42.

suggestive and regard the visit as the missing puzzle piece in indicating the identity of the graduate and revealing the nature of that encounter. In other words, the reader's reading of the last sentence determines how he should perceive the entire narrative: whether to consider the encounter as innocently as it seems, that is, with a local scholar, or to consider it an experience with a ghost that comes back from the tomb, looking for companionship. The reader may gravitate towards one of the explanations, but the other explanation cannot be exhausted and therefore a completely satisfying conclusion cannot be reached. In other words, neither interpretation can be entirely confirmed.

In this story, the fantastic hesitation does not appear at the beginning of narrative; rather, it emerges for the first time at the very end of the story when the reader's assumed interpretive framework is challenged. The reader then hesitates over not only two interpretations of events but also two distinct readings of the text: the way we understand the text when we do not know the "secret" versus the way we interpret it when we have known the "secret". It is tempting to look at the first reading as a distraction from or blind for the second reading. But again without a full confirmation within the story, uncertainty is sustained beyond the text.

According to Todorov, the hesitation can be resolved only if the text supplies some means of doing so. In the fantastic, as opposed to allegory and poetry, this resolution, if it comes at all, must be accompanied with a full acceptance of either one of the two possible interpretations of the ambiguous events. Because in both stories, the narrative fails to provide conclusive evidence for either interpretation of the events described, the reader cannot be fully satisfied with his choice of either interpretation. In both stories, the narrative carefully creates hesitation and uncertainty that are essential to

fantastic horror tales. However, when the reader's hesitation occurs in the two stories is different. In the first story, hesitation is generated mainly within the text. It starts to grow right after the beginning of the narrative and is sustained throughout the narrative. In the end, one of the explanations is more promising than the other one. The reader's uncertainty beyond this point relates to the lack of confirmation of his interpretation from other sources. In the second story, the possibility of an alternative explanation does not occur to us until the very last moment. Brief as it is, the last piece of information is enough to challenge our previous assumption of the story. It is precisely from this point on that the reader needs to consider two possible interpretations and may hesitate over two distinct readings. In other words, the reader's hesitation is sustained beyond the text.

If we consider Todorov's four related genres of the fantastic, we may estimate that the first story is on the border of the fantastic/marvelous, while the second is the rare case of the pure fantastic. In *The Delights of Terror*, Terry Heller convincingly points out that one characteristic of the pure fantastic is anti-closure. According to Heller, one of the central devices of "anti-closure" is when the narrative "withholds the full development of the fantastic enigma until virtually its last sentence... [where] all the preceding narrative becomes new."¹⁶⁴ Anti-closure occurs only when a twist in the ending appears which puts the reader back into the story through ambiguity with regard to what has actually happened. The "surprise" ending as one would expect, transforms the import of the entire narrative, but in a terrifying way, because it creates a trap: the surprise leads to questions, and the questions lead to the terrifying entrapment of the reader. Indeed, we arrive at the end of the story of Liu to find a reopening rather than a closing of tale. Because of its last sentence, the reader receives new information that is contradictory to previous

¹⁶⁴ Terry Heller, *The Delight of Terror*, 110.

instructions about how to interpret the event, and consequently, struggles to find resolution within the text. To some extent, the reading process continues after the text ends, and until some satisfactory resolution of the ambiguity is attained. The element of uncertainty therefore permanently exists in the narrative.

In both stories discussed, the reader is confronted with two subsequent events and his understanding of the connection between the two events determines his reading of the whole story. The reader can either disregard the juxtaposition of the two incidents and deem them unusual coincidences or acknowledge the involvement of elements that are beyond the boundaries of the human domain. Both choices involve situations that are strange to some degree. The difference between the two interpretations is that one interpretation clearly involves ghosts, deities, monsters or demons, and the other does not. Thus, the reader hesitates between two interpretations: one remains within the domain of human life, and the other surpasses the observable rules of the human world. Both interpretations are unusual enough to be elevated above the everyday life of ordinary people and therefore categorized as strange experiences. In this sense, the fantastic hesitation in both stories resides between two explanations that are both “unnatural” in that they are so highly extraordinary that they surpass the normal range of human experience. As such, the fantastic is generated through two distinct yet both strange interpretations: the one that involves supernatural beings or occurrences and the one that involves the rare and the extraordinary standing out against the grain of common life experience.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Karl Kao made a similar distinction in his discussion of classical Chinese tales of the fantastic. See Karl S.Y. Kao, ed., *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 2-3.

The relation between the supernaturally strange and the mundanely strange is further explored in tales that play with the boundary between the real and the illusionary. In these tales, the reader must either decide that the character is “the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us.”¹⁶⁶ The following story may help to illuminate the interplay between reality and illusion.

At the beginning of the Yuanhe era (805-821), a gentleman, whose name was lost, lay drunk in the room. When he woke up, he saw the women on the screen dancing and singing in front of his bed; the song went:

“Under the warm sun of the spring,

Girls from Chang’an city go on an outing,

Heartbroken everywhere they go,

The dancing long sleeves and the waist-bending move are now completely forgotten,

Their beautiful eyebrows are as sad as the autumn frost.”

Among these women, one girl with double braids asked curiously, “what is the waist bending move?” The singing girl smiled and said, “Don’t you see I am bending my waist right now?” She then bent her waist backwards until her hair touched the ground. Her waist formed perfectly half a circle.

The gentleman was terrified and shouted at them. All of a sudden, these women went back to the folding screen as if nothing happened.

¹⁶⁶ Todorov, *Fantastic*, 25.

元和初,有一士人失姓字,因醉臥廳中。及醒,見古屏上婦人等悉于床前踏歌,歌曰:“長安女兒踏春陽,無處春陽不斷腸。舞袖弓腰渾忘卻,蛾眉空帶九秋霜。”其中雙鬟者問曰:“如何是弓腰?”歌者笑曰:“汝不見我作弓腰乎?”乃反首,髻及地,腰勢如規焉。士人驚懼,因叱之,忽然上屏,亦無其他。¹⁶⁷

Unlike other stories that feature named protagonists, this story begins its narrative with an unknown scholar whose senses are unstable. The gentleman's temporary mental and physical disability caused by intoxication is an important piece of information for the reader's further reading of the story because his condition discredits his point of view and challenges his perception of the event. In doing so, what the scholar sees is no longer the trustworthy version of what happened but rather a questionable experience of an unreliable character. When the scholar “wakes up”, he sees what seems impossible: the women on the folding screen have stepped out of the screen and come to life in front of his eyes. The transformation of the women from being merely images on the screen to live persons dancing in the scholar's room clearly indicates something unusual in the process. This unusual situation can be explained by the intrusion of the supernatural, in which case the women on the screen possess the power to cross not only their physical containment, i.e. the screen itself, but also the conceptual boundary between the animated and the inanimate. At the same time, because the event is narrated from the scholar's point of view whose credibility is put into question by the first sentence of the narrative, the reader cannot exclude the possibility that what the scholar sees is merely an illusion as the result of the liveliness of the portrait on the screen or his distorted sensory and

¹⁶⁷ *Youyang zazu*, 14.565, 136.

impaired judgment. When these women go back to the screen, they do not leave any substantial evidence for the scholar to prove the veracity of his supernatural experience.¹⁶⁸ This fact along with the situation that the scholar is all alone in the room with no one to bear witness further undermines the credibility of the scholar's account and thus places the reader in a dilemma of two opposite interpretations of the event. He either decides that the screen is imbued with supernatural properties and the images therein depicted can separate themselves from the screen upon which they have been painted and become by their own will really alive; or that the scholar suffers from a distortion of senses and an overstimulation of imagination caused by alcohol, and mistakes the artistically painted portraits of women for actual persons. In other words, the reader hesitates between the interpretation that features a reality with supernatural elements and the interpretation concerning the incredible depth of human imagination and illusion.

No matter which interpretation the reader subscribes to, it is worth noting that the painting remains at the center of the fantastic. The choice of a painting as the source of illusion and confusion is not uncommon in *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* narrative. In her study of boundary-crossing in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, Zeitlin analyzes a story which also relies on the power of a painting. This story tells how a young man is drawn by a vivid portrait of a girl in the mural and enters the painted wall to have a romantic relationship with her. According to Zeitlin, the painting is like a dream that "had long symbolized the

¹⁶⁸ A similar story can be found in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 where the male protagonist feels that he enters the secret world of the painted wall and has a romantic relationship with a young girl. When an old monk summons him out of the wall, he finds out that the young girl in the painting whom he was with has changed her hairstyle to that of a married woman. Zeitlin did a close analysis of the story in the conclusion of her *Historian of the Strange* where she discusses how Pu Songling plays with the boundaries between reality and illusion.

blurring of the boundaries between the real and the unreal.”¹⁶⁹ She argues that scholars throughout history have compared and likened paintings with reality and reality with paintings. The Chinese often refer to the deceptive power of such images as *huan* 幻—the ability to deceive, to cause illusion and magical transformation.¹⁷⁰ The idea is that since an illusionistic painting erases the boundary between real and unreal, it possesses the possibility of becoming reality; that is, images that look real may become real. Despite their similar focus on a magical painting, the story of the painted screen in *Youyang zazu* is different from the story of the painted wall in *Liaozhai zhiyi* because in the former it is the women portrayed on a screen who intrude into our everyday life, while in the latter a male protagonist enters the secret world of the painted wall. As Zeitlin points out, the story in *Liaozhai zhiyi* reverses the usual plot of a painting coming to life and thwarts reader’s expectation when the viewer in reality enters the world of the painting. This discrepancy between the two stories contributes to the difference between a romantic love affair and a terrifying incident. In *Liaozhai zhiyi*, the young man initiates the first contact with the girl on the wall by staring at her for a long time. Although his intrusion is not intended, his long gaze and undeniable admiration for the girl plays a significant role in his entry into the painted wall. In fact, the girl is described in such lively matter that she seems to be just waiting for a truly devoted admirer to become her lover. The young man’s passion has allowed him to physically and metaphysically penetrate the wall, and thereby cross the boundary between reality and illusion. The gentleman in *Youyang zazu* however, does not display any sort of passion towards the screen or the painting. He simply falls asleep in his private room and does nothing to trigger the magical

¹⁶⁹ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 190.

¹⁷⁰ For etymology and basic meanings of *huan*, see Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風, ed., *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1991), 427-429.

transformation of the painting. He does not witness the exact moment when the painted images step out of the screen alive, nor does he participate in the process in any way. In fact, he experiences the transformation of the painting in his unconscious state unprepared for what happens next. When he awakens, what used to be lifeless has suddenly become full of life. Ironically, when the gentleman finally regains his senses, he is disturbed again by his newly recovered sight. One can only imagine the kind of shock and distress he must experience when the new “reality” strikes him in such an abrupt way.

To link the power of a painting with danger and terror is not accidental. In fact, a woman in a painting who comes to life as one’s nightmare is, according to Wu Hung, “a persistent theme in ancient Chinese tales.”¹⁷¹ The *Yiyuan* 異苑 compiled by Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (fl. 5th c.) recorded one such tale. It tells that after the death of his favorite concubine, Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-465) was troubled by his memory of her one night. Suddenly he saw a woman emerge from the screen and surround his bed. As she moved towards him, the heavy screen collapsed onto him. After this incident, Yan became very ill and died soon after.¹⁷² This story shares certain similarities with the story in *Youyang zazu* in that they both suggest the possible intrusion of the supernatural by depicting painted beauties that come to life; both of the protagonists are horrified by the incidents. The sense of danger comes from the fact that the painting is possibly supernatural in nature and it may possess power that defies the observable rules of our daily life. Danger is also associated with the sense of losing control over one’s familiar surroundings. To

¹⁷¹ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 104.

¹⁷² *Yiyuan* 異苑 cited in Jiang Tingxi 蔣廷錫 et al., *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Shanghai: ZHonghua shuju, 1934), 2213.

better illustrate this point, we need to consider the significance and function of screens in the Chinese tradition.

In medieval China, although a screen is a very versatile household item and can be placed in multiple locations to accommodate many occasions, its basic function remains the same, that is, to divide and separate spaces. Whether it is placed in the hall to set off the reception quarters, in the bedroom to maintain privacy; or in an open space to create privacy between groups of people, its fundamental role is, as Wu Hung points out, to “transform space into places that are definable, manageable, and obtainable.”¹⁷³ This function is determined by the physical feature of the screen:

A screen has a ‘face’ and a ‘back’. So when it is set up, it not only divides an undifferentiated space into two juxtaposed area—that in front of it and that behind it—but also qualifies these two areas. To the person backed or surrounded by a screen, the area behind the screen has become hidden from sight; it has suddenly disappeared, at least temporarily. He finds himself within an encircled area and perceives this area as belonging to him. He is the master of this place.¹⁷⁴

By its very nature, a screen defines one’s space, furnishes him with a sense of security and privacy and enhances his authority and control over the space he occupies. As an artistic object, the physical existence of a screen relies not on the images painted on its surface but also on the frame that secures the painting. When a painted beauty comes to life, she breaks free from the screen and liberates herself from the confinement of a sealed space. She thus no longer remains within the control of humans: she ceases to be a

¹⁷³ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting*, 10-11.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

passive object of admiration and become a subject of free will acting according to her own wishes. As the painted beauty steps into the space claimed by her viewer, she has left the space she is assigned to and enters the conventional territory of a human and thereby diminishes the distance between herself and the viewer of the painting. In both stories, the woman in the painting comes very close to the protagonist by standing immediately next to his bed. Such an act can be deemed very dangerous by the viewer on two levels. On the first level, the painted beauty challenges the viewer's soundness and perception of reality by blurring the boundary between subject and object in her transformation from one state to another; on the other level, she thwarts the viewer's authority and undermines his sense of control over his own domain by shortening the distance between her and her viewer. According to Christian Metz, an appropriate distance must be maintained between the viewer and the object of his attention in a state of artistic appreciation, and to lose it "would threaten to overwhelm the subject."¹⁷⁵

Although both stories relate an incident that involves a painted screen, the difference between the two is evident through narrative. In the case of Yan Yanzhi, the reader may initially hesitate to accept Yan Yanzhi's point of view because his recent loss of a loved one may jeopardize his judgment. But by the end of the story, the reader can be certain that the supernatural has invaded the realm of everyday life. Such judgment is supported by the direct physical evidence of a collapsed screen during the incident and the indirect evidence of the protagonist's subsequent death following the incident. Thus, this tale can be classified as "fantastic/marvelous". The story of the drunken gentleman, meanwhile, is a case of pure fantastic. When Zeitlin argues against using Todorov's

¹⁷⁵ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press 1986), 60.

fantastic to analyze Chinese *zhiguai* and *Liaozhai zhiyi* in particular, she asserts that the difference between Todorov's definition of the fantastic and the strange in *Liaozhai zhiyi* is that in the former the reader hesitates between two different interpretations of ambiguous events, but at the end of such a story the reader must "opt for one solution or the other", while the latter "often results when things are paradoxically affirmed and denied at the same time. In other words, the boundary between the strange and the normal is never fixed but is constantly altered, blurred, erases, multiplied or redefined."¹⁷⁶

Zeitlin's point is that in Todorov's schema, the reader must choose between two mutually exclusive explanations; and the incompatibility of the two explanations implies some fixed boundaries between normal and strange. But is the fantastic concerned with such fixed boundaries as Zeitlin argues? First of all, for Todorov, although the literary fantastic relies on the tension between the natural and the supernatural explanations, it is not exactly concerned with the boundary between what is normal and what is strange. Because, according to Todorov, both explanations are strange to a certain degree. The supernatural explanation is certainly strange by its very definition. Even the natural explanation, which can be explained by the laws of reason, is "in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected."¹⁷⁷ Thus, Todorov's fantastic, as argued previously, is rather between two explanations that are both strange in their ways. By limiting the reading of the text to two solutions that are both extraordinary and 'unreal', the reader is forced to reflect back on the nature and scope of reality no matter which choice he eventually makes. Thus the fantastic pushes the limit of what is considered 'real' in society. Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: the*

¹⁷⁶ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 7

¹⁷⁷ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 46.

Literature of Subversion argues that fantasy as a genre is necessarily subversive. She argues that the primary functions of fantastic literature reside in the transgression of boundaries, and the fantastic challenges the boundaries of what is deemed to be normal or normative.¹⁷⁸ Second, for Todorov, the literary fantastic involves a sense of prevarication that occupies only the duration of this moment of hesitancy; the instant the reader decides upon a single reading—uncanny or marvelous—we leave the fantastic for its neighboring genres and place the text in a confined space. The pure fantastic only exists when the hesitation of the reader is sustained through the end of the reading experience. Thus pure fantastic lies precisely in the fact that the reader cannot decide between two possible solutions. In the case of the drunken scholar, the reader is never able to gain a position from which to assert without reservation that what he sees is wholly illusional or that he is unsettled by external supernatural agency. He is stuck between what Company calls a paradox: the solution that is “relatively probable yet supernatural” and the solution that is “relatively improbable yet natural.”¹⁷⁹ Such a reading experience is profoundly disturbing, for it paradoxically supports two incompatible views and denies neither. The incorporation of the two views is foregrounded in an effortless way that the boundary between reality and illusion becomes blurred and fluid. By doing so, the story as a whole resists any sense of closure and remains open and unfinished. Thus the reading of such text become always provisional and always in the process—as opposed to sharply fixed in a definite view.

Strategies for exploring the boundary between the illusionary and the real in

¹⁷⁸ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy*, 51.

¹⁷⁹ Company, *Strange Writing*, 208

fantastic tales also include blurring the line between dream and reality.¹⁸⁰ Dreams in Chinese narrative have traditionally been juxtaposed with reality to explore the ambiguous relation between a dreaming experience and a waking state. The famous fable of Zhuangzi's dreaming of being a butterfly, for example, proposes that the distinction between dream and reality is not as clear as the dichotomy might suggest. This idea is later explicated in other Daoist philosophical texts, such as *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and *Liezi* 列子. When discussing dreams in *Liezi*, A.C. Graham argues that states of dreaming and being awake are equivalent and there is "no implication that it is either possible or desirable to awake from the dream."¹⁸¹ Thus, differentiating between dreaming and waking states becomes unnecessary and impractical.

One of the most remarkable motifs that deal with the relationship between dreaming and reality involve situations in which one's dream is proven to be reality through external evidence. Bai Xingjian 白行簡 (775-826) in his "A Record of Three Dreams" 三夢記 ("San meng ji") recorded three such cases which he considered extraordinary because they differed dramatically from other dreams and have not commonly been transmitted by other sources. The first dream tells a story about someone in a waking state who witnesses and participates in events that occur in someone else's

¹⁸⁰ The dream is a recurrent theme in *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* narrative. Works with a noteworthy collection of dreams include Gan Bao 干寶 (fl.ca.317-ca.349), *In Search of the Supernatural* 搜神記 (*Soushen ji* ca.335-ca.349), Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 and *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 and Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志. Of many often contradictory views on dreams, Chen Shiyuan 陳士元 (16th c.) in his *Meng zhan yi zhi* 夢占逸旨 (*Treaties on Dream Interpretation*) identifies two major approaches to the dream: To either read it as prophecy (*zhao* 兆) which carries important messages that predict the future or as illusion (*huan* 幻) which questions the boundary between dream and reality. Both approaches, according to Zeitlin, deem dream as a liminal state through which communication between parallel worlds become possible. (139-140) Karl Kao proposes another approach to the dream: to treat dream as literary allegory, as is the case in the Tang tale "Zhenzhong ji" 枕中計 ("The World Inside the Pillow") and "Meng lang" 夢狼 ("A Dream of Wolves") in *Liaozhai*.

¹⁸¹ Graham, A.C., tr., *The Book of Lieh-tzū: A Classic of Tao* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 59.

dream. An official named Liu Youqiu 劉幽求 (655-715) was on his way home and saw his wife attend a banquet and drink with strangers. He was upset and threw a stone at her. When he arrived home, he was greeted by his wife who had just awakened from a dream. In her dream, she participated in a drinking party and was hit by a stone thrown from outside; after she awakened her forehead continued to hurt from being hit by the stone.¹⁸²

The second case involves one who dreams about the actual experience of someone else far away. In this story, the author Bai Xingjian recalled a personal experience of his friend Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) who dreamed about the Bai brothers who visited a temple at the same time that they made the trip. The last story involves the scenario where two individuals who are completely strangers to each other share the same dream. A scholar named Dou Zhi 竇質 (fl.785-804) dreamed of encountering a spirit-medium at a temple who called herself Zhao Nü 趙女. On the next day, he attended the temple and to his surprise, he found a spirit-medium who looked exactly like the one he dreamed about in the previous night. Upon inquiring, he discovered that spirit-medium whose name was also Zhao Nü had an identical dream about their meeting the night before.¹⁸³ In all three cases, one's private dream is verified by another person's experience, whether through a dream or an actual event. By bringing an external point of view into the subjective experience of an individual's dream, such stories not only challenge the

¹⁸² The same plot also appears in *Liaozhai* under the same "A Gentleman from Fengyang" (鳳陽士人 "Fengyang shiren"). Zeitlin argues that Pu Songling's version changes the perspective of the original by focusing on the wife's consciousness and desire; see *Historian of the Strange*, 157-158.

¹⁸³ For an edited version of the text, see Wang Pijiang Comp., *Tangren xiaoshuo* 唐人小說 (Shanghai: gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1955), 108-112. Wang's source is *Shuo fu* 說郛, ed., Hanfenlou, (Taipei: commercial press, 1972), *juan* 4, 23b-24b. There is a translation in Karl Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic*, 193-194. For a discussion of the textual history and authorship of this work, see Li jianguo 李劍國, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇叙錄, vol. 1, 342-344.

boundary between subjectivity and objectivity, but also question the distinction between dreaming and being awake.

Although whether Duan Chengshi was familiar with this particular work *San meng ji* is unclear, dream tales in *Youyang zazhi* often adopt the same approach towards the problematic dichotomy between what is presumed to be real and what is not. The following story, for example, introduces a case that is similar to the first dream described in “San meng ji” in which one person’s dream turned out to be another person’s reality.

When Liu Jing administered the national examinations, there was a certain candidate for the classicist degree in the imperial academy of education whose name was lost. He once took a nap during the day and dreamed about wandering around the door of the college where a man dressed in yellow with a cloth sack on his shoulder asked for his name. When the classicist told him, that person smiled and said, “you will pass the exam next spring.” The classicist then asked him about the fortunes of five or six men who lived next door and were from the same town as he. Some of them, the man said, would pass the exam. The classicist then invited the man to enter a pilaf shop in the Changxing ward. It was a place that he had frequented. Outside the shop some dogs were fighting. In alarm, he said, “something is wrong.” He quickly called several of his neighbors and told them of his dream. Suddenly the shopkeeper of the Changxing restaurant came in the door and said, “You, sir, and your guests ate two plates of pilaf. Why did you leave without paying?” The classicist was terrified. He stripped off his clothes and gave them as a pledge to the shopkeeper. The

man's comments proved what he had dreamed. Looking at the couches and implements, he could see that they looked exactly like those in his dream. He then said to the shopkeeper, "My guest and I both came to your place in a dream. How could my guest have eaten?" The owner answered in alarm, "at first I thought it strange that the pilaf in front of your guest was intact, and I then suspected that he did not like the garlic that I put in it." The next spring the classicist, along with three of the men who lived next door about whom he had requested fortunes, all passed the exam.¹⁸⁴

柳璟知舉年, 有國子監明經, 失姓名, 晝寢, 夢徙倚于監門. 有一人負衣囊, 衣黃, 訪明經姓氏, 明經語之, 其人笑曰: "君來春及第." 明經因訪鄰房鄉曲五六人, 或言得者. 明經遂邀入長興裡饌饌店常所過處. 店外有犬競, 驚曰: "差矣!" 遽呼鄰房數人語其夢. 忽見長興店子入門曰: "郎君與客食饌饌計二斤, 何不計值而去也?" 明經大駭, 褫衣質之, 且隨驗所夢, 相其榻器, 皆如夢中. 乃謂店主曰: "我與客俱夢中至是, 客豈食乎?" 店主驚曰: "初怪客前饌饌悉完, 疑其嫌置蒜也." 來春, 明經與鄰房三人夢中所訪者, 悉及第.¹⁸⁵

Like other fantastic tales, the reader of this story first faces two opposed readings of the same ambiguous event: either the reader interprets the no-name candidate's dream simply as a dream or treats it as what really happened. But upon further reading, the reader may find out that choosing one over another is not as easy as it seems to be because the distinction between dream and reality itself is not as clear as it should be within the story.

¹⁸⁴ *Taiping guangji* includes a slightly different version, see *Taiping guangji* 278.99.

¹⁸⁵ *Youyang zazu*, *xuji* 1.11, 203.

The candidate's dream experience intertwines with reality in multiple layers, leaving both the character and the reader wondering about the nature of the event. Unlike the first dream in *San meng ji* whose protagonist is in a waking state and intrudes upon his wife's dream, the no-name candidate in this story is in his own dream when he steps into the pilaf shop and enters another person's waking reality. The candidate's dream first appears ordinary since it is not unusual for a candidate to dream about receiving information regarding the result of his exam given the fact that in medieval China when it comes to examination candidates, the dream often functioned as prophecy and carried a certain message that predicted the success or failure of one's examination.¹⁸⁶

What is unusual about this candidate's dream is that it does not occur in a parallel world where the process of revealing secret knowledge is separated from our reality; rather the dream occurs in perfect conjunction with the reality that someone else partakes in the story. The shopkeeper, for example, was unaware of the dream situation. Even after discovering that the guest did not touch his pilaf, the shopkeeper was still able to find excuses for the guest's behavior. Only after he pursued the candidate for unpaid bill did he finally realize the strange nature of what he had just witnessed. It also should be noted that the story does not specify the exact moment when the candidate awakened. The lack of an explicit clarification with regard to his awakening becomes apparent when compared with another version of this story found in *Taiping guangji*, which states clearly that "he awoke from his dream" 夢覺 upon noticing the dog fight. This difference is significant; because it suggests that the *Youyang zazu* version does not draw a clear-cut

¹⁸⁶ See Liu Wen ying 劉文英, *Zhongguo gudai de mengshu* 中國古代的夢書 (Peking: zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1-65; and Roberto Ong, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Ancient China*. (Bochum: Studienverlag Brockmeyer, 1985), 8-46. See also Carolyn Brown, ed., *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dream in Chinese Culture* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988).

boundary between dreaming and waking and thus blends the candidate's dream with his own reality. Unlike the shopkeeper who was not aware that his reality was someone else's dream, what the candidate did not know is that his dream was in fact reality to both the shopkeeper and himself. In addition, because the prediction made in the candidate's dream is verified by his later success on the exam, the dream also connects with the candidate's future reality in a concrete and visible way by following the traditional formula of a prophetic dream in which the prediction is always fulfilled. In this story, the dream experience blends into reality in multiple ways so that one person's dream not only intertwines with other person's reality, but also constructs part of his own current and future reality. As such, the dichotomy between dreaming and reality becomes increasingly arbitrary and the two opposing explanations that the reader initially hesitates over turn out not to be opposite but complementary readings of different aspects of the same reality.

In *Youyang zazu* the physical actuality of the dream world sometimes manifests through material evidence left behind by an occurrence in one's dream. One story tells that a young man who fancied a girl next door dreamed about eating the cherries sent by the girl and woke up with cherry pits by his pillow.¹⁸⁷ Such a technique, though simple, is efficient in generating fantastic effect. The original text includes only thirty characters, but the text is powerful enough to blur the boundary between reality and illusion. With the presence of cherry pits, the reader must suspect that these are material evidence of the young man's dream and that dream world can interact with the actual world in a physical way. In "The Flower of Coleridge," Jorge Luis Borges cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge

¹⁸⁷ *Youyang zazu*, 8.322, 83.

who wrote: “if a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Ay!—and what then?” and uses Coleridge’s flower as “the nexus between the real and the imaginary.”¹⁸⁸ Here Coleridge’s flower turns out to be cherry pits. But even in this case, the possibility that the young man simply incorporates what was happening in real life into his dream cannot be completely excluded. Though unlikely, it is still possible that someone did feed him cherries while he was asleep and thus triggered his dream. Especially in consideration of the story that immediately precedes this one tells of Duan’s cousin who once dreamed of watching a drum being beaten, woke up only to find that the drumbeats he dreamed of were actually the sound of his younger brother knocking on the door. In this explanation, the boundary between reality and dream is crossed, but instead of the dream becoming reality, the actual world becomes part of the dream experience. By juxtaposing two stories about a similar topic but with contrastive orientations regarding the ambiguous nature of dream experience, the author also contributes to the fantastic effect by adding uncertainty to the stories.

The ambiguous nature of the dream experience makes the text amenable to different and conflicting interpretations that can in turn generate fantastic hesitation. In *Youyang zazu* the ambiguity of dream manifests not only through its connection to the imminent reality, namely, the circumstances one is in right after waking up but also through its relation to a temporally more remote reality. One story explains that a man named Zhang Shenggong dreamed of having an affair with a man whose name was Zhang Chui. A scholar by the same name who had failed the regional civil service exam

¹⁸⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, 1937-1952 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 11-12.

happened to sojourn in the area, but he had never met Shenggong before. In the dream, the two young men had a good time together for a few days. When Zhang Chui was about to leave, he wrote Shenggong a poem. Upon hearing the poem, Zhang Shenggong was startled awake. Days after recording the poem, Zhang Shenggong died.¹⁸⁹ Unlike many dream narratives that play with the murky boundary between dreaming and waking, the distinction between the two states is not a central issue in this tale because the ambiguity of dream experience does not originate from the indistinguishableness between dreaming and waking but rather from the vague relationship between the dream and a subsequent event. The reader must decide whether the dream is somehow connected to Zhang Shenggong's premature death or if the two are completely separate matters. It is important to note that Zhang's dream is different from the dream the examination candidate has in the previous tale. The candidate's future is clearly articulated in his dream and the connection between his dream and the result of his examination is proven by the success of the prediction. In the case of Zhang Shenggong, however, no prediction is ever made and no direct evidence links the dream to his subsequent death. Except for the juxtaposition of these two incidents in the narrative, the reader's suspicion of the existence of some connection between Shenggong's dream and his death is, to a large extent, attributed to the poem which startled Zhang Shenggong awake. The poem reads:

Sorrow, and then more sorrow 戚戚複戚戚;

The autumn hall looks a hundred years old 秋堂百年色.

Alone, I find myself wandering far, far away 而我獨茫茫;

Coming upon the Cold Food festival in the wild 荒郊遇寒食.

¹⁸⁹ *Youyang zazu, xuji juan* 2.22, 209.

The interpretation of the poem is essential in determining the relationship between Zhang Shenggong's dream and his death. One can argue that the poem indicates that the man whom Zhang met is already dead since the Cold Food festival is a custom associated with the deceased. In this case, Zhang Shenggong's death is most likely to be the result of his sexual encounter with the ghost. Sexual encounter with specters is certainly not an uncommon theme in Chinese ghost stories. Anthony C. Yu, for example, in his study of the typology of ghosts in Chinese narrative, points out that a large number of traditional ghost tales embrace the theme of a ghost lover. Drawing from sources, such as *Soushen ji* 搜神記, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, *Taiping yulan* 太平預覽, *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 and *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異, he classifies the ghost that engages in a relationship with the human as "the amorous ghost."¹⁹⁰ Sexual interaction with ghosts is traditionally considered dangerous and potentially fatal, because as Zeitlin points out "ghosts had been conceptualized as demonic agents capable of disease and death."¹⁹¹ According to her, since antiquity there has been an epistemological and philosophical dichotomy throughout history between ghost and man that can be understood from the perspective of *yin* and *yang*. Man is regarded as embodiment of pure *yang* whereas ghost is "super-yin, an intensification of the qualities or phases associated with *yin* as opposite to *yang*."¹⁹² The fact that the sexual encounter takes place in a dream does not make it less injurious because the protagonist's soul may leave his body in the dream and meet with a disembodied soul that by nature is invasive. The sexual part of the dream seriously compromises Zhang Shenggong's health and the sudden fright caused by the poem may

¹⁹⁰ Anthony C. Yu. "'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirits!'" Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (Dec., 1987): 423-434.

¹⁹¹ Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 15.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 16.

also disturb his mental well-beings and ultimately contribute to his death. One can also argue that the poem is a literary expression of Zhang Chui's longing for companionship and sorrow for losing it. Zhang Cui somehow enters Zhang Shenggong's dream, and the two young men fall in love with each other. When one departs from a dream, the other wakes up in shock and dies of lovesickness in reality. The two explanations evolve around the distinction between what Zeitlin refers to as "ghost poetry" and "ghostly poetry". While ghost poetry includes poems written or chanted by dead souls, ghost poetry is "verse that creates a mood of intense melancholy and suppressed emotion mainly through a conventionalized set of natural images associated with a nocturnal, autumnal world of graveyards or uninhabited wilderness."¹⁹³ To read the poem as ghost poetry is to understand it as a communication from a ghost whose voice is greatly responsible for another man's death. To read the poem as ghostly poetry, however, is primarily to recognize the poem for its eerie atmosphere and dismal scenes that impart the gloomy and melancholy emotions of the writer to its designated reader who dies of extreme human emotions.

Another possible interpretation is to dismiss any supernatural involvement by claiming that the dream as a whole is likely to be a reflection of Zhang Shenggong's desire. The poem and the farewell of his lover in the dream are little more than a display of his emotional loneliness and sexual frustration. Although Zhang Shenggong never meets Cui in person, he may have heard of him somewhere and coincidentally incorporates him into his own sexual fantasy. In this case, Zhang Shenggong's death can be interpreted as the result of his psychological and sexual frustration.

¹⁹³ Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 56.

The ambiguity of literary composition in such stories creates flexibility in the narrative space. It also adds an extra layer of sophistication to the narrative possibilities while simultaneously sustains fantastic hesitation. This point can be further illustrated by the following tale from *Youyang zazhi*:

Cui Gu, an Imperial Secretariat drafting official, had a younger brother named Cui Xia who married Miss Li. [He] was the perfect of Caozhou and ordered troop commander Guo Shaonan to handle the ceremony of Zhangche (blocking the bride's palanquin).¹⁹⁴ Later when Shaonan was asleep, he suddenly dreamed that Cui and Li were in the same hall. The woman was standing on the west side of the bed, and Cuixia on the east side of the bed. She held a slip of red paper and wrote a poem on it. She handed it over to Cuixia with smile. Cuixia then read it aloud. The poem went:

“Do not try to detain me with loyalty;

Let us rather play music.

One's beauty is impossible to last;

Who knows how many years we have?¹⁹⁵

One year after the dream, Cuixia's wife passed away.

中書舍人崔嘏弟崔暇，娶李氏。為曹州刺史，令兵馬使國邵南勾當障車。

後邵南因睡，忽夢崔女在一廳中。女立于床西，崔暇在床東。執紅箋題詩

¹⁹⁴ A Tang wedding custom where people crammed the alley and blocked the bridal palanquin to ask for money, wine and food, ect. See Fan Xinyang 范新陽, “Lun Tangren hunli zhong de zhangche xisu” 論唐人婚禮中地障車習俗, *Journal of Huanyin Normal College* (Social Science Edition) 27. 6 (2005).

¹⁹⁵ I consulted Carrie Reed's translation. Some changes were made to better reflect the original text. See *Chinese Chronicles*, 168.

一首,笑授暇,暇因朗吟之。詩言:“莫以貞留妾,從他理管弦。容華難久駐,知得幾多年。”夢後纔一歲,崔暇妻卒。¹⁹⁶

In this story how the reader understands the poem directly affects his reading of the overall sequence of events. On the one hand, the poem indicates the fleeting nature of time and transient nature of a woman's life that corresponds very well with the short-lived life of Miss Li. Her death thus shows that the implication of the poem is valid after all. The fact that it was Shaonan—a family acquaintance—instead of the husband or the wife herself who observed the scene ensures a safe distance between the person who related the dream and the dream itself and thereby adds a sense of objectivity to the story. In retrospect, the dream, especially the poem in the dream, foretells the misfortune of Miss Li. On the other hand, the subject and language style of the poem are typical for poetry that laments evanescence, temporality, and human vulnerability. Although the poem suggests the writer's anxious sense of time, it is not a prediction in the sense that specific information is given about a future event. We can repudiate any connection between the poem and the death of Cui Xia's wife by treating them as separate incidents. According to Zeitlin, a prophetic dream account has three basic components: the dream, the interpretation upon awakening and the fulfillment of the interpretation. The focus of a prophetic dream tale tends to shift “from the dream itself onto the interpretation and its fulfillment.”¹⁹⁷ Because the tale maintains its focus on the dream itself and does not offer any sort of interpretation of the dream by the dreamer or someone else, it generally resists

¹⁹⁶ *Youyang zazu*, *xuji* 3.58, 221.

¹⁹⁷ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 140. Wai-ye Li argues that in early Chinese narrative, the representation of dreams is motivated by the need to interpret and define causes and consequences, see “Dreams of Interpretation in Early Chinese Historical and Philosophical Writings” in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, ed. David Dean Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-42.

categorization as prophetic. Here the dreaming experience does not become the source of hesitation because no one ever questions that it is a dream; rather, the ambiguous nature of poem is directly responsible for the hesitation on the reader's part.

Note that this poem is neither "ghost poetry" nor "ghostly poetry" in the sense that everyone was still alive when the poem was composed and the poem itself does not invoke desolated scenes and dark images. The poem does, however, incite a profound sense of anxiety over the instability of youth and happiness that makes the reader wonder whether such anxiety concerns a specific situation anticipated in the future or just a typical response to the passing of time in general. The ambiguity inherent in the poem is further compounded by the chain of people involved in delivering the poem to the reader. Miss Li apparently wrote down a poem on a slip of paper, but the poem became known to others through Cui Xia's eyes and voice. All of this occurred in the dream of Shaonan who most likely transcribed the poem, but the whole sequence of events was narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. By nesting indirect discourse within indirect discourse and framing a narrative within narrative, the uncertainty regarding the process through which the poem took shape is enclosed, and the question concerning the nature of the poem remains open.

Fantastic horror as we discussed above does not rely on explicit supernatural presence; rather it plays with the tension of multiple possibilities for one narrated events or a sequence of events. This type of story does not intend to scare the reader with horrific monsters or gruesome attacks but endeavors to upset the reader's expectations and creates hesitation, anxiety, suspense, uncertainty, wonder, and amazement. All of these responses help engender the sense of strangeness in *Youyang zazu*. With the help of

Todorov's concept of the fantastic, we are able to discover the narrative devices buried within the comparatively brief accounts of anomalies. Techniques, such as the construction of open-ended plot by providing two interpretations for the same event and deliberately blurring boundaries between illusion and reality not only add flavor and complexity to the narrative but also solidify the effort of making strange of the collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

***QI* THROUGH BOUNDARY-CROSSING: MONSTER HORROR**

Like ancient Greek tragedies, horror stories involve disturbing their audiences.

Horror aims to evoke uncertainty, anxiety, disgust, fear, and other associated emotions in the same way that tragedy arouses pity and fear. Both genres can be defined in terms of the emotions that such works are designed to elicit from audiences and both genres present a paradox about why we would enjoy them, since the emotions they arouse are unpleasant. The cognitivist perspective represents one approach to this paradox.

Cognitivist scholars draw upon human psychology and the human mind to describe our responses to artworks and insist on the cognitive appeal of horror.¹⁹⁸ According to David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, cognitivism “is best characterized as a stance. A cognitivist analysis or processes of explanation seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency.”¹⁹⁹

Recent cognitivist studies of horror emphasize the intricate intertwining of human intellect and emotions. In his book *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, Noël Carroll tries to solve the paradox by proposing “the curiosity/fascination” resolution. He argues that it is curiosity which drives us to horror. We find pleasure in

¹⁹⁸ For some cognitive studies of horror, see Cynthia Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000); Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognitions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Daniel Shaw, “Power, Horror and Ambivalence”, *Film and Philosophy: Horror Special Edition* (2001): 1-12.

¹⁹⁹ David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), xvi.

curiosity; however, to get this curiosity we need to be presented with an impossible being to be curious about. A being that will seem impossible to us is one that crosses over the boundaries we have used to classify nature. These creatures will inspire fascination amongst us, but due to their nature they will also disgust us. Carroll also distinguishes horror in real life from what we experience in horror narratives. The former is described as “nature horror” and the latter is called “art-horror,” a specific aesthetic response to a representation in an artwork. He presupposes that art-horror is an emotion and argues that this emotion is engaged by the audience in a process of cognition. He believes that art-horror is an emotional state involving the subject’s cognitive evaluation of his/her situation. Carroll then specifies the “object” of art-horror, the element in a text that elicits art-horror in audiences. Carroll’s response is that horror’s monsters provoke the emotion of art-horror. In other words, monsters are the object of art-horror. He defines monsters as entities that violate laws of nature: “in works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order.”²⁰⁰ Invoking Mary Douglas’s notion of impurity in her highly influential work in the field of social anthropology *Purity and Danger*, Carroll argues that the creatures of horror “seem to be regarded not only as inconceivable but also as unclean and disgusting” as they are both “threatening and impure”, and are associated with “contamination” as well as the “composite”.²⁰¹

Carroll’s view of monsters as a violation of nature is consistent with previous views on monstrosity in Western tradition. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2002), the word monster originates from the Latin *monstrum* (omen), which

²⁰⁰ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 16.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 21-28. For Mary Douglas’s analysis of impurity and cultural categories, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

is derived from *monere*, which refers to a warning. This root indicates the symbolic role of the monster in society. Monsters serve as a warning, a risk of that which is outside the natural and social realm. In *Physics* Aristotle argues that a monster is a mistake of nature, something that failed to attain its purpose:

Now surely as in intelligent action, so in nature; and as in nature, so it is in each action, if nothing interferes. Now intelligent action is for the sake of an end; therefore the nature of things also is so. ... Now mistakes come to pass even in the operations of art: the grammarian makes a mistake in writing and the doctor pours out the wrong dose. Hence clearly mistakes are possible in the operations of nature also. If then in art there are cases in which what is rightly produced serves a purpose, and if where mistakes occur there was a purpose in what was attempted, only it was not attained, so must it be also in natural products, and monstrosities will be failures in the purposive effort.²⁰²

For Aristotle, monsters now and then occur as missteps of purpose in nature just as grammatical mistakes now and then intrude on the purpose in writing.

Carroll's characterization of monsters also invokes the work of noted anthropologist Mary Douglas, who attributes feelings of disgust and aversion to apparent transgressions or violations of cultural categories: "given a monster in a horror story, the scholar can ask in what ways it is categorically interstitial, contradictory (in Douglas's

²⁰² Aristotle. *Physics* II.8. trans., Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1960-1963).
R.P.Hardie and R.K.Gaye (Stilwell:Digireads.com Publishing, 2006), 27.

sense), incomplete, and/or formless... [monsters] are unnatural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it.”²⁰³

Carroll's definition of monsters points out one important feature that horror narratives share: the description of something not only physically threatening but also cognitively threatening. Horror texts often deal with things or events that do not correlate with our presumptions about the world. By bringing what is considered as anomalous, unnatural and cultural outcast into our sight, horror stories not only draw attention to established cultural boundaries and cultural conventions but also challenge our conceptual scheme of norms. Carroll's cognitive approach to horror and his notion of monsters is illuminating in the Chinese context because it provides a useful tool for the analysis of the mechanism of horror stories that features monstrous creatures and assists in the explanation of the aesthetic experience of disgust, revulsion and fear related to reading these horror narratives. Monster horror stories are not unique to the West. Ghosts, demons, spirits and metamorphosing creatures often prevail in the narrative of *zhiguai*.

In China, fear (*kong* 恐) was recognized as one of the seven human emotions (*qing* 情), which according to *Xunzi* is the substance of *xing* 性 (情者性之質也).²⁰⁴ Since the *Zhuangzi* defines *xing* as the substance of one's life (性者生之質也), *qing* by extension signifies what is innate in human life.²⁰⁵ According to the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), human *qing* manifests through a series of emotions: “What is meant by human *qing*? Pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, aversion, and desire—these seven are what human beings are naturally capable of without having to acquire through learning?” (何

²⁰³ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 34.

²⁰⁴ *Xunzi*, “Zhengming,” in *Xunzi zhuzi suoyin*, 荀子逐字索引 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1996), 111.

²⁰⁵ *Zhuangzi*, ch.23, “Gengsang Chu” 庚桑楚, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985), 810.

謂人情? 喜怒哀懼愛惡欲, 七者弗學而能).²⁰⁶ One of the more common terms associated with *kong* is *jing* 惊, which is used to express the basic meaning of surprise or being startled, and which can often be translated as “fright”. Other terms include *wei* 畏, *pa* 怕, *bu* 怖, *ju* 惧, *hai* 骇, *dong* 恫, *xia* 吓, *she* 慑 and *zhe* 謐. These characters can be used separately or combined to express various degrees and nuances from fear to terror. This kind of emotions is found in many literary works, especially in *zhiguai* tales where the unexpected and the unfamiliar are predominant. Fear is considered to have a negative impact on one’s health, because in traditional Chinese medicine it is one of the basic emotions that cause illness. *The Inner Classics: Simple Questions (Huangdi neijing suwen)* 黃帝內經素問) clearly states that “anger hurts the liver” 怒傷肝, “joy hurts the heart” 喜傷心, “longing hurts the spleen” 思傷脾, “sadness hurts the lung” 憂傷肺, “fear hurts the kidney” 恐傷腎.²⁰⁷

In his study of sentiments in Chinese history, Paolo Santangelo points out that fear often rises from “a definite and immediate cause, such as imminent danger or the anticipation of something unpleasant or painful” or from “something unexpected”.²⁰⁸ A monster is usually both. In Chinese narratives, the most common terms used to describe monsters and the experience related to them are *yi* 異, *guai* 怪 and *qi* 奇. According to Zeitlin, *yi* is the most flexible term and its preliminary meaning is “different, to differentiate”. By extension, it means extraordinary, foreign, and eccentric and it can refer to anything that differs from the norm. *Qi* is most frequently used as an aesthetic

²⁰⁶ *Liji*, ch. 9, “Liyun” 禮運, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 *juan* 22 (Taipei: Shijie, 1963), 27b.

²⁰⁷ *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 5.5, *suwen* 素問, in *Huangdi Neijing: A Synopsis with Commentaries*, ed. Y.C. Yang, (Hongkong: the Chinese University of Hongkong, 2010), 150.

²⁰⁸ Paolo Santangelo, *Sentimental Education in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 369.

appraisal and means marvelous, fantastic, amazing and odd. *Guai* carries the most negative connotation of the three terms: weird, uncanny, freakish, anomalous and unfathomable. The term *guai* also designated the demonic spirit of animals, plants, and inanimate things.²⁰⁹ With regard to horror stories in *Youyang zazu*, Carroll's account of monsters is useful because many of these stories precisely deal with such gruesome *guai*. These stories are comparatively short; they lack sophisticated plot and identifiable characters, yet they are just as fascinating and compelling as any well-developed modern horror story. Their most prominent feature is the representation of strange monsters that are uniquely dangerous and impure. The following story is taken from the "Nuoguo" section of *Youyang zazu* and is used here as an example of how the application of Carroll's ideas can contribute to our understanding of traditional *zhiguai* stories:

During the Dali period (766-779), there was a gentleman who had a manor in Weinan [a region south of the Wei River]. He fell sick and died in the capital city. His wife Liu then moved to and lived in the manor. They had a son who was between the age of eleven and twelve. On one summer night, their son suddenly seemed scared. With his heart palpitating with fear, he could not sleep. After midnight, an old man appeared. He wore a white gown, and his teeth were sticking out of his mouth. He looked around carefully and gradually approached the bed after a while. A maid was asleep in front of the bed and didn't notice him at all. He grabbed her by the throat and made a noise as if he were gnawing on something. The maid's clothes ripped into pieces in his hands. The old man pulled her closer and started eating her flesh. In only a moment, she was down to

²⁰⁹ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 6

bones. He then lifted her up to suck her internal organs. Seeing the old man's mouth was as big as a dustpan, the son shouted for help. But nobody could see anything. All that was left of the maid was her bones. A few months passed, nothing else happened. On the day of the first anniversary of the death of Liu's husband, a fast ceremony was conducted. That night, Liu was sitting in the open air to cool down and saw a wasp flying around her face. When Liu hit it with her fan, the wasp fell down to the ground and turned into a walnut. Liu picked it up and put it in her palm, fiddling with it. The walnut suddenly grew bigger. At first, it was about the size of a fist, then a bowl. When Liu started panic and took another look, it had grown to the size of a plate. With a loud noise, the walnut split into two halves, circling around her head and making swarming noises. The two halves then suddenly closed up on Liu's head. Her skull was immediately crushed, and her teeth were tossed into a tree. The thing then flew away and nobody knew what kind of a monster it was.²¹⁰

大曆中, 有士人莊在渭南, 遇疾卒于京, 妻柳氏因莊居。一子年十一二, 夏夜, 其子忽恐悸不眠。三更後, 忽見一老人, 白衣, 兩牙出吻外, 熟視之。良久, 漸近床前。床前有婢眠熟, 因扼其喉, 咬然有聲, 衣隨手碎, 攫食之。須臾骨露, 乃舉起飲其五藏。見老人口大如簸箕, 子方叫, 一無所見, 婢已骨矣。數月後, 亦無他。士人祥齋, 日暮, 柳氏露坐逐涼, 有胡蜂繞其首

²¹⁰ To my knowledge, this story has not been translated in English. Here is my own translation. Carrie E. Reed has selected and translated some entries from the *Youyang zazu*. See *Chinese Chronicles* and *A Tang Miscellany*.

面，柳氏以扇擊墮地，乃胡桃也。柳氏遽取玩之掌中，遂長。初如拳，如碗，驚顧之際，已如盤矣。曝然分為兩扇，空中輪轉，聲如分蜂。忽合于柳氏首，柳氏碎首，齒著于樹。其物因飛去，竟不知何怪也。²¹¹

Unlike most modern horror narratives, this story is extremely concise. In its original Chinese, the story runs only six-lines, less than 220 characters. It has no sophisticated plot and lacks identifiable characters. Yet it is just as fascinating and compelling as any well-developed horror narrative. While one may appreciate the simplicity of its rhetoric and conciseness of narrative, its major appeal lies in the representation of the monster that is uniquely dangerous and impure. The monster is metamorphic. Etymologically, metamorphosis “derives from the Greek *meta*, signifying both a change and the state of being among, with or after, and *morphe*, signifying a form.”²¹² A direct translation from the Greek would simply be “change of shape”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, metamorphosis means “the action or process of changing in form, shape or substance; esp. by magic or witchcraft”. The presence of change is also quintessential to my understanding of metamorphosis, and I therefore draw on a definition formulated by Leonard Barkan, who regards metamorphosis as a “magical alteration of physical form from one species to another [...] designed to capture the imagination through shock and wonderment.”²¹³

In this story, the monster constantly changes its form. Such metamorphosis is a transgression of conventional limits with its tendency to discard the physical boundary

²¹¹ Youyang zazu, 14.560, 134.

²¹² Kai Mikkonen, *The Writer's Metamorphosis: Tropes of Literary Reflection and Revision* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1997), 1-2.

²¹³ Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 19.

between categories: human and monster, animal and insect, insect and seed. When the monster first emerges, it has taken the shape of an old man, but the monster is readily identifiable as bestial or monstrous despite its ostensibly human shape. Even with disguise, the reader must suspect there is something wrong about its presence. The fright of the young boy is already an ominous sign and the fact that the old man appears out of nowhere suddenly and late at night only adds to the sinister atmosphere. The displaced teeth as an earmark of monstrosity reveal the entity to be non-human. With the gnawing sound, the big mouth and the way its sharp teeth sink into the maid's flesh like a dog's canines, the reader may suspect the monster to be animal origin. However, as the story progresses, the monster appears as something completely different. From a wasp to a walnut, from a small toy to a powerful killing agent, in its state of constant transformation the monster defies not only every law of nature but also the very idea that an entity is supposed to have a consistent way of being that fits into the conventional classification of things. Unlike some other monsters that possess characteristics from contradictory categories, this monster does not have something coherent enough that can be identified as its characteristic. Referred to as “the thing” 其物, the monster keeps its true identity hidden (if it has one at all) from the reader.

It should be noted that although this monster remains unidentified, it probably is related to some kind of *sha* 煞—a term used to indicate a particular condition of the soul after death. The earliest mention of *sha* can be found in the Northern Qi (550-577) scholar Yan Zhitui's 顏之推(ca. 531-603) *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓) in which he described the contemporary custom of avoiding *sha*: “Books not standing on a par (with the classical) make mention of *sha* returning to the

house after death. Sons and grandsons then flee and hide themselves, all refuse to stay at home, and they decorate the tile with written charms, performing sundry practices to suppress the evil. And on the day on which the funeral train sets out, they make a fire before the gate, placing also glowing coals outside the door, in order to exorcise and avert that domestic ghost.” 偏傍之書, 死有歸殺. 子孫逃竄, 莫肯在家; 畫瓦書符, 作諸厭勝; 喪出之日, 門前然火, 戶外列灰, 被送家鬼.²¹⁴ Such a practice probably had its origin in the Han dynasty where people left the house of the recently deceased to avoid disease²¹⁵ and by the sixth century it had become quite popular.²¹⁶ In the *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志 (*Records of a Palace Chamber*) by Zhang Du 張讀 (?-ca.853) of the Tang dynasty, *sha* was described as a bird-like being that flies out of the coffin several days after the death of a man.²¹⁷ In *Chuijian lu waiji* 吹劍錄外集, the Song dynasty author Yu Wenbao 俞文豹 cited from *Tang taichang boshi Lü cai bai ji li* 唐太常博士呂才百忌曆, which listed various taboos in Tang dynasty, saying that “the soul of a person who dies on a *si* 巳 day of the calendar, is a *xiong sha* 雄煞. It returns to the house on the forty-seventh day after death.”²¹⁸ Hong Mai (1123-1202) of the Song dynasty recorded in his *zhiguai* collection *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志: “It is said that when a person dies, his spirit will return. Having

²¹⁴ Yan Zhitui 顏之推, *Yanshi jiaxun*, sect.6. For translation, see J.J.M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol.5, (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 769.

²¹⁵ See Lin Fushi 林富士, “Shilun Handai de wushuyiliaofa ji qi guannian jichu” 試論漢代的巫術醫療法及其觀念基礎, *Shiyuan* 史原 16 (1987), 31-33.

²¹⁶ Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982), 99. For a thorough study of the custom of escaping from the returning ancestral spirits, see Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, “Tamakayeru” 魂歸, in idem, *Chugoku no minkan shinko* 中國の民間信仰 (Tokyo: Kosakusha, 1982), 406-450.

²¹⁷ J.J.M. De Groot. *The Religious System of China*, vol.5, 770

²¹⁸ See S.J. M. Kennelly, *Research into Chinese Superstitions* (Shanghai: Tussewei printing press, 1914), 140. De Groot’s translation of this passage in *The Religious System of China* is inaccurate: “on the hundredth day after the demise of Lü Cai, a doctor in the court of Sacrificial Worship under the Tang dynasty, as also at the end of one year, his *sha* wrought harm” 按唐太常博士呂才百曆載喪煞損害法, 如已日死者, 雄煞; 四十七日回煞, see 771.

calculated the date, everyone from the household goes out to avoid [the spirit] when it returns. This is called ‘escape from the killing’.” 相傳人死則其魄複還, 以其日測之, 某日當至, 則盡室出避于外, 名為避煞。²¹⁹ Although the monster in the story above is not bird-shaped, it displays the same flying ability that was associated with the return of the dead. Note that the monster’s last return occurred on a very specific day, which is exactly one year after the death of the husband. This detail seems to be in accordance with Yu Wenbao and Hong Mai’s observation that the spirit of the dead will return on certain dates.

The *sha* monster is dreadful because of its malignant power. J.J.M. De Groot points out that in ancient China, the belief that the soul of the newly dead could fall into the hands of malicious demons is the reason that many tales were concerned with the attacks of *sha*.²²⁰ But why is the soul of the newly dead so vulnerable to the possession of demonic power? Li Jianmin 李建民 attributes the vulnerability of *sha* to its in-between state: “The soul of the newly dead has only drifted away from the body, and exists in a most volatile condition. It is neither ghost (*gui*), nor spirit (*shen*); it does not belong to this world, or the other world, and is temporarily caught in a liminal, betwixt-and-between state.”²²¹ In the story of Mrs. Liu, the monster’s demonic power is clearly displayed through its bloodthirsty and man-eating behavior.

According to Carroll, the impurity of monsters is portrayed through certain characteristic structures. One structure for composing a horrific creature is fusion, and by

²¹⁹ Hong Mai, *Yijianzhi. Yizhi, juan 19*.

²²⁰ J.J.M. De Groot. *The Religious System of China*, vol.5, 774.

²²¹ Li Jianmin, “Contagion and Its Consequences: The Problem of Death Pollution in Ancient China,” Y. Otsuka, S. Sakai, and S. Kuriyama, eds., *Medicine and the History of the Body* (Tokyo: Ishiyaku Euro America, 1999), 201-222.

fusion, Carroll refers to the construction of a monster that “unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural schema of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity.”²²² A fusion figure may combine distinct or opposed categorical elements, but it must assume a single identity and have a continuing form of existence. Creatures such as ghosts, zombies and mummies are all fusion figures. In contrast, another structure for the composition of a horrific being is fission. In fission, “the contradictory elements are, so to speak, distributed over different, though metaphysically related, identities.”²²³ Fission has two modes: temporal fission and spatial fission. A temporal fission has multiple identities that take turns inhabiting one body. Werewolves are an example of having both human and animal identities, with the animal and the human inhabiting the same body in sequence, not simultaneously. A spatial fission involves multiple bodies, each standing for one of the opposed categories. Doppelgangers, for example, fall under the category of spatial fission.

Based on Carroll’s theory, the monster in the story of Mrs. Liu is a unique being that has characteristics of both fission and fusion. The monster is a temporal fission figure in that it has taken on different identities at different times. Its human, wasp and walnut forms are displayed in sequence and there is no temporal overlapping between them. But this monster is significantly different from Carroll’s examples of werewolves and shape-shifters. For a shape-shifter, there are a specific number of consistent identities that alternatively possess the body in question; the monster in the story, however, seems to have endless choices of shape-shifting. A werewolf switches between wolf and human, both of which are indispensable components of its identity; the monster in question,

²²² Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 43.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 46.

however, has disguised itself as something (i.e. human) that is clearly not a part of its being. While werewolves and shape-shifters are frequently portrayed as human beings who change into wolves or other animals, the monster in the story shows no indication of its original form. That is not to say that this monster, werewolves and shape-shifters have little in common. On the contrary, they share the fundamental feature of temporal fission figures, that is, the lack of a continuing form of existence. The monster also has fusion characteristics since it has displayed categorical contradictoriness in its temporary form. It takes on human form and dresses like a human, but its gruesome behavior belongs to something non-human. When the monster takes on the form of the walnut, it also possesses attributes that are definitely not seed-related. A real walnut could not change its size in a few seconds nor could it split itself and take a bite of Mrs. Liu's head, crushing her skull effortlessly. As Carroll has pointed out, what fission and fusion have in common is that they both "involve a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories."

²²⁴ The fact that the monster in the story of Mrs. Liu is artistically constructed through the combination of both structures makes it even more culturally and epistemically challenging.

Unlike monsters in other horror stories, which often have a temporary disguised form and a more permanent original monstrous form, the creature in this particular story does not reveal its true nature. In fact, because of the instability of each form it has taken on, we cannot even be sure that it has a definite form at all. In other words, its apparent metamorphosis could be the result of its amorphous nature.

It is worth noting that the monster reappears a few months after its debut just when the anxiety is dispersed. The second haunting becomes even more terrifying in the

²²⁴ Ibid., 43.

sense that the reader now realizes the monster is not a one-time strike of bad fortune but a recurring phenomenon; its appearance may be temporary, but its potential to manifest itself is permanent. The fact that the monster escapes in the end does not release the anxiety caused by its bizarre yet brutal killing. In fact it only intensifies the insecurity and uncertainty experienced by the reader because a monster is now on the loose, lurks in the dark and is ready to reappear someplace else. What the monster escapes from is our field of vision that provides us a sense of control. When the monster finally disappears from our sight, it is no longer a monster on paper. It has escaped the confinement of the very physical words through which it comes into existence. It now comes to life with the help of our imagination, dwelling in the margins between the real and the imaginary, waiting for its turn to disturb our conceptual world once again.

Metamorphosing monsters are not uncommon in *Youyang zazhi*. While the monster in the story of Mrs. Liu can change into different forms, other monsters excel in their ability to metamorphose into human form. Another story, for example, features a similar plot, picturing the devastating consequences inflicted by a monster with such deceptive powers:

During the Zhenyuan period (785-805) there was a commoner named Wang Shen who lived west of the Wangyuan post-station. With his own hands he planted elms by the side of the road, and they grew into a grove. He also built a few thatched cottages and in summer months often offered refreshments to passing travelers. When the travelers were officials, he would immediately have them take a rest while he prepared tea for them. He had a son who was thirteen years old, whom he would send to serve

the customers. One day the boy suddenly told his father that there was a girl on the road asking for water, so he told his son to call her in. The girl was young. She wore a green upper garment and a white kerchief on her head. She said her home is about ten *li* 里 [a Chinese measure of length] south from here. Her husband died and she had no children. Now her mourning period was just over and she was on her way to Mawei to visit her relatives and beg for clothing and food. She seemed to be smart and intelligent from the way she speaks and her manner was lovable, so Wang Shen asked her to stay for a meal. He said to her, “You may stay here overnight and leave at dawn.” The girl was glad to do so. His wife then set her up in the back room and called her “little sister.” She asked the girl to make several articles of clothing. From noon to *shu* 戌 [Chinese time unit from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.] she finished all of them. The stitches were so small, dense and beautifully tucked in that they almost seemed not to be the work of a human. Wang Shen was greatly shocked and amazed, and his wife had especially liked the girl and teased her, saying, “Since ‘little sister’ does not have immediate family, could you become our daughter-in-law?” The girl smiled and said, “Since I have no one to rely on, I am willing to attend to your well and stove [i.e. manage household affairs].” That very day Wang Shen leased the clothing and the ceremonial necessities to make her their son's bride. That night it was very hot, but the girl warned her husband, “There have been a lot of bandits recently; we cannot leave the door open.” She then heaved the huge beam door bolt into place, securely

fastening it, and went to bed. In the middle of the night Wang Shen's wife dreamed that her son, with his hair all disheveled, complaining, "I'm being eaten and I am almost gone!" Alarmed, she wanted to go check on her son, but Wang Shen scolded her, saying, "The fellow has gotten a nice new bride; he is so extremely happy that he is probably talking in his sleep." His wife went back to sleep and dreamed the same thing again. Shen and his wife then took candles and called out to their son and his bride. But neither of them answered. They tried to open the door, but the door was shut, tight as iron. Finally they broke the door. When the door was barely open, a creature with round eyes, chiseled teeth and a bluish body rushed out against them and took off. All that was left of their son was his skull and hair.²²⁵

貞元中, 望苑驛西有百姓王申, 手植榆于路傍成林, 構茅屋數椽, 夏月常饋漿水于行人, 官者即延憩具茗。有兒年十三, 每令伺客。忽一日白其父, 路有女子求水, 因令呼入。女少年, 衣碧襦, 白幅巾, 自言家在此南十余裡, 夫死無兒, 今服禪矣, 將適馬嵬訪親情, 丐衣食。言語明悟, 舉止可愛。王申乃留飯之。謂曰: "今日暮夜可宿此, 達明去也。" 女亦欣然從之。其妻遂納之後堂, 呼之為妹。倩其成衣數事, 自午至戌悉辦。針綴細密, 殆非人工。王申大驚異, 妻猶愛之, 乃戲曰: "妹既無極親, 能為我家作新婦子乎?" 女笑曰: "身既無托, 願執粗井灶。" 王申即日賃衣貲禮為新婦。其夕暑熱, 戒其夫, 近多盜, 不可辟門。即舉巨椽捍而寢。及夜半, 王申妻

²²⁵ Based on Reed's translation; see *Chinese Chronicles of the Strange: the "Nuogao ji"*, 132. Some changes are made to make it more sensitive to the original text.

夢其子披髮訴曰：“被食將盡矣。”驚欲省其子。王申怒之：“老人得好新婦，喜極嚙言耶！”妻還睡，複夢如初。申與妻秉燭呼其子及新婦，悉不復應。啟其戶，戶牢如鍵，乃壞門。闔纔開，有物圓目鑿齒，體如藍色，沖人而去。其子唯余腦骨及發而已。²²⁶

The beginning of the story bears the trace of an anecdote. The first sentence, though short, provides us the information about the person who was involved in the event and the place where it took place. The preliminary information relevant to the historical and geographical setting implies that what follows is something could indeed happen to actual persons in a real place.²²⁷

The protagonist Wang Shen seems like a virtuous man whose deeds can be compared to that of Yang Boyong 楊伯雍. In the *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (*In Search of the Supernatural*), Yang Boyong was a filial son who lived by his parents' burial site up in the mountain. Because the road to the top of the mountain was long and there was no water, Yang Boyong established a drinking place and hauled water to distribute to the thirsty travelers. Three years later, a stranger stopped by and gave him some stone seeds. The stranger told Yang that if he planted them they would engender jade, with which he

²²⁶ *Youyang zazu*, *xuji* 2.21, 209.

²²⁷ Scholars have noticed the similarity between *zhiguai* and historical narrative in terms of language style, content and structure. Kenneth DeWoskin and Karl Kao, for example, both argue that *zhiguai* developed out of the Chinese historiographical tradition during the Six Dynasties and laid the groundwork for more sophisticated forms of prose writing. See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, "The Six dynasties Chih-kuai and the Birth of Fiction", in Andrew H. Plaks, ed. *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 21-52; Karl Kao S.Y., ed. *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). Scholars such as Glen Dudbridge and Edward L. Davis see *zhiguai* texts as important historical sources for studying the historical and cultural contexts of pre-modern China. See Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-i chi*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Edward L. David, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

would be able to get a good wife. His prophecy was subsequently fulfilled.²²⁸ The reader who is familiar with the Yang Boyong story must expect the same good fortune to happen to the Wang family when his teenage son accidentally encounters a beautiful young lady on the road. The description of the color of this girl's clothing seems to prove the young lady's self-claimed identity as a mourning widow, since it is common in China for a widow to dress in white and green. Her story about her lost husband seems logical as well. But as the narrative moves on, we find ample things about her that are quite unusual. How does an unaccompanied young lady dares to travel alone in a rural area? If she is left no choice but to beg for food and clothing from her relatives, how does a delicate young lady plan to travel that far with apparently nothing? The young lady's otherworldly sewing skill and her willingness to accept the marriage proposal reminds us of the weaving maid from Heaven (*tian zhi zhi nü* 天之織女) who was sent down by the Emperor of Heaven (*tian di* 天帝) to reward Dong Yong 董永 for his extreme filial piety. Since Wang Shen does the virtuous deeds of serving others, the reader probably expects the young lady to reward him by becoming his daughter-in-law.

However, such expectations do not last long. When the mother dreams about her child being eaten alive, the reader must suspect that the appearance of the young lady is not as auspicious as it seems. Yet, at this point, the text still does not offer us any decisive evidence that will lead the reader to believe she is a monster. The victim's father even suggests an alternative possibility—a naturalistic explanation, which sustains the reader's suspicion. When the mother goes back to bed and dreams the same thing again,

²²⁸ Gan Bao 干寶, *Soushen ji* 搜神記, ed. Wang Shaoying 汪紹楹 (Peking: zhonghua shuju, 1979), *juan* 11.285, 137; for translation, see *In Search of the Supernatural*, trans. Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J.I. Crump, Jr. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 133-134.

the suspense is increased to its peak, and the reader cannot help but wondering about such a strange coincidence.

It is worth noting that the monster's ability to metamorphose is the key in maintaining suspense. Not only does it hide its monstrosity completely, it is capable of imitating humans on a very complex level. It followed norms and customs of human society, looking like a woman, dressing like a woman, talking like a woman, even working like a woman. In other words, it not only can adopt human shape, but can also adopt human behavior and act appropriately in human contexts. Because of its impeccable metamorphosing skills, it successfully gains the trust of the Wang family, allays their suspicions and progressively leads them into its trap. According to Noël Carroll, suspense arises when "a well-structured question—with neatly opposed alternatives—emerges from the narrative."²²⁹ In the story of Wang Shen, there are questions that have been raised by scenes and events in which the reader is faced with two opposite interpretations. Is the young woman lying or telling the truth? Is the mother's dream a nightmare or a premonition? Before one of the alternative answers is eventually posited in the story, the suspense is sustained. It is not until the end of the narrative when the boy's parents witness the horrific scene that the reader finally discards the possibility of a natural explanation and faces the crime of the monster directly. The ending of the story presents the gruesome nature of the monster and the disgusting crime scene in such an abrupt way that it frustrates the reader's expectation of a happy ending and brutally ends the suspense surrounding the lady. What makes the story even more horrifying is the morally disturbing fact that a virtuous man was not only not repaid for

²²⁹ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 137.

his good deeds, but he also lost his only son to a malicious demon that took advantage of his kindness and ripped his family apart. The depiction of such morally ambiguous event shows that the story of Wang Shen does not operate on the simple moral principle of the good being rewarded and the evil being punished. Rather it portrays a much more sophisticated world and a more complex interaction between humans and spirits in which the supernatural is, to a large extent, unpredictable according to human ethics.

The sudden confirmation of the existence of the monster, however, does not offer the reader a sense of closure, rather it generates more questions: What is the monster? Where does it go? Why does it choose to attack the son but not others? Nobody knows the answer. The boy is dead, and his parents are left in the dark. Everything is narrated in a matter-of-fact style: something horrible happens, and the story is over. Absent is a concluding section to examine evidence in the story as well as a narrator's voice to soften the shocking effect of the horror. The reader can rely on no other resources to make sense of the monster and the information offered by the story is utterly insufficient for us to appropriately identify it. Its name, origins and intentions remain unknown and the method whereby the threat can be overcome is also a mystery. Such unidentifiable features of the monster have become a part of the threat itself.

In these stories, the monsters' threat comes from their ability to change shapes in order to kill, but the threat also comes from the fact that these monsters cannot be properly identified or located within the realm of our secular society. In Carroll's words, they are threatening on a cognitive level. In *Youyang zazu* such unidentifiable monsters are not uncommon. The story of scholar Wang is another example where a deadly and mysterious monster commits a horrific killing:

At the beginning of the Yongtai era (765-766), there was someone known as Scholar Wang lived north of Xiaogan temple in Yangzhou. On a summery day, he was drunk, and his hands dangled off his bed. His wife was afraid that he would come down with a chill so she was about to lift his hands up. Suddenly, a giant hand came up from the ground in front of the bed, grabbed Wang's hand, and pulled him off of the bed. Little by little Wang's body penetrated into the ground. His wife and the maids and the servants all tried to pull him out, but they couldn't hold for long. The ground had cracked: at first his clothes and belt still were left to be seen, but in a moment even they disappeared. The people in the household used all of their effort to dig him out. When they had dug more than two *zhang* 长 [ancient Chinese measure of length], they found a dried up old skeleton that looked like it had been dead for several hundred years. They never did find out what kind of monster it was.²³⁰

永泰初, 有王生者, 住在揚州孝感寺北。夏月被酒, 手垂于床。其妻恐風射, 將舉之。忽有巨手出於床前, 牽王臂墜床, 身漸入地。其妻與奴婢共曳之, 不禁, 地如裂狀, 初余衣帶, 頃亦不見。其家並力掘之, 深二丈許, 得枯骸一具, 已如數百年者, 竟不知何怪。²³¹

The giant hand in this story is clearly a monster according to Carroll's definition. It is threatening and impure at the same time. The giant hand possesses horrendous strength that easily overcomes human effort; it crawls out of the darkness of underground and preys on humans at their most vulnerable moments. The giant hand is also categorically

²³⁰ Carrie Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 117.

²³¹ *Youyang zazu*, 13.523, 125.

incomplete. Hands are parts of the body and should not appear as an independent agents acting on its own. In other words, a hand is not a complete entity. According to Carroll, such categorical incompleteness is “a standard feature of the monsters of horror.”²³²

Many monsters that frequent horror stories are missing some body parts such as eyes, fingers, arms, feet and skin or one “in some advanced state of disintegration” where body parts are severed from the body but continue to act as a free agent with diabolical will.²³³

In the case of scholar Wang, the giant hand seems to be such an animated agent that it alone is the object of horror. However, this comfort of knowing the source of evil soon fades away as the narrative progresses. When the victim’s wife and servants dig out the skeleton, many questions emerge as well. Whose skeleton is it? Does the skeleton belong to the victim? What is the relationship between the old skeleton and the giant hand? Is the giant hand part of the old skeleton? None of these puzzles is resolved by the end of the narrative and the reader is just as clueless as the victim’s family.

Unlike previous stories, the difficulty in identifying the monster in this story is not so much about its metamorphosis as it is about the story’s ambiguity and apparent susceptibility to several plausible yet unconvincing interpretations. If we are to claim the skeleton as the remains of scholar Wang, then the questions of why the skeleton seems to be hundreds of years old and where the giant hand went still are not answered; if we are to claim the skeleton as the source of the evil, we then must ask where scholar Wang or his remains went. If the skeleton has the power to reach out of the ground and devour a human without a trace, why does it stay put until exposed? Why doesn’t it hide or even attack people who come to scholar Wang’s rescue? Is it possible that the skeleton is the

²³² Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 33.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

remains of a previous victim? If this is the case, what happens to scholar Wang? The ambiguity of the text lies in the fact that the skeleton is subject to all the following interpretations:

1. The skeleton controls the giant hand or is the giant hand itself.
2. The skeleton belongs to scholar Wang.
3. The skeleton belongs to previous victim, someone unidentified.

These interpretations may not be equally valid, but neither of them can be excluded beyond reasonable doubt based on the information offered by the story. The questions left unanswered by each of these interpretations overlap: they are most concerned with the whereabouts of both the victim and the source of the threat. Although Wang's survival of the incident is highly unlikely, what happens to the monster is still unclear. The multiple possible interpretations of the skeleton make the monster's whereabouts impossible to determine: whether it has been captured or has fled away remains a mystery. Knowing the giant hand is the executor of the crime at this point is no longer satisfying since we still cannot identify the monster appropriately. Without name or apparent knowledge of where it is and where it comes from, this monster is an enigma, an identity-less form with neither goal nor background. Without a concrete and unquestioned identity, the monster is impenetrable within the limits of human knowledge, becoming uncontrollable and dangerous.

It is useful here, in connection with the giant hand in the story, to consider what Noël Carroll has suggested about the origins of horror monsters. He argues that since horror monster often come from "marginal, hidden, or abandoned site," "it is tempting to interpret the geography of horror as a figurative spatialization of the notion that what

horrifies is that which lies outside cultural categories, and is, perforce, unknown.”²³⁴ The place from which the giant hand comes is precisely such an unknown space—the underground. It is dark, cold and forbidding; it is below the operative system of human society and remains unexplored and peripheral; it is also the space where the dead lay. The emergence of the creature from under the earth is significant in that it shows that the monster is native to places outside of the human world and thus beyond human control. The fact that the creature appears in the bedroom and not any other room in the residence is equally alarming because it indicates that the space that we consider most secure and private is now violated by supernatural malevolence.

What is frightening about the giant hand is not only its demonic power and mysterious origin but also the invasive act that it performs. That process of the giant hand reaching out of the ground to grab the victim constitutes what Andrew Tudor calls “the invasion narrative” in which the supernatural, death, alien abnormality have intruded bluntly into the secular everyday life. According to Tudor, the invasion narrative is “the simplest and, in some respects, the most pervasive of horror-movie narrative.”²³⁵ Because of its accessible simplicity and its capacity for flexible adaptation to a wide variety of contexts, the invasion narrative can be found throughout the genre’s history. For Tudor, what is at the heart of the invasion narrative is boundary crossing: “the threat crosses the oppositional boundary unbidden, whether it is that between secular and supernatural, earth and space or life and death.”²³⁶ In invasion narrative, the unknown simply invades the known, for reasons which may or may not be forthcoming but which are, in many cases, an autonomous feature of the threat itself. The attack of the giant hand

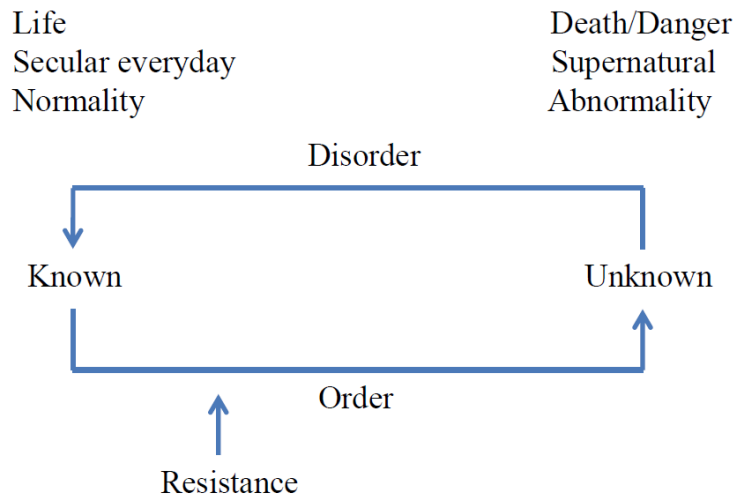
²³⁴ Ibid., 35.

²³⁵ Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 90.

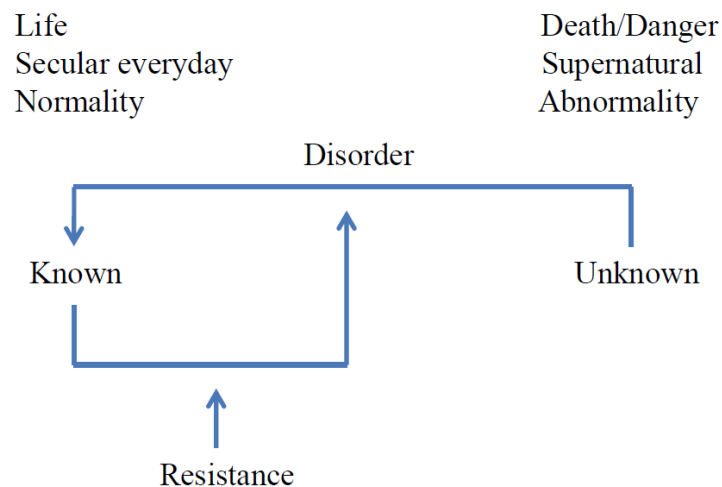
²³⁶ Ibid., 92.

shows the invasion narrative at its most simple: the monster suddenly appears, goes on the rampage and is faced with a certain degree of resistance. Finally, the threat returns to its unknown domain, normality and order is restored. Such invasion narrative naturally assumes an opposition between life and death, human and monster, normality and abnormality. In this story, the process of crossing these boundaries is specifically marked by the two-way penetration: the monster emerging from underground, literally and symbolically penetrating the secular world and the victim being dragged into the ground inch by inch, devoured by the mysterious creature.

According to Tudor, despite variations the basic patterns of the invasion narrative can be categorized into two versions: the closed invasion narrative and the open invasion narrative. They both assume the opposition between life and death, secular everyday and the supernatural, human normality and alien abnormality. In closed invasion narrative, the supernatural and the abnormal invade the normal human domain and are later eliminated or repelled by human effort in one way or another. In the end, the boundary between alien threat and human normality is restored and the order of nature is reasserted. For Tudor, the closed invasion narrative can be represented as follows:

Figure1: The closed invasion narrative

The open invasion narrative is similar to the closed version in that it also features boundary crossing between oppositional categories. But in open invasion narrative, the emphasis is not solely on the confrontation between monsters and human resistance. What happens after the initial confrontation is rather the focal point of the narrative, because in this version, the monster either leaves undefeated or continues to linger. In this case, the boundary is not repaired and order has not been restored.

Figure 2: The open invasion narrative

The difference between the closed invasion narrative and the open invasion one is that the closed version offers us a sense of closure by successfully defeating the monstrous threat and restoring order at least temporarily while in the open version the threat is yet to be overcome and the possibility of a continuing threat is tantalizingly held before us. The difference between the two versions of the invasive narratives can be further illustrated through the comparison of the following stories:

After Wei Ying of the Wei Dynasty (389-557) died, his wife Liang married Xiang Ziji. On the wedding day, Ying suddenly returned to the courtyard and cried out: “A Liang, have you forgotten me?” Ziji was startled and drew the bow and shot at him. Ying immediately turned into a wooden effigy carved out peach wood riding on a horse made of grass. 魏韋英卒後, 妻梁氏嫁向子集。嫁日, 英歸至庭, 呼曰: “阿梁, 卿忘我耶?” 子集驚, 張弓射之, 即變為桃人茅馬。²³⁷

This happened in the seventh year of the Taihe era (827-835) to Monk Xie Zong of the Green dragon temple. His lay home was in Fanzhou. His older brother, Fan Jing, developed a fever and babbled incoherently and burst out laughing for no reason at all. Xie Zong was spiritually virtuous, so he burned incense and used *chi le* charms. Suddenly the older brother ranted at him, saying, “You are a monk. You should just go back to your temple and take care of things there. Why do you have to intrude here? I reside in the Nanke, but I love your productive crops, so I’ve come here for awhile.” Xie Zong suspected that it was a fox spirit, so he again said a chant over a

²³⁷ *Youyang zazu*, 12.493, 120

peach branch and beat his brother with it. His brother merely laughed and said, "You are not beating your brother properly. God should kill you. Beat harder, don't stop." Xie Zong realized that it was no use, so he stopped beating his brother. The sick man suddenly got up and dragged his mother over to him, and she was struck down dead with a sudden illness. He then grabbed his own wife, who also died. Next he began to caress the wife of his younger brother. When she turned her face away from him, she became blinded. After a day, however, all of them returned to normal. The spirit then spoke to Xie Zong, saying, "Since you won't leave, I shall call for my relatives to come." Just as he finished speaking, several hundred rats appeared, squeaking. They were bigger than ordinary rats. They charged up against people, and they could not be driven away. They all disappeared before dawn. Xie Zong had become even more terrified by this time. His brother addressed him again: "Be careful when speaking to me; I am not afraid of you. Now let my eldest brother come." He then shouted: "Han Yue, Han Yue, come here!" When he shouted three times, a creature the size of a cat, red as fire, arose from the sick man's feet; it clambered up the coverlet and landed on his stomach. Its eyes were glowing. Xie Zong took hold of a knife and stabbed at the creature, hitting it on one of its paws. It leapt out of the door. When Xie Zong lighted up its lair with fire, he found that its tracks led to a certain room. He saw that the creature had hidden away in an earthenware jar. Xie Zong lifted up a giant basin and covered up the jar with it, sealing up the crack with mud. When

he opened it three days later, the creature had become as hard as iron, and it couldn't move. Xie Zong fried it in oil to kill it. Its stench permeated the air for several *li*. Xie's brother then recovered. More than a month later there was a family in the village six or seven of whose members all died suddenly; everyone believed that the spirit caused this.

太和七年,上都青龍寺僧契宗,俗家在樊州。其兄樊竟因病熱,乃狂言虛笑,契宗精神總持,遂焚香敕勒。兄忽詬罵曰:“汝是僧,第歸寺住持,何橫於事?我止居在南柯,愛汝苗碩多獲,故暫來耳。”契宗疑其狐魅,復禁桃枝擊之。其兄但笑曰:“汝打兄不順,神當殛汝,可加力勿止。”契宗知其無奈何,乃已。病者歛起牽其母,母遂中惡。援其妻,妻亦卒。乃摹其弟婦,回面失明,經日悉復舊。乃語契宗曰:“爾不去,當喚我眷屬來。”言已,有鼠數百,穀穀作聲,大於常鼠,與人相觸,驅逐不去。及明,失所在。契宗恐怖加切,其兄又曰:“慎爾聲氣,吾不懼爾,今須我大兄弟自來。”因長呼曰:“寒月,寒月,可來此。”至三呼,有物大如狸,赤如火,從病者腳起,緣衾止於腹上,目光四射。契宗持刀就擊之,中物一足,遂跳出戶。燭其穴,蹤至一房,見其物潛走甕中,契宗舉巨盆覆之,泥固其隙。經三日發視,其物如鐵,不得動。因以油煎殺之,臭達數裏,其兄遂愈。月余,村有一家父子六人暴卒,眾意其興蠱。²³⁸

In both stories, the supernatural invades the secular human world with their presence and transgressive behavior in human domain. In the first story, the spirit of an ex-husband comes back on his widow's wedding day to haunt her. But in the end the embodiment of

²³⁸ *Youyang zazu*, *xuji* 2.20, 208.

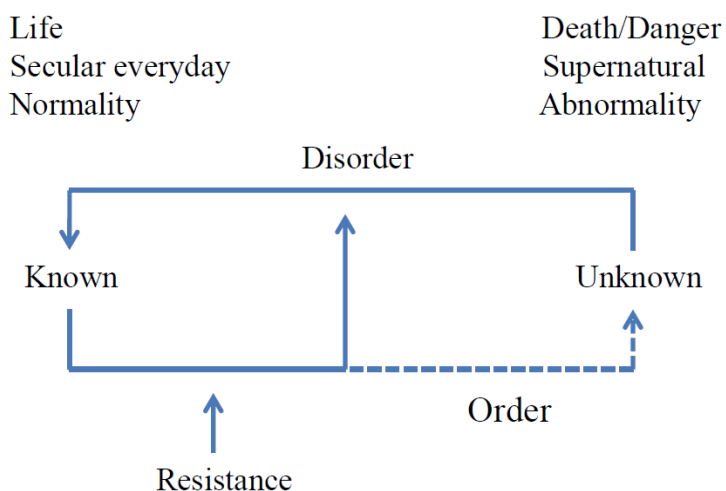
the spirit is exposed and the haunting is successfully stopped. The story ends here without any evidence suggesting the possibility of a second haunting.

Thus, the circle of order-disorder-order is completed and remains closed. In the second story, a fox spirit possesses an individual and brings disease and death to his household. Although the supernatural threat is identified, the initial human effort to defeat it does not seem to work. The confrontation between the human protagonist and the supernatural adversary continues for several rounds. When the monk finally defeats the monstrous creature and restores normality to his household, an unexpected twist in the end suggests that the supernatural threat continues to linger. The temporarily restored order is once again disrupted and remains so by the end of the narrative. The lingering supernatural threat thus keeps the narrative open-ended, and leaves the reader in anticipation.

While most invasion narratives adopt only one of the two versions, the narrative of the giant hand conforms to either one of them depending on how we interpret the skeleton and its circumstances. If the skeleton is the source of the threat, the story can be taken as a closed version of invasion narrative in which the threat is to some extent explained and its evil force is restrained or overcome if temporarily. We may never learn what exactly happens to scholar Wang but at least we find comfort in knowing what is physically responsible for this horrific attack. We may never fully comprehend the nature of the monster, but human resistance (digging) turns out to be useful in exposing the origin of the evil. Thus, the closed version offers us a sense of closure, though not completely satisfying, is nevertheless acceptable. If we consider the skeleton as the remains of scholar Wang or other victim, the narrative is then opened up by the fact that the monster is not defeated and the force of disorder is never even temporarily overcome. The

characters in the story are left with the prospect of a continuing cycle of disaster without any knowledge of what it is. There is nothing holding the threat at bay or protecting ordinary people from its return. No successful defenses are conducted and human effort is ultimately in vain. The threat is formally unrestrained: not only does the identity of the monster remain unknown; it is untraceable, unanalyzable and untreatable. In this case, the order that has been disrupted by the supernatural force is not restored appropriately, and the narrative sequence translates order into disorder and stops at that. With these two different readings, the narrative of the giant hand can be represented combining the closed version and the open version shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Combination of the closed invasion narrative and the open invasion narrative



The beginning of the story establishes the life of the victim as a concrete everyday person. His name is given; his time and location are specified. What he does on that summer day is not unfamiliar to our everyday experience: having a few too many drinks and going to bed without positioning his hands appropriately. However this prosaic and familiar everyday experience is soon to be disrupted. The intimations of disorder—a punctuation point marking the transit from the orderly world of the known to the period

of monstrous rampage and threatening domain of the unknown—comes with the giant hand emerging from the ground right in front of scholar Wang's bed. The eruption of abnormality into a mundane setting is essential to horror stories because it introduces the incredible into a physically and naturally credible world in the most direct and effective way. The rampage phase follows immediately. The victim's family members make great effort to stop the monster's savage attack, but they fight a losing battle. The combat between human and monster also highlights the context in which the opposition between the secular and the supernatural and between life and death is underlined. The discovery of the skeleton does not necessarily guarantee the restoration of the order because multiple readings on the skeleton are available and not each one of them supports the assumption that the monster has been temporarily defeated by humans. The possibility of two opposing readings of the story keeps the reader wondering and at the same time elevates the invasion narrative to another level. The narrative goes beyond the closed and open invasion narrative because it does not simply follow the generic order-disorder-order sequence as in closed invasion narrative; nor does it merely disrupt the sequence as in open invasion narrative. The narrative of the story combines the two versions and modifies the sequence of plot into a formula with multiple interpretations.

The invasion of the supernatural into the everyday world is not the only occasion where humans encounter monsters. Humans sometimes can also cross the line between the two worlds, intruding into the supernatural realm. This kind of intrusion most often occurs along the borders between the wild and the civilized, whether it is on the edge of the woods or near the entrance to the underworld (tomb/grave). Part of the reason for this dynamic of a contact zone along a tomb is that such space is the realm where the known

and unknown worlds collide. In *Youyang zazu*, when it is the human who violates the boundary, an encounter with supernatural entities is almost inevitable. When the human knowingly intrudes into the supernatural world, his chance of facing a monster is dramatically increased. Grave robbers, for example, are often the protagonists of these human-initiated invasion narratives. Motivated solely by greed, transgressive behavior is a serious offence to the well-established boundary between the dead and the living. The punishment for such offense is usually carried out by monstrous agents of supernatural forces. The following story depicts a scenario where grave robbers are forced out of the tomb and suffer ill effects from their intrusion:

In recent past, a few thieves dug up the tomb of former kings of Shu 蜀. When they reached the burial vault, they all saw two men playing chess under the lights, surrounded by more than ten imperial guards. The thieves were terrified. They fell down to their knees to apologize. One person looked at them and asked, “Do you drink?” The thieves all drank one cup and begged for mercy. They were then given several jade belts and were commanded to leave immediately. When they got out of the tomb, their mouths had already turned completely black and the belts became giant snakes. When they looked back, the tomb seemed as if it had never been touched.

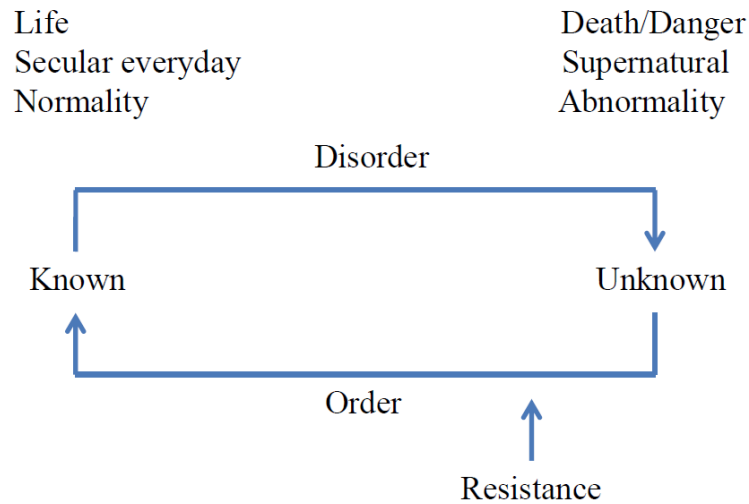
近有盜發蜀先主墓墓穴，盜數人齊見兩人張燈對弈，侍衛十餘。盜驚懼拜謝，一人顧曰：“爾飲乎？”乃各飲以一杯，兼乞與玉腰帶數條，命速出。盜至外，口已漆矣。帶乃巨蛇也。視其穴，已如舊矣。²³⁹

²³⁹ *Youyang zazu*, 13.527, 126.

The monsters in this story are no longer creatures of unknown origin. On the contrary, their identities are clearly indicated throughout the narrative. The fact that they are playing chess under the protection of imperial guards suggests their superior status. Considering the thieves are given jade belts that are only common for court officials, we can argue with confidence that the person these thieves saw in the tombs were in fact kings of *Shu*. This time the monsters are terrifying not because we do not know what they are, but rather because we know exactly who they are. Under ordinary circumstances, the dead and the living occupy completely different spaces and do not have direct, unmediated contact. But when the thieves dig up the grave and venture into the realm of the dead, the boundary between the living and the dead is temporarily blurred and the two separated territories have a moment of intersection. At this point, the dead are no longer inanimate, senseless and motionless; they think, talk and behave like living persons. They have now become monsters with contradictory characteristics: the living dead.

According to Campany, one of the primary boundaries explored in *zhiguai* tales is that separating the dead from the living.²⁴⁰ The prevalent type of boundary-crossing involves the dead initiating contact with humans either through resuscitation, i.e., returning from the death or through the spectral form of a ghost. In the story of grave robbers, however, the violation of the boundary is conducted by humans with malign intentions. This kind of transgression is a reverse of Tudor's closed invasion narrative:

²⁴⁰ Campany, *Strange Writing*, 260.

Figure 4: The reversed invasion narrative

In this schema, it is the known that intrudes upon the unknown, destabilizing the system of boundaries and the resistance is carried out by the supernatural forces on the other side of boundary. When the invading agent is driven out of the territory of the unknown, order is restored and the system is once again stabilized.

It is worth noting that unlike previous stories, where the vicious attacks on humans appear random and unjustified, the attack on these tomb robbers is an understandably defensive move on the part of the dead. In the reversed invasion narrative, the encounter with monsters is brought upon by the combination of ill intention and transgressive behavior of humans themselves. Unlike many *zhiguai* tales where men are lured to the world of the supernatural and violate the boundary unintentionally, the thieves in this story were very much aware of their actions, and therefore, any ill effect that they suffer as a result of their transgression becomes a deserved punishment. Because the nature of the attack is not intentionally aggressive, the degree of violence is not as high as in the normal invasion narratives. There was no blood, guts or gore. The

former kings of Shu do not act like ruthless creatures that go on rampage based on their intuitive needs; their response to human provocation is rather a calculated process involving disguise and manipulation. The thieves are not greeted by outright abusive violence when they penetrate the underworld. They are asked if not politely whether they want to drink; they are even given gifts before they are asked to leave. It seems that the thieves are just very fortunate to be able to retreat from the tomb unharmed considering their offensive behavior. But when the thieves come out of the tomb, the reader realizes that their fortune is not as good as it seems. Without these thieves realizing it, the punishment is already carried out. The drink turns out to be poisonous after all and the gift is not a friendly gesture but rather a ticking time-bomb ready to detonate the moment they go back to human world. The kings carefully manipulate the situation in the tomb, giving the thieves as well as the reader the false impression that they either are not seriously offended by grave-robbing or already accept the thieves' apologies and forgive their wrongdoing. But what the kings of Shu planned all along is in fact a two-step strategy that will exact their revenge on both physical and psychological levels. The first step is to deceive the target with a calm response, luring and coercing the thieves into taking the drink and the belts. The second step is to ask them to leave as if they were excused. The genius of the plan is that the real consequences of robbing the grave take place only after the thieves step outside of the tomb, thinking they are finally safe. By postponing physical harm, the arrangement minimizes suspicions of the thieves and catches them off guard, maximizing the shocking effect of the punishment.

In *Youyang zazu* a monster's physical damage to its victim is often postponed by hours, days, even months. The lack of immediacy of the monster's threat, however, does

not change its dangerous nature, since the delayed consequences of a malicious attack is often the death itself, either of the victim or of his family members. The postponement of the threat does not alter the basic patterns of the invasion narrative either because the boundary-crossing between the unknown and the known remains the cause of disorder. In the following story, the monster's threatening potential is not fully realized until days after its appearance and the method by which it can be overcome is yet to be found:

Former scholar Li Hu went to be received in Yingchuan. At night, he reached a government post station and stopped to rest. When he had just lied down, he saw a creature resembling a pig rushing up the steps of the hall. Li Hu, in alarm, ran through the back door, heading towards the stable. He hid himself in a haystack and held his breath while waiting for the monster. The monster did follow him there, and it circled the haystack, all the while making a noise. It stared fixedly at Li's hiding place.

Suddenly, it transformed into a huge star, shot up, and illumined the sky with several beams of light. Li Hu's associates took candles and found Li Hu inside the haystack, but he already passed out. He did not wake up until half a day later. He then told of what he had seen, but ten days had not passed when he died without suffering from any illness.²⁴¹

前秀才李鵠觀于潁川, 夜至一驛, 纔臥, 見物如豬者突上廳階. 鵠驚走, 透後門投驛廄, 潛身草積中, 屏息且伺之. 怪亦隨至, 聲繞草積數匝, 瞪

²⁴¹ I have consulted Reed's translation on this story, see *A Tang Miscellany*, 130.

目相視鵠所潛處, 忽變為巨星, 騰起數道燭天. 鵠左右取燭索鵠于草積中, 已卒矣. 半日方蘇, 因說所見, 未旬, 無病而死.²⁴²

The strange creature's unique ability to transform has clearly marked itself as one of the metamorphosing monsters that we have discussed before. It shares their fission characteristics and supernatural ability to change its form. The difference between this creature and others is that while others metamorphose to assist their attack by concealing their identities and avoiding the target's suspicion, the pig-like monster in the story does it for no apparent reason other than to leave the scene spectacularly. In other words, its metamorphosis power does not seem to play any significant role in the part of the assault. It is rather its delayed effect on the victim that distinguishes it from other monsters. Judging from the way the monster pursues Li Hu (sneaking up on him during night and following him to the haystack), the monster clearly does not have good intentions. Although its motive is still a mystery to us, we can be certain that Li Hu is in the danger of the monster's savage attack.

The surprise therefore does not come from Li Hu's unfortunate situation of falling into unconsciousness, but rather from the fact that the real damage does not happen until ten days after Li Hu's initial contact with the monster. The reason that Li Hu passes out on that night is not entirely clear to us, but it seems that Li Hu does not suffer any obvious external injuries when he is found in the haystack. There is no mention of any sort of direct physical assault either by Li Hu himself or by his associates. We can probably assume that Li Hu passes out as the result of his intense fear of facing the monster. When he comes back to his senses and tells his story, the monster is already

²⁴² *Youyang zazu, xujì* 1.5, 201.

gone and his ordeal seems to be over. That is, of course, until we find out what happens to him ten days after the attack. The fact that he dies “without suffering from any illness” is highly suggestive because by ruling out natural causes for Li Hu’s death, the story implies a strong connection between Li’s death and the monster he encountered days ago. The question of how exactly the monster causes Li’s death is left open to speculation. One possibility is that the experience is so traumatic that Li Hu never recovers from the mental and physical distress caused by it. Another likely explanation is that the monster is able to manipulate the effect of its power on its victim so that the death of Li Hu is intended and unavoidable. The monster follows Li to the stable, circles around the haystack and discovers Li’s hiding spot. Instead of launching an attack on Li Hu, it stares at his hiding place fixedly. The stare may well be more than just a look. It probably carries secret power and functions as an unvoiced spell that will cause death to its victim. In either case, the postponed consequence of its power does not change the fact that monster’s threatening nature is responsible for the damage inflicted upon its victim.

The delayed effect of the monster’s threat does not disrupt the generic formula of the open invasion narrative. The intrusion of the unknown into the world of known reality takes the forms of monster invasion. This invasion is barely resisted, let alone defeated. The monster’s disruptive power is at work even when it is physically absent; and the invasion-induced disorder remains long after the monster is gone. The narrative ends here. It neither leaves us any sort of explanation that can lead to a narrative closure, nor does it suggest a successful, even if temporary, reimposition of order.

The fear of this particular monster is probably rooted in the Chinese belief in the baleful star. According to Ching-lang Hou, this belief goes back to very early times in

China. Almost all dynastic histories preserve documents related to baleful stars, including some of the earliest Chinese classical texts, such as Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記.²⁴³ A baleful star is a heavenly body that can cause harm to people who has somehow “collided” 冲 with it or “offended” 犯 it. The result of such encounter can be the loss of one's vital spiritual components, such as the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 (souls), sickness or even death. The monster that scares Li Hu initially takes on a strange pig-like form, but later transforms to a bright star with tails of white light. Such description fits well with an apocryphal text on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which states “stars that are pointed and have long tails are baleful stars. Their color is white, and they emit rays.”²⁴⁴

It should be emphasized here that, although boundary-crossing always involves boundary violation, this does not necessarily incite fear. The *zhiguai* genre in general concerns the nature of boundaries and tests the variety of ways in which it could be crossed. In the *zhiguai* world, animals can turn into humans; inanimate objects can become animate objects; ghosts can marry living persons and the dead can resurrect from tombs. Take fox spirits for example. They can assume human form, but their boundary-crossing transformation is sometimes the catalyst for romance rather than a disguise for crime. In “Wang Xuan” 王璿, a story collected from the Tang *zhiguai* collection *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 by Dai Fu 戴孚 (fl. 742-756), a handsome young official is bewitched by a fox.²⁴⁵ She is certainly beautiful, but it is rather her behavior and manners that set her apart from other women. She is remarkably respectful and polite to everyone in his

²⁴³ Ching-lang Hou, “The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars”, *Facets of Taoism*, ed. Homes Welch and Anna Seidel, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 193.

²⁴⁴ *Chunqiu qian tan ba* 春秋潛潭巴, in *weishu jicheng* 緯書集成, ed. 安居香山 and 中村璋八 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1994), 851.

²⁴⁵ *Taiping guangji*, 451.11

family. She is an exemplary new bride, behaving appropriately in all family matters to the delight of everyone. When Wang is promoted to high office, she stops seeing him. Although a fox, she has never harmed anyone in any way. Her exceptionally good manners have earned the respect of people around her. When her lover holds a more public position, she chooses to leave him to avoid leading him into controversy. Her behavior is even more thoughtful and respectful than that of a human being. In another story “Ji Zhen” 計真 collected from Zhangdu’s *zhiguai* work *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志, the hero marries an exceptionally intelligent and beautiful woman and lives happily with her for more than ten years.²⁴⁶ His wife serves him with care and love, bearing him seven sons and two daughters. Nobody suspects anything and the husband only finds out about her true nature when she reveals her secret to him on her deathbed. In these stories, although the boundary between species is crossed, the crossing is rather contained by the strikingly human-like behavior of the fox spirits. It is only when the boundary-crossing becomes physically, morally or epistemically threatening that the monster that violates the boundary is able to incite horror. In the story of “A Zi” 阿紫 from *Soushen ji*, the female demon A Zi is dangerous not only because she is seductive and deceptive, but also because the male character who has a relationship with her is in danger of becoming a fox himself.²⁴⁷ The deceptive bride in the story of Wang Shen, the giant hand in the story of scholar Wang, the living dead in the tale of tomb robbers, and the shooting star in the case of Li Hu all cross boundaries of various kinds, but none is horrifying simply because of their transgression. The danger of these monsters lay primarily in their harmful intentions and conducts. In many instances, the display of such danger on paper is

²⁴⁶ *Taiping guangji*, 454.3

²⁴⁷ Gan Bao, *Soushen ji*, 18. 425

coupled with the medieval Chinese beliefs about the supernatural in reality. This combination makes the stories even more horrifying.

The unusual subject matters of these horror tales certainly contribute to the aesthetic principle of *qi*. The abundant supernatural elements have clearly excluded these tales from the realm of canonical texts. Although a minor amount of *zhiguai* materials was accepted in orthodox texts such as *Zuozhuan* and *Shiji* as evidence of marginal phenomena, the majority of *zhiguai* tales were criticized for their unreal or frivolous content. According to Zeitlin, although *qi* is often used as an aesthetic term of high praise, its inherent meaning of unusualness and deviation from the norm make it the direct opposite of *zheng* 正 (canonical).²⁴⁸ The horrifying monsters that barely make their way into canonical texts are now the featured focus of many tales; and their conflicts with humans have become one of the most recurring themes of *Youyang zazhu*. In his study of traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo* 小說, Liang Shi notices that the presence of supernatural is one of the most fundamental traits of traditional Chinese storytelling.²⁴⁹ He argues that the reason for this phenomenon is the lack of separation between this-worldly and the other-worldly: “Human society was always closely connected with the supernatural world, and human life was forever mixed up with that of supernatural beings.”²⁵⁰ Liang’s argument also points out one important fact about the aesthetic effect of supernatural *qi*; that is, it depends on the mingling of the mundane and the supernatural elements within

²⁴⁸ Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 6.

²⁴⁹ Liang Shi, *Reconstructing the Historical Discourse of Traditional Chinese Fiction* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, July, 2002), 240. The term *xiaoshuo* 小說 has long been used as a Chinese equivalent for fiction by scholars of traditional Chinese literature since the early 20th century. But the meaning, the properties and values of this term, like many other terms that are transmitted from early Chinese tradition, have gone through a process of changes. For a full discussion of the various attempts to define *xiaoshuo*, see Robert Hegel, “Traditional Chinese Fiction—The State of the Field”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 53. 2 (1994): 394-426.

²⁵⁰ Liang Shi, *Reconstructing the Historical Discourse*, 240.

the same narrative. Thus, it is not the gruesome nature of these monsters alone that contributes to the creation of *qi*, but also the supernatural power these monsters exhibit in a perfectly secular everyday world. This fact should not be surprising because a monster may give rise to the initial feeling of wonder, but it is the contrast between the strange and the familiar and the interplay of the anomalous and the normal that sustain and reinforce the effect of *qi*. If we take into account of the fact that the previously discussed tales often employ various forms of invasion narrative, we can conclude that monster horror tales in *Youyang zazu* concerns more than simple representations of supernatural beings, rather they involve certain narrative patterns or techniques that all contribute to the aesthetic of *qi*.

As we have shown, Carroll's account of the monster and its role in horror can provide us some useful insights in interpreting horror stories in *Youyang zazu*, where demonic agencies are the most prominent features of the narratives. Carroll's approach has many virtues; it is economical and it accounts for many examples of horror stories in *Youyang zazu*. But his approach is not without shortcomings. As Carroll has argued, his theory of horror is basically entity-based. His definition of horror requires "essential reference to an entity, a monster, which then serves as the particular object of the emotion of art-horror."²⁵¹ As useful as it is, Carroll's emphasis on the monster as a vital characteristic of horror has been much challenged. Many critics find his definition of monsters too restrictive. For example, Cynthia Freeland has pointed out that Carroll's definition of "the monster" does not include real-life monsters like psychopaths or serial killers. With regard to Chinese *zhiguai* narrative, especially horror stories, it fails to explain texts that do not feature any specific monsters but rely on mysterious and

²⁵¹ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 41.

unexplained events. With this concern, I will proceed to the next chapter which deals with cosmic horror.

CHAPTER FIVE

***QI* THROUGH COSMOLOGY: COSMIC HORROR**

As Carroll's approach to horror has received more academic attention, his emphasis on the presence of the monster as a characteristic feature of horror has sparked a vigorous discussion about the thematic range of horror literature. Critics argue that Carroll tends to ignore important portions of horror literature that do not correspond well to his theory of "art-horror" and definition of the monster.²⁵² The most obvious example is the exclusion of "realistic" monsters, such as serial killers and the great white shark in Stephen Spielberg's film *Jaws*, from Carroll's system. Another example of such a tendency is Carroll's attempt to distinguish "art-dread" from "art-horror." For Carroll, "art-horror" must have a definite object, i.e. the monster, while stories that withhold or lack a monster should be put into another separate category called "tales of dread":

I do think that there is an important distinction between this type of story—which I want to call tales of dread—and horror stories.

Specifically, the emotional response they elicit seems to be quite different than that engendered by art-horror. The uncanny event which tops off such stories causes a sense of unease and awe, perhaps of momentary anxiety and foreboding. These events are constructed to move the audience

²⁵² See Steven Jay Schneider, "Monsters as Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror," ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini, *Horror Film Reader* (New York: Limelight Edition, 2000), 167-191; Cynthia Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000); David J. Russell, "Monster Roundup: Reintegrating the Horror Genre," ed. Nick Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 233-254.

rhetorically to the point that one entertains the idea that unavowed, unknown, and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe. Where art-horror involves disgust as a central feature, what might be called art-dread does not.²⁵³

Carroll's distinction between "art-horror" and "art-dread" is problematic, because it clearly eliminates stories that are based on "mysterious, unnerving, preternatural events" and unnecessarily narrows the possible range of horror texts. The only reason for Carroll's distinction, according to Matt Hill, is "to expel the unwanted portion of what is identified as 'horror' by non-philosophical audiences in order to bring theoretical and philosophical order to 'art-horror'." ²⁵⁴ In other words, Carroll imposes an artificial distinction between "art-horror" and "art-dread" that does not exist for the audience and he deliberately neglects important horror works for the purpose of purifying and securing his concept of "art-horror."

What Carroll excludes from his system is a specific type of horror stories that deal with ambiguous evil and withhold obscure monstrous agencies rather than clearly represent them. The focus of these stories is on the fact that some hidden, mysterious force is at work behind certain phenomena through a process unknown to us. The law and order of the human world become insignificant and unpredictable when contrasted against the background of unknown spheres and powers. One concept often cited to account for such horror stories is Lovecraft's "cosmic fear." In his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", H.P. Lovecraft remarks that cosmic fear is a mixture of fear, awe and wonder:

²⁵³ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 42.

²⁵⁴ Matt Hill, "An Event-Based Definition of Art-Horror", eds. Stephen J. Schneider and Daniel Shaw, *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror* (Lanham: Scarecrow press, 2003), 140.

The only test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes on the known universe’s utmost rim.²⁵⁵

In Lovecraft’s view, cosmic fear lies beyond horrifying monsters, bodily fear and the mundane gruesome; it rather expresses a vision, “a certain atmosphere of breathless” where “unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present.”²⁵⁶ The root of this fear is deeply seated in human instincts that are vital for mankind in order to deal with the unknown and the unpredictable and to survive antiquity’s hostile environment. Thus, the appeal of cosmic horror is that it confirms our instinctual belief about the world, namely, the simple fact that the world contains vast unknown and unknowable forces.

Lovecraft’s concept of cosmic fear is especially useful in understanding horror stories that emphasize events and their effects, especially when a monster is either absent or has to be imagined by the reader. The notion of cosmic fear can also be helpful in analyzing a certain type of Chinese *zhiguai* tales, because despite the large number of *zhiguai* tales that do involve supernatural entities such as ghosts, animal spirits and demons, many *zhiguai* tales deal with supernatural forces without definite monsters or explicit etiologies. These narratives usually concern remarkable coincidences, malignant premonitions, inauspicious omens and weird dreams. The

²⁵⁵ Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 16

²⁵⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, eds. T.E. Klein and S.T. Joshi (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1965), 268.

uses of these textual devices create an ominous atmosphere while excluding the appearance of any concrete monstrous agency whatsoever. In *Youyang zazu*, contact with unknown forces often takes the form of a distinctive narrative structure: a strange event takes place, and then after a certain length of time a horrible event is manifested. No explicit interpretation is offered with regard to the causal connection of the two incidents; however, an accompanying relationship between them is implied by their juxtaposition. The following is recorded in *juan* four under the section named “Huo zhao” 禍兆 (Inauspicious Portents) and can serve as an example of cosmic horror:

After Yang Shenjin and his brothers rose to power and wealth, they often felt restless. Every morning they worshipped the Buddha image and silently prayed to be blessed. One day, three piles of dirt appeared on the bed in front of the image, and they looked like burial mounds. Shenjin found this sight repulsive. He also thought it was a trick, and he ordered the dirt to be swept away. The next morning, the dirt piles appeared the same way as they had before. Shortly afterwards, disaster struck.

楊慎矜兄弟富貴, 常不自安. 每詰朝禮佛像, 默祈冥衛. 或一日, 像前土榻上聚塵三堆, 如塚狀, 慎矜惡之, 且慮兒戲, 命掃去. 一夕如初, 尋而禍作.²⁵⁷

What is clearly missing in this story is the existence of a “monster” that Carroll expects in his theory of horror tales. Instead of focusing on a monster and its ravages, the story is centered on the construction of a generally eerie feeling that surrounds strange incidents. The fact that the three dirt piles appear at the same place twice in

²⁵⁷ *Youyang zazu*, 4. 204, 50

front of the worship site is certainly alarming, but it turns out that these incidents are only the prelude to the unspecified disaster that is to befall the Yang family. But unlike many Buddhist miracle tales in *zhiguai* collection which vividly detail one's wicked behavior and the gruesome consequences, this narrative reveals no information as to the nature of or the reason behind the disaster. One can only assume based on the limited knowledge offered by the text that the Yang brothers' misfortune has little to do with the law of causality because no comment or observation has been made throughout the narrative to indicate any wrongdoing on their part. The lack of direct causal relationship between the strange incidents and the disaster, however, does not dismiss the close connection between them.

These incidents are not Carroll's monsters; rather they are signs of something vague yet powerful—an unforgiving fate that is under the control of a mysterious cosmic force. Throughout the story, the force is not embodied, yet its presence is strongly implied. The force cannot be explained by natural laws, yet its mysterious way of working manifests itself through the connection between the incidents and the central characters' destinies. One may feel the force but cannot adequately conceptualize it; one may describe it but do not understand it; one may experience it, but cannot control it. The fear of this unknown force is at the center of this horror story. The horror goes beyond what monsters embody, and Carroll's view of monsters turns out to be too limited in explaining the mechanism of such horror tales.

What is at work here is not a concrete monster but rather a monstrous force. This force does not necessarily involve concrete entities or, monsters *per se*. Often, the force is not incarnated into a fully or clearly defined object; it can remain formless,

shapeless, undefined, and unseen yet omnipresent. In such cases, supernatural events occur frequently, but the source of horror is absent. But this absence does not necessarily mean that materialized objects are not involved in the events; it only means that the objects in the stories are not given away as the source of the art-horror.

In the story of Yang Shenjin, for example, there is not a single object that is threatening or horrifying. However, the overall display of the mysterious events gives it an eerie and ominous atmosphere which elicits unease and dread. Although the protagonists' death cannot be rationally related to the strange incidents that happened to them previously, the story suggests an undeniable causal relationship between them. Thus, these strange incidents can be taken as inauspicious portents that predict the misfortune ahead of the protagonists. This unexplained link between them is unjustified, yet it reveals an arbitrary fate at the mercy of a mysterious, unreasonable cosmic force. In the end, the force has not been dispatched or dealt with, which indicates that this power is as vast and endless as one's imagination.

Throughout the story, the insignificance of human agency in the face of this large cosmic force is depicted. All the portents have now become a tease: something terrible is go to happen, but no human power can prevent it. The insignificance of humans in the larger scheme of a greater force is undeniably evident through the inevitability of one's fate. The idea that individual lives is at the mercy of this unknown and uncontrollable power calls into question the scope of human power and stimulates thought about the very limit of human knowledge.

For readers who are familiar with Tang history, this story must evoke special interest. Unlike many anomalous accounts which feature an unremarkable protagonist,

the protagonist in this story a prominent official whose life is well documented and can be easily traced through historical records. The brief biography of Yang Shenjin can be found in *The New Tang History* 新唐書. He was a great-grandson of Yan Jian 楊暕, the Prince of Qi and the son of the Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty 隋炀帝 (569-618).

Yang Shenjin's father Yang Chongli 楊崇禮 held the position of Minister of Trade 太府卿 under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty 唐玄宗 (685-762) and was widely known for his honesty and competence.²⁵⁸ Emperor Xuanzong later appointed all of Yang Chongli's three sons, Shenjin and his two brothers Shenyu 慎餘 and Shenming 慎名, to official positions. As a young official, Yang Shenjin was considered reliable, resourceful, and loyal to his friends. His talent was highly regarded by the Emperor, and he began to rise in political importance.²⁵⁹ Yang Shenjin was later involved in the political power struggle with the Emperor's chancellor Li Linfu 李林甫 (d. 752) who accused Yang of sorcery and plotting to overthrow the Tang and reestablishing the Sui. As a result, Yang Shenjin and his two brothers were all forced to commit suicide.²⁶⁰

It is worth noting that cosmic horror tales in *Youyang zazu* tend to involve major historical figures that were influential during Duan Chengshi's own time. This tendency is not random and it manifests itself throughout Duan's work. As Reed argues, in *Youyang zazu* "there is less of an attempt to appear 'historical' than those earlier works; this is not really an informal historical chronicle of ancient events and people that the

²⁵⁸ See *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, vol. 105, *liezhuan* 列傳 55.

²⁵⁹ See *The New Tang History* 新唐書, vol.134, *Liezhuan* 列傳 59 and *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, vol. 105, *liezhuan* 列傳 55

²⁶⁰ See *The New Tang History* 新唐書, vol.134, *Liezhuan* 列傳 59. Yang Shenjin is a recurrent character in *zhiguai* collection of Tang. *Xuashi zhi* 宣室志, for example, records the tale of Yang Shenjin's encounter with a *Ye Cha* 夜叉 (a fearful monster). This tale was later included into *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, vol.143.

author deemed important or that he wanted to preserve for posterity (although some parts of it do fulfill this role). Rather, Duan's collection reveals a greater interest in the contemporary."²⁶¹ As such, prominent contemporary figures often populate the collection and Yang Shenjin is certainly not the only well-known name in the tales of cosmic horror. Another tale in "Zhi Nuogao" 支諾皋 (Supplements to Nuogao) involves an even more prominent historical figure:

Three strange things that happened to chancellor Wang Ya 王涯 of Yongning 永甯. The rice washer Su Run 蘇潤 used to work as a cook in the Wang's household. I did not know about this until I went to Jingzhou 荊州. I then asked him about the inauspicious omens surrounding the Wang family. He said that there was a well to the south of the residence. Every night people could hear the sound of welling up and gushing out. In the morning, when people inspected it, they sometimes found a bronze washbasin in it. Sometimes they found a silver iron. The water then became stale and undrinkable. Also, in Minister Wang's inner rooms, there was a meditation chair made of mulberry wood and strung with silken cords. The workmanship was extremely fine and delicate, but it fell apart for no reason at all, and all the pieces were lying around in a heap. Wang thought this situation was repulsive, and he had the parts burned in the kitchen stove. Another event was when Wang's oldest son Menbo 孟博 arose one morning to find several drops of congealed blood on the floor of the hall. He followed the trail of blood all the way to the main door

²⁶¹ Reed, "Motivation and Meaning", 135.

where it ended. Mengbo quickly had someone scrape them off, and Minister Wang did not learn anything about the matter. But before several months had passed, disaster befell the family.²⁶²

永甯王相涯三怪, 浙米匠人蘇潤, 本是王家炊人, 至荊州方知, 因問王家咎征, 言宅南有一井, 每夜常沸湧有聲, 晝窺之, 或見銅 [一作叵] 廝羅, 或見銀熨斗者, 水腐不可飲. 又王相內齋有禪床, 柘材絲繩, 工極精巧, 無故解散. 各聚一處, 王甚惡之, 命焚于灶下. 又長子孟博晨興, 見堂地上有凝血數滴, 蹤至大門方絕, 孟博遽令鏟去, 王相初不知也, 未數月及難.²⁶³

This story is particular noteworthy because Duan deliberately includes himself in the narrative. Not only does he reveal his presence through direct participation; he also offers his opinions about how to interpret the tale. He first starts with an explicit suggestion that identifies the nature of the events he is about to relate as “strange” and “inauspicious”; he then claims that what he states is his personal testimony based on his conversation with a first-hand witness. By providing the authorial point of view and the evidence of his account, Duan immediately gives the reader his impression of the events while motivating him to find out for himself whether the narrator’s comments are trustworthy.

Although none of the three incidents seems normal at first glance, they all can be somehow explained rationally as the result of human influence. The basin and the iron in the well were probably placed there in advance by someone who had accesses to the well. The blood trail and the shattered chair could be the result of careful planning by someone

²⁶² I consulted Carrie Reed’s translation. Some changes were made to better reflect the original text. See *Chinese Chronicles*, 169-170

²⁶³ *Youyang zazu*, *xu ji* 3.61, 223.

inside the household who held resentment towards the family—a mere trick to upset the minister. In this case, we can regard these incidents as the result of human intention and action. If the story ended here, no one would exclusively suspect the involvement of an alien force, despite the unusual nature of the incidents. But the last piece of information changes the perspective of the story completely. What used to be annoying tricks turns out to be the prelude of future disaster; what seemed to be human design is really a warning sign of imminent destiny. When the reader returns to the narrative and reexamines the course of events, what the narrator means by “inauspicious omens” becomes suddenly clear to the reader.

The benefits of deploying famous historical figures as main characters are evident. First, the presence of a historical person brings a sense of familiarity to accounts of unfamiliar experiences without burdening the narrative with additional information. Second, it is easier for the reader to verify the authenticity of the characters, which would add credibility, and a sense of historical accuracy to the otherwise incredible events. In this story, the protagonist Wang Ya was indeed the chancellor during the reign of Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (827-840). In 835, only two years after he became the Chancellor, he was involved in the plot to strike the dominance of eunuchs’ political power. When the plan was discovered, the emperor himself was taken hostage. Several ministers along with a number of officials were executed in relation to this failed attempt. This is what historians call the Sweet Dew Incident 甘露之變 (835).²⁶⁴ The whole clan of

²⁶⁴ The Sweet Dew Incident must be seen against the background of the rise of eunuchs during the late Tang. After the An Lushan rebellion, emperors relied heavily on eunuchs as a direct arm of imperial authority in their efforts to reestablish the central power of the throne. The power of eunuchs increased over time and by 820s and 830s eunuchs gradually came to exert influence over the imperial government even the process of imperial succession. On the Sweet Dew Incident, see *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.

Wang Ya's family was killed in the aftermath of this coup. The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* 資治通鑑 recorded this bloody event in this way:

[...] All officials were forced to watch them being cut in half from the waist at Dulu [an execution ground for political criminals]. All their relatives were executed no matter how distantly related they were or how young they were. Their wives and daughters who were alive were confiscated as state-owned slaves.

[...] 命百官臨視, 腰斬于獨柳之下, 梟其首于興安門外。親屬無問親疏皆死, 孩稚無遺, 妻女不死者沒為官婢。²⁶⁵

This tragedy is obviously what Duan referred as the “disaster”. Unlike many other anomalous accounts in which an event is virtually impossible to prove by external materials, the concluding claim of this story turns out to be historically accurate. The fact that the misfortune of the Wang family can be confirmed by an independent historical source is significant because in this case history proves the credibility of the narrator and adds an air of verisimilitude to the account, and dissipates any doubt that the reader may have about the nature of the events. Whether the story is based on hearsay or solely on Duan's imagination is no longer relevant at this point. The strong dose of actual and verifiable information leaves the reader not knowing where the real ends and the imaginary begins.

The story invokes a typically Lovecraftian horror: the combination of awe and terror at the mystery of the cosmos, which is juxtaposed with a sense of hopelessness and

3, Part 1: *Sui and Tang*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 654–59.

²⁶⁵ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1967), *juan* 245.

helplessness. In this case, both the chancellor and his son noticed the unusual nature of some incidents and took certain measures afterwards in response to such an emergency. But their efforts to resolve the problem fail miserably, because they do not prevent anything from happening. It becomes very clear to the reader that what they did does not matter at all and what ought to happen actually did happen in a way that is both unjustifiable and unstoppable. The signs are merely observed; man can do nothing to bring about to avert the events that they fear. There is no escape from the working of a mysterious force that is beyond human comprehension and to which humans must submit.

One might argue that since the people involved in the strange incidents are often politicians who have obtained wealth and power, the omens and disasters can be seen as punishment for their moral transgressions during their rise to power. Even though the stories do not depict their sins, they must have done something wrong in the past that is widely known. Duan's readers can then make the connection between their moral breach outside the text and their misfortune within the text. From their perspective, these portents are not random. On the contrary, they are closely associated with the sins committed by the protagonists in the stories. Therefore, what happens to the Yang brothers and Wang Ya is not arbitrary, but heavenly retribution for their previous wrongdoing. In other words, these stories are not meant to depict the unpredictable nature of the unknown cosmic force but rather the underlying relationship between morality and fortune.

This argument, however, is problematic because it assumes two conditions that are not applicable to our stories under discussion. First, it assumes that the protagonists

involved in the story were all evil officials. Second, it assumes that they were infamous enough to be widely known by their contemporaries so that the reader of the story can make sense of their misfortune in the story based on their bad reputation in real life. Both conditions, as historical evidence shows, do not apply to Yang Shenjin and Wang Ya. As we have shown above, according to both *The Old Tang History* and *The New Tang History*, Yang Shenjin was widely acknowledged for his competence in government. *The Old Tang History* said that Yang and his brothers were “all diligent and honest, much like their father. But Shenjin was the most outstanding one among them” 勤恪清白有父風,而慎矜為其最. In terms of personal character, *The Old Tang History* commented that Yang Shenjin was determined, competent, strong-willed and loyal to his friends (沉毅有材幹, 任氣尚朋執). Although he was somewhat cowardly in dealing with Li Linfu, he was reluctant to follow Li’s order during political battles. His talent in managing finance was also criticized by later commentators because he provided financial support for the emperor’s extravagant life style.²⁶⁶ Judging from the records, Yang Shenji might not be morally perfect, but he also did not commit crimes that merited death for him and his brothers. In fact, both *The Old Tang History* and *The New Tang History* depicted him as a victim of Li Linfu’s political jealousy over the emperor’s favor. Thus, he was more a sympathetic character than a vicious public figure. As a politician, Wang Ya also had his transgressions. According to *The Old Tang History*, he clung to his power and did not distance himself from hypocrites and petty men during his appointment.²⁶⁷ But he was also among the people who plotted the annihilation of the eunuchs and his death was

²⁶⁶ *The New Tang History* 新唐書, juan 134, *Liezhuan* 列傳 59 and *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, juan 105, *liezhuan* 列傳 55.

²⁶⁷ *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, juan 169, *liezhuan* 列傳 115.

considered by his contemporaries an injustice (涯之死也, 人以為冤).²⁶⁸ The reaction of Wang Ya's contemporaries shows that despite Wang's previous wrongdoing, the bloody disaster that befell the entire Wang family was considered unwarranted. We have already learned from close analysis of the text that both stories fail to offer a sufficient explanation for the cause of the protagonist's misfortune. Now the historical records also does not provide enough evidence to support the claim that what Yang and Wang suffered was due to "heavenly retribution", since they did not seem to carry out any kind of wrongdoing that deserved such severe "punishment". The lack of rationale for the protagonists' disasters from both within and without the text suggests that these tales are not meant to be moral-oriented tales that emphasize the cause-and-effect relationship between one's moral and one's fortune.

This point may be further clarified by a comparison of two tales, both of which deal with thunder and its implications. The first tale is recorded in *juan* four of *Youyang zazu*.

When Xiao Huan (?-836)) first arrive at Suizhou, he had two banner poles made and donated them to a temple. He set up a ceremony to celebrate.

When the ceremony concluded, music was playing. Suddenly, loud thunder and violent lightning struck the sky and shattered the poles into dozens of pieces. The next year, during a thunderstorm, Huan died.

蕭浣初至遂州, 造二幡竿施于寺, 設齋慶之。齋畢作樂, 忽暴雷霹靂, 竿各成數十片。至來年, 當雷霹日, 浣死。²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ *Youyang zazu*, 4.206, 50, also see *Taiping guangji*, *juan* 394.

It is tempting to look at the thunder in the story as the will of heaven that punishes evil, especially considering the fact the thunder has a long history of being deemed as a celestial weapon against the wicked.²⁷⁰ But before we jump to the conclusion that this is a moral tale, we need to answer the following questions: What is the moral of the story? If this tale is meant to convey a moral message, why does the narrator not point out his misbehavior explicitly? One might argue that Xiao was probably a well-known evil public figure whose transgressions were evident for the contemporary reader of the story. In this case, since they were public knowledge the narrator might not feel the need to disclose his transgressions. But was Xiao Huan an infamous official whose sins were so apparent to the contemporary reader that Duan did not need to mention them? Although it is almost impossible to assess whether an actual Tang reader knew of Xiao or what kind of impression he had of him, judging from few historical records left about him, Xiao was not a particularly influential public figure. All we know about him is that he was once a vice minister of Justice (刑部侍郎) and was later demoted to be the chief officer of Suizhou (遂州刺史) because Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-850), the head of the Li Faction (李党) considered him a member of the Niu Faction (牛党).²⁷¹ He was also a very close friend with the famous Tang poet Li Shangyin 李商隐 (813–858) who wrote a poem in honor of him after Xiao's death. The facts that there were so few records about Xiao and that none of them discussed him as an evil person or a corrupt official suggest that Xiao was not an infamous public figure with a sinful record. These facts now bring us back to our questions about the lack of reason behind Xiao's death and the moral of the story.

²⁷⁰ See Charles E. Hammond, "The Interpretation of Thunder," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53.2, 487-503.

²⁷¹ *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, juan 17, benji 本紀 17.

The lack of moral reasoning in Xiao's case becomes more apparent when compared to another Tang dynasty *zhiguai* story that also involves thunder and a political figure. Liu Zongyuan's *Longcheng lu* 龍城錄 reported the following story:

In Huizhou, a prostitute was struck dead in the marketplace, and on her side was a line of inscription in red ink: "Li Linfu manipulated political power with malevolence, so the Lord ordered transcendent to smite him altogether three times." The woman was suspected to be Li Linfu's reincarnation. This is truly mysterious and frightening. [This happened] in the sixth month of the first year of Yuanhe period 元和 (806).

惠州一娼女震厄死于市衢, 脅下有朱字雲: "李林甫以毒虐弄正權帝命列仙舉三震之." 疑此女子偃月公後身耶. 譎而可懼. 元和元年六月也.²⁷²

Unlike the story of Xiao Huan, which offers no explanation for his misfortune, this story provides a clear explanation for the seemingly accidental death of the victim. The writing on the victim's body not only serves to identify the former incarnation of the victim but also point out the sins he committed. As the chancellor of Emperor Xuanzong, Li Linfu was considered a manipulative and corrupt official who rose to power by flattering the emperor and suppressing dissenting political views.²⁷³ According to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, Li's contemporaries described him as "having honey in the mouth and a sword in

²⁷² Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, "Li Linfu yi du nue nung zheng qua" 李吉甫以毒虐弄正權, in *Hedong xiansheng Longcheng* 河東先生龍城錄, *Baidu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成, 8th series, vol. 1. Although Liu Zongyuan recorded the story of Li Linfu, his view on Heaven is ambivalent. According to H. G. Lamond, Liu Zongyuan in his "tian wen" 天問 speaks of Heaven's irrationality and suggests its maliciousness.

²⁷³ *The Old Tang History* 舊唐書, *juan* 106, *liezhuan* 列傳 56.

the belly” (口有蜜, 腹有劍).²⁷⁴ The protagonist’s evil reputation and the explicit condemnation exhibited on the victim’s body make the story a moral tale with a message to convey: Heaven punishes human transgressions by smiting people with thunder. This message is clearly missing in the story of Xiao Huan where he was a generous patron of the temple who was suddenly struck dead by thunder without any evidence of guilt. The comparison of the two tales shows that their difference lies mostly on the explicit explanation (or the lack of) provided for the thunder strike. While the tale of Li Linfu deliberately connects the thunder strike with the victim’s previous incarnation and his sins, the tale of Xiao Huan only describes the incident with a sense of uneasiness but without offering any interpretation. With its explicit articulation of didactic message, the tale of Li Linfu is an example of tales of karma—a category closely associated with, but distinctive from tales of comic horror.²⁷⁵ In the tale of Xiao Huan, the lack of rationale for the protagonist’s suffering not only amounts to an unjustified misfortune for him but also suggests the incomprehensible and irrational nature of the cosmic force behind such misfortune.

The incomprehensibility of this force is also underscored in the story of Yang Shenjin and Wang Ya by the lack of apparent causal connection between the strange circumstances and impending disasters. Although strange incidents precede the disasters, they are indications of what is to happen rather than the direct cause of future calamity. In other words, the strange incidents are simply warning messages from a malevolent cosmic force that is elusive yet omnipresent. One should also point out that in both cases, the signs are impossible to fully understand at the time and it is only after the fact that

²⁷⁴ *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, *juan* 215

²⁷⁵ We will return to this point later in this chapter.

they appear highly significant. The difficulty in interpreting these signs comes from the fact that they carry conflicting messages that often resemble each other. Those that are portents of death to some people are not much different from omens of prosperity for others. In *Youyang zazu*, Duan increases confusion by placing auspicious omens and inauspicious ones side by side without further explanations as to the differences between them. In *juan* four, the section which features “Huo zhao” 禍兆 (Inauspicious Portents) is immediately preceded by the section entitled “Xi zhao” 喜兆 (Auspicious Portents) in which similar signs appear with a dramatically different outcome. The following two tales are included in the “Xi zhao” section:

The scholar at the Academy of Scholarly Worthies Zhang Xifu once said that one month before Li Kuai was promoted to the position of chancellor, a toad as big as a bed appeared in the bedroom when the sun was setting and soon disappeared. He also said that Li Kuai was first appointed in Xinzhou. When he was about to be promoted to Chancellor, the water level in the well suddenly rose more than one *chi* (a Chinese measurement of length).

集賢張希復學士嘗言：李揆相公將拜相前一月，日將夕，有蝦蟆大如床，見於寢堂中，俄失所在。又言：初授新州，將拜相，井忽漲水，深尺余。²⁷⁶

The residence of Zheng Yin was located at the south gate of the Zhaoguo ward. One day there was suddenly something that was throwing rubble at the residence. The disturbance did not stop for five or six days. Zheng Yin then moved to his residence at the west gate of An Ren ward to avoid it,

²⁷⁶ *Youyang zazu*, 4.201, 49.

but the rubble-throwing followed. After a long time, he moved back to the Zhaoguo ward. Zheng Yin devoted himself to Buddhism in a meditation room and when he moved back, he immediately walked towards the meditation room. He saw countless spider webs all over the room, hanging one or two *chi* above the ground. That evening the rubble throwing stopped. The next morning, Zheng Yin was promoted to Chancellor.

鄭綱相公宅, 在昭國坊南門. 忽有物投瓦礫, 五六夜不絕. 乃移于安仁西門宅避之, 瓦礫又隨而至, 經久複歸招國. 鄭公歸心釋門禪室方丈. 及歸, 將入丈室, 蟬子滿室懸絲, 去地一二尺, 不知其數. 其夕瓦礫亦絕. 翌日拜相.²⁷⁷

In both narratives, strange incidents occurred as signs of forthcoming events. Yet the signs are so obscure that it is almost impossible to determine whether they are warnings of approaching calamity or omens of prosperity. In fact, the giant toad, the rising water in the well, the restless rubble and the hanging spider webs in “Xi zhao” are so similar to those portents of ill fate in the following section of “Huo zhao” that one can only tell the difference after the realization of their prediction.

The similarity between good and ill fortune may be the result of the lack of specification in the system of omens intended by Duan. By juxtaposing similar signs with potentially conflicting information, Duan reinforces the impression that these strange signs and the operative force behind them are unpredictable in nature and incomprehensible to human minds.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 4. 202, 49; also see *Taiping guanji*, juan 137.

In his study of fiction, Tzvetan Todorov proposed two types of narrative interest: curiosity about the information gap in the past in which case the reader proceeds “from effect to cause” and suspense about what will happen in the future when the reader “proceeds from cause to effect.”²⁷⁸ Although Todorov’s analysis deals primarily with detective fiction, it is applicable to the narrative structure of tales of cosmic force. The previous stories all appeal to the reader through the same pattern: they first invoke intense suspense in the reader through anticipation of the outcome of the strange events, since the reader must alternate between states of hope and fear regarding a positive or negative result; once the reader reaches the final point of the narrative and realizes the gap of information regarding the process and the connection of the events, he must ask how this outcome is reached and why. In the case of cosmic horror, the suspense is intensified by the negative nature of the events revealed; only at the end of narrative does the reader discover that the answers to questions of how and why are unattainable. The mystery engendered by such unanswered questions is precisely what makes tales of cosmic horror so powerful in their depiction of the strange.

Robert Campany, in his influential study of Chinese *zhiguai*, categorizes anomalies that deal with mysterious force or agent behind certain phenomena as anomalies of causation. He explains that in this type of accounts, “the anomaly usually lies both in the mysterious nature of the causal agent or process (how did things get from point X to point Y) and in the surprisingly meaningful and ‘legible’ nature of the outcome (how comes it that a message is so clearly and forceful signified by this

²⁷⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*. trans. Richard Howard, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 47.

event?).”²⁷⁹ In other words, the focus is rather on the lack of available information about the working mechanism and the operative principle of the mysterious force. In this regard, tales of cosmic horror differ greatly with tales that promote a certain religious worldview and serve a didactic purpose such as Buddhist miracle tales. In his survey of early Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, Donald E. Gjertson divides these tales into three categories. The first category includes “accounts of divine intervention in times of need”; the second category demonstrates the efficacy of Buddhist cause, “often through descriptions of the inexorable workings of the law of karmic retribution”; the third category tells of “miracles prodigies associated with famous monks or laymen, serving to demonstrate their high spiritual attainments.”²⁸⁰ In the light of this classification, one should distinguish tales of cosmic horror from the second type of Buddhist miracle tales—tales of karma.²⁸¹ Tales of karma are similar to tales of cosmic horror in many aspects: they both deal with anomalous events and the “mysterious” cosmic force behind the phenomena; they usually are written in what Campany describes as “non-metrical or loosely metrical but non-parallel, non-rhyming, classical prose”; and they often narrate the strange incidents in a normal, chronological order that implies a certain connection between them; they are also framed as factual accounts of what actually happened.²⁸²

Despite the similarity they share in terms of subject matter, style of language and

²⁷⁹ Campany. *Strange Writing*, 256.

²⁸⁰ Gjertson, “The Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tale”, 296.

²⁸¹ Although the concept of karma is religious in nature, the idea that one’s deeds have corresponding consequences does not lack support from native Chinese philosophy and belief. This idea can be traced back to both Confucian classics such as the *Book of Rites* 礼記 and Daoist texts such as *Dao de jing* 道德经 and *Bao pu zi* 抱朴子. For reference to this concept in early Chinese texts, see Lien-sheng Yang, “The Concept of *Pao* as a Basis for Social Relations in China,” ed. Fairbank, J.K., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 291-309.

²⁸² Campany, *Strange Writing*, 25. Gjertson discusses in greater detail the similarities between what he calls the “indigenous strange tale” and the Buddhist miracle tales. See “The Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tale”, 299.

narrative structure, the emphasis of tales of cosmic horror is entirely different from that of tales of karma.

Integral to tales of cosmic horror is the inexplicability of strange occurrences and the incomprehensibility of the cosmic force behind these incidents. In cosmic horror tales, there is no explanation as to the cause of strange incidents and human characters seem to suffer under the influence of an alien and mysterious force whose operation is completely unwarranted. Whatever moral meaning or purpose may or may not be invested in the course of the events is not obvious to the protagonists or the reader and the emphasis lies rather on the mysteriousness and ambiguity surrounding the events. Tales of karma, however, focus on providing evidence or witness to one single truth—the ineluctability of the law of karma. In other words, tales of karma are designed around a didactic purpose of promoting one of the fundamental Buddhist teachings and practices. Unlike tales of cosmic force, tales of karma carry a didactic message and this message is often conveyed through a dynamic schema where virtue is rewarded and vice is punished and reinforced through explicitly articulated authorial comments.

In tales of cosmic horror, the protagonists have absolutely no control over their fates and no power to effect any change. They are the victims and their efforts are utterly insignificant in comparison to the vast and powerful cosmic force. In tales of karma, the human characters always bring harm to themselves. They are fully responsible for their actions, and as a result, are destined to certain consequences. In his study of the Chinese concept of karmic retribution, Karl S.Y. Kao remarks that karmic retribution “involves mainly only one party functioning both as the agent and the patient: the original action by the agent being the ‘cause’ of an ‘effect’ that befalls, overtake the same person, thereby

turning him/her to a patient who suffers a corresponding consequence.”²⁸³ In other words, the law of karma is not the cause of one’s suffering. It is rather one’s own evil actions that lead to an inevitable punishment. In *Youyang zazu*, only a few tales explicitly describe the workings of karmic retribution. One tale in the section of “Zhi Nuogao” 支諾皋 (Supplements to Nuogao) reads as follows:

In Yucheng county of Guozhou prefecture, there is a blackfish valley. During the Zhenyuan period (785-805), a commoner named Wang Yong was cutting wood and burning charcoal in the valley. A few steps away there was a pond where two black fish often swam on the surface of water, each measuring more than a *chi* in length. Yong was hungry and exhausted because of all of the work, so he ate one of the fish. His younger brother said in alarm, “This fish is probably a supernatural creature of the valley. Why did you kill it?” After a little while, his wife brought his food to the field. Yong was still swinging his ax. After a while, when he finally turned around, his wife noticed that he somehow looked different. She called out his younger brother to take a look at him. Yong suddenly stripped off his clothes, leaping and howling. He now turned into a tiger and went straight to the mountain. From time to time, he would kill roe deer and throw them into the courtyard of his residence at night. This went on for two years. One day at sunset, somebody knocked on the door and revealed himself: “I am Wang Yong.” His brother replied, “My older brother has turned into a tiger for three years

²⁸³ Karl S.Y. Kao “Bao and Baoying: Narrative Causality and External Motivations in Chinese Fiction,” in *Chinese Literature: Essay, Articles, Reviews* 11 (1989): 130.

now, what ghost is falsely assuming my brother's name?" The person spoke again, "I killed a black fish years ago and was banished as a tiger in the underworld. Recently because I killed a man, the officials flogged me one hundred times. Today I was released, and the marks of the rod still cover my body. Once you see me, you won't have any doubt." The younger brother was overjoyed and immediately opened the door. He saw a person whose head was still that of a tiger. He was frightened to death. The whole family was startled. They shouted and ran off. The tiger was finally killed by the villagers. When they examined his body, they found black spots on it. They were convinced that it was Wang Yong whose head had not changed back. In the Yuanhe period (806-820) the hermit Zhao Qiyue once went into the valley and heard the villagers talk of the incident.²⁸⁴

號州玉城縣黑魚谷，貞元中，百姓王用業炭于谷中。中有水，方數步，常見二黑魚，長尺余，游于水上。用伐木饑困，遂食一魚。其弟驚曰：“此魚或谷中靈物，兄奈何殺此？”有頃，其妻餉之。用運斤不已，久乃轉面。妻覺狀貌有異，呼其弟視之。忽褫衣號躍，變為虎焉，徑入山。時時殺麋鹿，夜擲庭中。如此二年。一日日昏，叩門自名曰：“我用也。”弟應曰：“我兄變為虎三年矣，何鬼假吾兄姓名？”又曰：“我往年殺黑魚，冥謫為虎。比因殺人，冥官笞余一百。今免放，杖傷遍體。汝第視予無疑也。”弟喜，遽開門，見一人，頭猶是虎，因怖死。舉家叫呼奔避，竟為村人格殺之。驗其

²⁸⁴ I consulted Carrie Reed's translation. Some changes were made to better reflect the original text. See *Chinese Chronicles*, 143.

身有黑子, 信王用也, 但首未變. 元和中, 處士趙齊約嘗至谷中, 見村人
說.²⁸⁵

In this story, the protagonist Wang Yong does not suffer from a mysterious force whose operating principles are unknown to the human mind; rather, it is evident through the narrative that Wang Yong himself is the cause of his own misfortune. His reckless behavior in the valley is the direct and only reason of his turning into a tiger, and the law of karma only provides a causal connection between the two separate incidents. In other words, the law of karma may supply an operative framework that accounts for Wang's misfortune, but it does not directly produce these negative results. Unlike protagonists in tales of cosmic horror who suffer without any apparent fault from their part, Wang Yong is entirely accountable for the consequences of his killing.

It should be noted that Wang Yong's transformation is precisely what Karl Kao refers as *xianshi bao* 現世報 (retribution realized in the current life), as opposed to the original scheme of *laishi bao* 來世報 (retribution in a subsequent life).²⁸⁶ The *xianshi bao* aspect of karmic retribution is one of the important features that indigenous Chinese beliefs had contributed to the flourishing of Buddhism in China. While the Buddhist doctrine of karma claims that karma generated through one's deeds determines the nature of his rebirth in the next life within the five different realms: denizen of hell, hungry ghosts, beasts, humans and deities; indigenous Chinese beliefs suggest that retribution may take place in one's current life.²⁸⁷ Thus, in the framework of *xianshi bao*, the effects

²⁸⁵ *Youyang zazu*, *xuji* 2.40, 214.

²⁸⁶ Karl Kao, "Bao and Baoying", 129.

²⁸⁷ See Yuet-keung Lo, "Destiny and Retribution in Early Medieval China," *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 319-342.

of actions are not manifested sometime in the distant future, either in the next life or in more temporally remote lives, but rather during the relatively short span of present life. According to Karl Kao, such immediacy of the temporal relation found between two events makes the law of karma possible to validate.²⁸⁸ Hui Yuan 慧远 (334-416) who was the leader of the Buddhist circle in his time already tried to integrate the indigenous Chinese beliefs in retribution with the Buddhist doctrine of karma. In his *San bao lun* 三報論 (*On the Three Types of Retribution*), Hui Yuan specifies three types of karmic retribution: “The sutra says that karma has three kinds of response: first, in the present life; second, in the next life; and in the third, in later lives. In the first, good and bad deeds originate in this present life and are rewarded in this life. In the second, the deeds are rewarded in the next life, while in the third, the deeds are rewarded in the 2nd, 3rd, 100th or 1000th life afterwards...”²⁸⁹ Hui Yuan’s theory explains that karmic retribution may occur in one’s current state of existence, but it is not limited to one single cycle of birth and death.

In the tale of Wang Yong, the moral is obvious: all actions have consequences that will inevitably affect the agent of the action at some time. According to the law of karma, like causes produce like effects; since what Wang Yong did is wrong, its consequence can only be negative. Such a didactic message is first implied by Wang’s transformation into a tiger immediately after he eats the black fish and is confirmed through the explicit personal testimony of Wang Yong himself and is ultimately reinforced by the chilling fact that he dies at the hand of his fellow villagers after hurting

²⁸⁸ Karl Kao argues that because of this, *Xianshi bao* remains to be a popular subject in classical tales as well as vernacular stories of Ming and Qing period. See “*Bao* and *Baoying*,” 129.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1973), 110-111.

his own family for which he deeply cares. It becomes gradually clear that from the moment of the killing, Wang Yong's future is already determined, not by the mysterious fate, but by his action of free will. The law of karma always manifests itself and there is no escape from one's own wrong-doing. The obvious concern for demonstrating the efficacy of the Buddhist doctrine of karma is essential for identifying tales of karma and distinguishing them from tales of cosmic horror.

Unlike tales of cosmic horror that never offer a clear explanation for observed events, in tales of karma, an explicit articulation of the cause of one's misfortune is often necessary in conveying the didactic message. In the following tales, the protagonist's death is fully explained in the narrative and leaves no room for speculation:

At the beginning of the Yuanhe period (806-820) there was a rascal named Li Hezi from the eastern section of Chang'an. His father was called Nuyan. Hezi was cruel; he often stole dogs and cats and ate them. His evil actions became a great concern for the neighborhood. Once he was standing on a thoroughfare with a falcon on his arm when he saw two men dressed in purple. They shouted at him: "Aren't you Li Hezi, the son of Li Nuyan?" Hezi simply greeted them with his hands clasped. They said: "We have something to discuss, shall we go to an open space to talk?" They walked a few steps and stopped outside of the crowd and said that the underworld was haunting him and he should immediately go with them. Hezi at first did not accept this news and said, "You are humans, why are you fooling me?" They answered, "We are indeed ghosts." One of them searched his chest and took out a document; the ink on the seal was still wet. Hezi saw

that his name was clearly visible and the warrant was issued because four hundred and sixty dogs and cats were suing him. Hezi was alarmed and let go his falcon. He beseeched the two, saying, “If it is my time to die, please stay a little longer for me; I should prepare a little wine for you.” The ghosts initially refused but eventually accepted the offer upon Li’s insistence. At first, they were going to a pilaw shop, but the ghosts covered their noses and would not go forward. He then invited them to the Du wine shop. He bowed politely and talked to himself. Others thought he was crazy. He asked for nine bowls of wine, and he drank three bowls and left six bowls placed in front of the seat to his west. He begged the ghosts to do him a favor and excused him. The two ghosts looked at each other and said, “Since we have received your favor, we have to think of something for you.” They then rose, saying, “Please wait a moment. We will be back momentarily.” Before he had even moved a muscle, they returned and said “If you provide four-hundred thousand cash, we will grant you three more years of life.” Hezi agreed and set noon the next day as the deadline. He paid for his wine and returned the wine that the ghost had not drunk. When he tasted it, it was like water that was cold enough to freeze his teeth. Hezi hurried home, sold his clothes and prepared the paper money. At the appointed time, he poured a libation and burned the money. With his own eyes, he saw the two ghosts lift up the money and leave. Hezi died three days later. What the ghosts meant by three years turned out to be three days in the human world.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ I consulted Carrie Reed’s translation. Some changes were made to better reflect the original text. See

元和初,上都東市惡少李和子,父努眼。和子性忍,常攘狗及貓食之,為坊市之患。嘗臂鷄立于衢,見二人紫衣,呼曰:“公非李努眼子名和子乎?”和子即遽只揖。又曰:“有故,可隙處言也。因行數步,止于人外,言冥司追公,可即去。和子初不受,曰“人也,何給言。”又曰:“我即鬼。”因探懷中,出一牒,印窠猶濕。見其姓名分明,為貓犬四百六十頭論訴事。和子驚懼,乃棄鷄子拜祈之,且曰:“我分死,爾必為我暫留,當具少酒。”鬼固辭不獲已。初,將入饌饌肆,鬼掩鼻不肯前。乃延于旗亭杜家。揖讓獨言,人以為狂也。遂索酒九盃,自飲三盃,六盃虛設于西座,且求其為方便以免。二鬼相顧,我等既受一醉之恩,須為作計。因起曰:“姑遲我數刻當返。”未移時至,曰:“君辦錢四十萬,為君假三年命也。”和子諾許,以翌日及午為期。因酬酒值,且返其酒,嘗之味如水矣,冷複冰齒。和子遽歸,貨衣具鑿楮,如期備酌焚之,自見二鬼挈其錢而去。及三日,和子卒。鬼言三年,蓋人間三日也。²⁹¹

The protagonist Li Hezi is not a sympathetic character. His reputation truly precedes him: he was already identified as a “rascal” even before his vices were revealed. He was petty and cruel. He had been killing stolen animals for his appetite, and no one in the neighborhood could restrain him. His crime went unpunished for quite some time until one day two “men” dressed in purple approached him. At this point, the reader should suspect something unusual but has to wait for more information to verify his suspicion. Even when the two “men” identified themselves and asked Li Hezi to go with them, the

Chinese Chronicles, 115.

²⁹¹ *Youyang zazu, xuji* 1.8, 202.

reason for his arrest was still concealed. Only through Li Hezi's own eyes is the reader able to confirm that his arrest was the result of his own crime. The fact that the ghost officers were sent here because of a lawsuit brought by the dogs and cats killed by Li Hezi shows not only the existence of the nether world but also some of its principles of operation. In the nether world, the lives of cats and dogs are highly regarded and equally valued; evil actions committed in human world do not go unnoticed or without consequences. Thus Li Hezi's encounter with the ghost officers is not a coincidence; it is rather an inevitable result of his previous behavior.²⁹² The story could end right here with a concluding sentence that states that Li Hezi was taken into custody and fell dead on the ground since the cause of his "misfortune" is already revealed, and the course of the event is fully in accordance with the law of karma. The clear articulation of the cause-effect linkage is a characteristic feature that this tale shares with the tale of Wang Yong and other tales of karma.

Based on the comparison above, it should also be noted that tales of karma arouse a different kind of fear than tales of cosmic horror. In the former, we are afraid of performing certain actions in fear of the consequences or punishment that might follow. In the latter, we are confronted by what is essentially unknown or even unknowable. Fear

²⁹² Many scholars have observed that Buddhism incorporated the indigenous Chinese belief about life and death after being introduced to China. In this process, the doctrine of karma went through substantial modification. The operation of karmic retribution, once a purely automatic process that determined the nature of the individual's subsequent rebirth in Indian Buddhism, now became a purgatorial ordeal mediated by the underworld bureaucracy in Chinese Buddhism. See for example Anna Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funerary Texts Found in Tomb," in *Dōkyō to shōkyō bunka* 道教と宗教文化 (Taoism and Religious Culture), ed. Akizuki Kan'ei 秋月観映 (Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppan, 1987), 678-714; Richard Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Paul R. Katz, *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture* (NY: Routledge, 2009); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). Both the tale of Wang Yong and the tale of Li Hezi suggest that medieval Chinese Buddhist underworld remains a bureaucratic realm where words and deeds of the living are under judicial surveillance and subject to legalistic punishment.

of the consequences, according to the law of karma, is rooted in ethical considerations. It is concerned with one's moral responsibility as much as with his causal responsibility.²⁹³ According to H. D. Bhattacharyya, the law of karma is propelled by the idea that what you sow is what you reap, and all actions have "a double effect—one physical and invisible....the physical effect follows the law of instantaneous succession, but the moral effect may remain in abeyance and fructify at a much later time when maturing conditions are present. Again, while the physical effect is mainly, if not wholly produced on others, the moral effect comes to rest upon the head of the doer himself."²⁹⁴ In other words, fear of the consequence puts a psychological restraint on immoral behavior. Tales of cosmic horror, however, are not concerned in the least with the moral quality of one's behavior. In his most influential essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", the master of cosmic horror, H.P. Lovecraft, links literature of cosmic fear with the intrinsic nature of mankind: "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."²⁹⁵ For him, literature of cosmic fear must be distinguished from literature of "mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome", because the former is born out of the fear of an unknown world "of peril and evil possibilities" and "the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity."²⁹⁶ It deals with the terrible and cryptic power of the extraterrestrial "and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence where of we know nothing and wherein we have no part."²⁹⁷ While

²⁹³ For a discussion about the moral concerns of the law of karma, see Bruce R. Reighenbach, "The Law of Karma and the Principle of Causation," *Philosophy East and West*, 38. 4 (Oct., 1988): 399-410.

²⁹⁴ H. D. Bhattacharyya, "The Doctrine of Karma," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (Amalner) 3 (1927): 239

²⁹⁵ Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 12.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

tales of karma ignite the fear of consequence, tales of cosmic horror provoke in the reader a combination of profound uneasiness and awe.

Although tales of karma are only occasional in *Youyang zazu*, the influence of Buddhism on this work is undeniably evident: four *juan* out of thirty are devoted exclusively to Buddhism related topics including Buddhist script, lore, temples and pagodas and many entries in other *juan* can be traced to Buddhist scriptures. In his study “Duan Chengshi’s *Youyang zazu* and Buddhism” 段成式《酉陽雜俎》與佛教, Xia Guangxing identifies two kinds of influence of Buddhism on *Youyang zazu*: the first type is the adaptation of Buddhist doctrines to the Chinese context, and the second is the direct borrowing of Buddhist content, such as descriptions of foreign lands, exotic creatures, unusual objects, mythical creatures, demons as well as plots of Buddhist tales. According to his observation, the second type of influence is overwhelmingly evident in *Youyang zazu*.²⁹⁸ But Duan’s interest in Buddhism does not necessarily translate into a pro-Buddhism agenda. As we have discussed in the overview chapter, most tales in *Youyang zazu* that involve Buddhist content focus rather on the strange aspects of the things, either sacred knowledge of Buddhism, the magical abilities of monks, or the miraculous power of The Diamond Sutra. As Carrie Reed points out, this orientation toward the strange becomes more evident if we compare Buddhist tales in *Youyang zazu* with tales in other Buddhist collections that intend to instill fear of punishment for evil deeds through description of all kinds of gruesome torture performed on the wicked to demonstrate the inevitability of karmic retribution.²⁹⁹ One such example is the Tang dynasty collection of

²⁹⁸ For a detailed study in the influence of Buddhism on *Youyang zazu*, see Xia Guangxing 夏廣興, “Duan Chengshi’s *Youyang zazu* and Buddhism,” 12-16.

²⁹⁹ Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 75.

Buddhist tales *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (*Record of Miraculous Retribution*) which often presents eyewitness accounts of tongue-ripping, eye-gouging, skinning and decapitation.³⁰⁰ It is also important to notice that in *Youyang zazu*, didactic stories are occasionally scattered among other strange tales instead of being grouped together.³⁰¹ In doing so, any didactic message the stories may carry is diluted by the overwhelming quantity of non-didactic strange tales whose emphasis is solely on objects or events that are rare, exotic, odd, wondrous, and extraordinary. Duan Chengshi fully takes advantage of his familiarity with Buddhism not to promote a certain religious agenda but to nurture his fascination with the strange and to enrich the detail and flavor of his tales.

From the perspective of representing the strange, the tale of Li Hezi, for example, is different from the tale of Wang Yong. The tale of Wang Yong concerns the demonstration of karmic retribution. In fact, the law of karma manifests itself twice during the relatively short narrative. It begins with the evil action of taking an animal's life, i.e., the "cause" and continues with Yong's transformation from a human into a tiger as the direct result, moves along with Yong's further evil action of killing a person as a tiger and finally ends with the corresponding effect of such evil, i.e., his death. Everything in the story serves a particular purpose: Wang Yong's reckless behavior in the beginning, his transformation into a tiger, his second time killing and finally his death all contribute to the demonstration of the link between one's actions and their results.

³⁰⁰ For scholar works that focused on the tradition of Chinese Buddhist miracle tale, see Donald E. Gjerston's dissertation, "A Study and Translation of the *Ming pao chi*: A T'ang Dynasty Collection of Buddhist Tales," (Stanford University, 1975) and his "The Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tale," 287-301.

³⁰¹ For example, "The Tale of Wang Yong" is found in *xuji*, *juan* 2; "the Tale of Li Hezi" is found in *xuji* *juan* 1; another tale in *xuji* *juan* 4 records the story about a monk being wrongly executed by the emperor of Wu 武帝. It turned out that the emperor was the reincarnation of an earthworm which the monk had accidentally killed in his previous life.

The fact that Wang Yong maintains human emotions after his transformation shows the severity of his punishment. One can only imagine the pain, the humiliation and the despair Wang felt while his human soul trapped in an animal body. Compared to this tale, the tale of Li Hezi contains many rich details and vivid description that seem less relevant to its didactic purpose. From the perspective of delivering a didactic message, Li Hezi's arrest warrant and his subsequent death should be sufficient in proving the law of karma. The rest of the plot about how he tries to negotiate with the ghost officers and use bribery to his advantage seems unnecessary if the only purpose of the tale is merely to offer a message. Although the bribery does not work to his favor as he expected, which proves the inescapable nature of karmic retribution, the tale focuses largely on creating a portrait of various characters, especially the unusual manners and behavior of the two ghost officers and the unfolding mystery that surrounds them.

The most noticeable characteristic of the ghost officers is their human likeness. Such a trait is, of course, not unique to this tale. According to Zeitlin's observation, the attribution of human-like behaviors to non-human objects, animals and ghosts is a common means of generating the strange—an anthropomorphism in which “things may retain their own form but are motivated by human ethics and desires; . . . [or] things take on human form, often so convincingly that they are mistaken for people until the denouement of the tale.”³⁰² In this tale, the ghosts apparently acquire human form and their physical disguise must be convincing because Li Hezi mistakes them for humans even after they reveal their identity. Their appearance is convincingly human-like, but the manner in which they conduct their duty underscores their resemblance to humans. The ghosts are at first reluctant to go into the pilaf shop—a place considered appropriate for

³⁰² Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 82.

the poor and lower class, but they did not voice their concerns directly; rather, they use body language to send the host a message. By covering their noses, the ghosts suggest that the place is filthy and inappropriate for treating officials from the underworld. Once Li Hezi changes the place to a more upscale wine shop, the ghost officers have no trouble sitting down and making further arrangements with him. It appears that both Li Hezi and the ghost officers know exactly how the process of bribery works. The fact that Li Hezi remains relatively calm and is able to think of bribery to delay his arrest shows that Li Hezi is not a stranger to the act. His behavior is not surprising because Li Hezi might have brought his way out of trouble before. It is ironic that Li Hezi never considers the payoff he should receive from killing these innocent animals because he seems to understand the principle of *bao* 報 (reciprocity) very well. In the wine shop, Li Hezi makes the first move by respectfully offering wine to the officials. It is only after the wine being offered that Li Hezi begs for mercy. The underlying message is clear: since I do something beneficial for you, you should return the favor. This idea of returning the favor runs deep in Chinese culture, and as Yang Lien-sheng argues, it functions as a basic mode for social interaction in China: “The Chinese believe that reciprocity of action between man and man, and indeed between men and supernatural beings, should be as certain as a cause and effect relationship, and, therefore, when a Chinese acts, he normally anticipates a response on return.”³⁰³ The ghosts seem to respond to this concept of the human world just as Li Hezi hoped, and they are not a bit surprised by Hezi’s request. The look they exchange with each other and their unrehearsed agreement to return the favor suggests that they must have some sort of mutual understanding with

³⁰³ Yang Lien-sheng, “The Concept of Pao as a Basis,” 291.

regard to this issue. After a short discussion, the ghosts return with a countering offer that states the term and the condition, for temporarily suspending his arrest. The wine alone turns out to be insufficient to meet the expectation of the ghost and what they request is a much greater amount of money for a three-year extension—an offer they know Li Hezi simply cannot refuse.³⁰⁴ They handle the request smoothly and tactfully as if this kind of agreement comes as naturally to them as such exchanges are to corrupted human bureaucrats. The attribution of human desires and preferences to disembodied souls does not increase the didactic value of the story. What it adds is rather an element of interest and unusualness that is quintessential to the experience of *qi* to an otherwise plain and dry didactic tale.

The unusual characteristics of the two ghost officers are also underscored by what happens after their negotiation with Li Hezi. When Li returns the wine, he finds that although the ghosts do not appear to drink the wine through physical contact, they take the “essence” of the drink without being noticed. Their impact on the wine is also evident through its low temperature, a quality often associated with the symbolic energy of *yin* that essentially constitutes a ghost.³⁰⁵ When Li Hezi finally gathers enough money to pay for the bribery, he has to burn it, so the ghosts can have it. According to Janet Lee Scott’s observation, the burning process is essential in the delivery of paper offering.: “the first feature to understand is that paper offering are burnt to ashes so they may go beyond the confines of the living world—to the gods, the ghosts, and the ancestors...burning changes

³⁰⁴ Four-hundred thousand units of money 四十萬錢 was indeed a great deal of money. If the money discussed refers to Kai Yuan Tung Bao 開元通寶 coins—the most commonly used coins in Tang dynasty—the weight of that much money is about 400 *jin* (one *jin* equals to about a catty). See Yu Liuliang, *Chinese Coins: Money in History and Society* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2004), 8-12,

³⁰⁵ For a discussion of the ghosts from the perspective of *yin* and *yang*, see Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, 16-53.

the nature of the offering, for in their original form they cannot go anywhere, burning accomplishes the vital transformation which sends the items to the ancestors, the gods, or the ghosts.”³⁰⁶ The fact that Li Hezi is able to “burn” the money is also intriguing, because scholars have argued that the first attempt at paper currency in China of which any record remains was in A.D. 806—the beginning of the Yuanhe period (806-820)—a date that matches the setting of the story well.³⁰⁷ In his reading of Aristotle and Shakespeare, J.V. Cunningham argues that making plausible of the irrational is essential in creating and maintaining the sense of wonder, a term he defines as “the natural effect of a marvelous story.”³⁰⁸ By weaving accurate historical details into supernatural events, Duan is able to create a sense of wonder that capitalizes on the contrast between the realistic and the supernatural.

The most curious detail in the story arrives at the end when the action of the story takes a surprising turn. Three days after Li Hezi makes the deal with the ghosts he dies. Li Hezi’s sudden death is accompanied by the shocking revelation about the difference in time between the human world and the underworld. Although unusual characteristics of the ghost officers are repeatedly alluded to throughout the narrative, nothing in the story suggests a vastly different view of time from the underworld. In fact, when Li Hezi sets up the deadline for the bribing money, the ghost officers arrive at exactly the right time to

³⁰⁶ Janet Lee Scott, *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: the Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Press, 2007), 20. For the use of paper in Chinese rites and religious ceremonies, see Dard Hunter, *Chinese Ceremonial Paper* (Chillicothe: The Mountain House Press, 1937).

³⁰⁷ The government of the time created bills of exchange called “flying money” 飛錢 to save the expense of copper or silver in coin-making. See Joseph Edkins, *Chinese Currency* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1980), 8. This view is also shared by Hosea Ballou Morse, Francis Lister Hawks Pott and A. T. Piry in *The Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908) and Andrew McFarland Davis, “Certain Old Chinese Notes,” *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 50. 11(1915): 245-286.

³⁰⁸ J.V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951), 68-69.

obtain their payoff. Only after the final revelation does the reader finally learn of the time difference between the human world and the underworld. Such a development in the plot successfully seizes the reader's attention by presenting unknown information that contradicts the reader's previous understanding. According to Cunningham, because of the startling nature of the surprise, wonder also manifests itself as "the result of a surprising and unexpected turn in events."³⁰⁹ In this story, the discovery of the new piece of information certainly motivates the reader to question the nature of the bribery that occurs between the ghost officers and Li Hezi. Apparently, the ghosts comprehend the time difference between the two worlds since they do not miss the pay day Li Hezi proposes. Mystery remains around their intention of tricking Li Hezi into believing the possibility of extending his life for three years. The questions remain of whether the plan intended to scam money from Li Hezi was premeditated or a spur-of-the-moment act initiated by Li Hezi's implication; also were the ghost officers truly corrupted or simply mischievous in nature? One could certainly argue that because bribery does not work in Li Hezi's favor, the inevitable nature of karmic retribution is manifested in the story. But the didactic values added by such a confirmation seem minimal compared to the wonder created through the vivid description of the unusual details and the plot twist. That is not to suggest, however, that the tale is not concerned with a didactic purpose, only that this particular tale is equally devoted to the creation of wonder and the strange aspects of the events. The final product of such combination is somehow ironic, whimsical, and even humorous.

In *Youyang zazu*, the perspectives of didactic stories are often diversified by abundant and unusual details, and by intriguing plot development that helps to adapt

³⁰⁹ J.V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder*, 68-69.

tales of karma into the broader aesthetic framework of the book in its pursuit of *qi*. But as discussed, tales of karma are by definition confined by their didactic purpose. The strange and the supernatural are sometimes only vehicles of delivery for didactic messages. In *Youyang zazu*, some tales are similar to tales of karma in both subject matter and language style but differ dramatically with regard to function and purpose. These tales introduce a sinister atmosphere in which a vast unknown sphere of power invades our own world. The characteristics of these tales—the mysterious nature of the causal agent, the operational process and the surprisingly meaningful outcome—can all be understood in terms of the fundamental thesis that Lovecraft developed in the cultivation of cosmic fear that the human microcosm is contained in “the magnitude and malignity of the macrocosm.”³¹⁰ Despite the similarities that tales of cosmic horror share with tales of karma, the former are more efficient in conveying the incomprehensible as well as the uncontrollable aspects of the strange. While tales of karma focus on the delivery of certain didactic messages, tales of cosmic horror focus on the portrait of phenomena that extend beyond the narrow field of human affairs as well as our own comprehension. While tales of karma feature protagonists who have control over their actions and are held accountable for their own transgressions, characters in tales of cosmic horror fall victim to the arbitrary force that rules the universe. While tales of karma explicitly explain the cause-and-effect relationship between events and imply the moral significance that accompanies such relationship, tales of cosmic horror deal exclusively with the lack of reason and meaning behind reality and the indifference of arbitrary cosmic force towards human morality.

³¹⁰ S.T. Joshi. *Icons of horror and the supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*. volume 1, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Press, 2007), 67.

It is also useful here to compare tales of cosmic horror with tales grouped under the heading of “the perspective of Heaven and Humanity” proposed by Robert Campany in his study of various worldviews in Six Dynasties *zhiguai* collections. In addition to describing the Daoist perspective, the Buddhist perspective and the Confucian perspective, he identifies another perspective in some of the most famous *zhiguai* works such as *Soushen ji* 搜神記 and *Youming lu* 幽明錄. This perspective, as he argues, cannot be reduced to any recognized philosophical framework and should stand on its own as a perspective of “Heaven and Humanity”. This approach advocates that “Humanity is inexorably connected to all other species of beings between Heaven and Earth” and “although events may seem to occur at random, there are principles that inexorably govern the world’s workings”.³¹¹ Some tales from this perspective imply a moral connection between humans and others, some “emphasize the sheer ontological connectedness of taxonomical distinct beings”, and others stress the sheer reality of the spirit world and seek to illuminate the principles of the unseen world.³¹² These principles are generally hidden from us and only occasionally accessible to ordinary human beings through certain anomalous occurrences.

The principles of “the perspective of Heaven and Humanity” are quite applicable to many *zhiguai* texts that do not seem to adhere to any explicit political or religious agenda. However, Campany’s description of the perspective of “Heaven and Humanity” and his concept of a law-governed and responsive cosmos does not sufficiently explain the tales of cosmic horror that I propose in this chapter. First, the principles of the perspective of “Heaven and Humanity”, to a large extent, concerns a universal morality

³¹¹ Campany, *Strange Writing*, 343-363.

³¹² Ibid.

that not only applies to humans but also to all kinds of beings between heaven and earth.³¹³ One of the underlying messages is, as Campany clearly articulates, that “the universe itself is not morally neutral or inert, but rather responds with sensitivity to the quality of people’s actions and intentions.”³¹⁴ The moral aspect of these principles is further elaborated by Campany’s close analysis on reciprocity between humans and other beings. This concern for morality is clearly missing in tales of cosmic horror where the cosmos does not seem to respond to any behavior on moral grounds and whose actions are unjustifiable under the concept of morality or reciprocity. Second, “the perspective of Heaven and Humanity” emphasize the predictability of the universe which, although appears random, is law-governed in nature. Campany’s examples include tales that involve successful prediction of one’s fate or the outcome of certain events and transformation of non-human beings to humans. According to Campany, these tales are an embodiment of paradox: on the one hand, they appear mysterious “in the seen realm of everyday life”; on the other hand, they implicate an “order in the unseen realm”.³¹⁵ For him, texts from the perspective of “Heaven and Humanity” advocate a locative worldview whose “chief preoccupation is the control of reality by means of boundaries”—as opposed to “anti-locative” worldview in which orders are challenged or “relativized”.³¹⁶ Although authors who write from the Heaven and Humanity perspective

³¹³ This differs from the Buddhist perspective in which karma is generated only in the human form, although all species of life are subject to the reactions of past activities. For discussions on karma and human responsibility, see Charles Keyes, “Merit-Transference in the Kammic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism,” *Karma*, ed. Charles Keyes and Valentine Daniel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and Francis Clooney, “Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedanta’s Theology of Karma,” *Journal of Religion* 69 (1989): 530-548.

³¹⁴ Campany, *Strange Writing*, 357.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 360.

³¹⁶ Campany, *Strange Writing*, 13.

often play upon the tension between the mystery of the world and the implicated order in every realm, they ultimately advocate the knowability of the world.

Tales of cosmic horror, as shown above, are also concerned with the working of unseen forces. But what is central to cosmic horror tales is not the revelation of implicated order in a seemingly random but ultimately predictable universe but rather the obscurity of the universe. It is from here that cosmic horror departs from Campany's perspective of "Heaven and Humanity". In tales of cosmic horror, the strange is left unaccounted for and cosmic forces are depicted as unpredictable and therefore uncontrollable. If "the unseen principles" exist at all, they are off-limits to human comprehension. The signs that appear before the events may not be random, but they are so ambiguous that one can only realize their significance after the fact. In other words, tales of cosmic horror deal with a universe that is seemingly purposeful but ultimately unpredictable. A comparison of two stories from *Youyang zazu* may clarify this point.

Fortuneteller Xu Daosheng said that a young scholar whose surname was Wang lived in the Jianghuai area (the Yangtze River and Huai River). He once posted a public announcement offering the service of dream interpretation. A merchant named Zhang Dan was about to return home and he dreamed of cooking a meal in a mortar. He asked scholar Wang about it, and the scholar replied: "when you get home, you will not see your wife. Cooking in the mortar means that there is no *fu* 釜 [a kind of cooking caldron—the word is homophonic with *fu* 妇 which refers to wife]." When the merchant returned home, he discovered that his wife

indeed had passed away a few months before. Only then did he know that what Wang said was true.

卜人徐道升,言江淮有王生者,榜言解夢.賈客張瞻將歸,夢炊于臼中.問王生,生言:“君歸不見妻矣,臼中炊,固無釜也.”賈客至家,妻果卒已數月,方知王生之言不誣矣.³¹⁷

Yuan Zhen owned a manor at Guqian of Xiangzhou in Jiangxia. He recently had a hall built. The beam of the hall had just been set when a terrible wind arose, and it rained heavily. At the time a tenant farmer was transporting six or seven earthen jars of oil. Suddenly, with a huge booming sound, the oil jars were all lined up on top of the beam. Not one drop of oil had spilled out. In that very year Yuan Zhen died.

在江夏襄州賈塹有莊,新起堂,上樑才畢,疾風甚雨.時莊客輸油六七甕,忽震一聲,油甕悉列于梁上,一滴不漏,其年元卒.³¹⁸

The first story evolves around a dream and how accurately it can be interpreted. The underlying message is that although dreams can appear to be mysterious, they carry messages that could be discerned by those with certain abilities. But unlike some stories with the same motif which seek to demonstrate the power of some special people, this story is more concerned with the accuracy of the interpretation than with the agent of the interpretation. As Campany points out, such a story “becomes a statement not so much of the prowess of specially trained individuals as of the amenability of events to prediction due to the law-governed nature of the universe itself; what matters is not who does the

³¹⁷ *Youyang zazu*, 8.360, 85.

³¹⁸ *Youyang zazu*, 8.310, 82.

predicting or how they do it but its sheer success.”³¹⁹ One such law is revealed through the method employed by scholar Wang in deciphering the dream, namely, through the use of homophones. When Wang’s technique turns out to be effective, the reader is given a sense that the universe is not as random as it appears, that it has patterns that can be detected and is, to a large degree, knowable. According to Wai-yee Li, the “readability” of the world implied in the interpretation of dreams provides a sense of control and order to one’s dream experience.³²⁰

While a successful prediction in the first story implies that the universe is knowable and readable, in the second story, no prediction is ever attempted throughout the narrative. Although a thunderstorm is normal, the impact of this particular storm is definitely unusual. Yet, no expert is there to offer any insight on how to understand such an exceptional phenomenon. The reader is left in the dark alone to wonder whether the incident even has implications, let alone what the implications might be. Neither the reader nor the character is able to predict subsequent events. Only after the actualization of the outcome does the reader become suspicious about the nature of the first incident. In other words, the incident does not become an inauspicious sign until it reveals itself through the subsequent event. This story provides just enough wonder to convince the reader of the strangeness of the events but not enough for him to comprehend the principles of the universe. Unlike texts from the perspective of Heaven and Humanity, which often involve “specialists”, “prophetic folk songs” or “prognosticatory texts”, tales of cosmic horror introduce no authoritative view on how to interpret certain events. Such lack of explanatory information directly contributes to the idea that the course of the

³¹⁹ Campany, *Strange Writing*, 359.

³²⁰ Wai-yee Li, “Dreams of Interpretation,” 17-42.

universe falls beyond the scope of the human mind and is not meant to be controlled or explained.

Just as Carroll's idea of the monster unveils the mechanism of supernatural beings in engendering the strange, Lovecraft's cosmic fear helps to reveal the incomprehensible and uncontrollable aspects of the strange in tales that do not necessarily feature supernatural entities. It makes sense of a unique type of *zhiguai* tales—that in spite of the absence of horrifying creatures—is nevertheless awe inspiring strange.

This type of *zhiguai* tales cannot be reduced to tales of karma because it does not seek to promote any religious principle. Unlike tales of karma, it never focuses on the sins of human characters, which explain and justify their suffering. It rather plays with the lack of causal explanation and moral justification for mysterious incidents. What it inspires in the audience is not the fear of the consequences of misdeeds, but a sense of hopelessness and helplessness when confronted by the unknown.

This type of *zhiguai* tales also differs from tales from the perspective of Heaven and Humanity. It does not concern a morally responsive universe that is prevalent in many texts that advocate the perspective of Heaven and Humanity. Nor does it emphasize the metaphysical connection between all beings between Heaven and Earth. Unlike tales from the perspective of Heaven and Humanity which propose the knowability of the world through their portrait of anomalous occurrences, tales of cosmic horror accentuate the inexplicability and unpredictability of the cosmos with their absence of explanatory information.

In *Youyang zazhi*, the effect of *qi* can be achieved without ambiguous events with multiple explanations or the presence of horrifying monsters. Stories that depict a

mysterious and morally ambiguous cosmic force beyond human understanding can also generate *qi*. With their lack of explanatory frameworks and moral concern, tales of cosmic horror are free of political, religious and moral agenda. They do not seek to familiarize, rationalize or moralize the strange. Instead, they focus on representing the incomprehensible aspect of the strange and leave anomalous occurrences unexplained and unaccounted for. Lovecraft argues that cosmic fear, in its purest form, “has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule”; it is rather “a malign and particular suspension or defeat” of known orders or fixed laws.³²¹ By definition, cosmic fear is transgressive and subversive. It is precisely such nature that makes the concept of cosmic fear compatible with the aesthetic of *qi*, which, in essence, challenges the usual, the ordinary, the normal and the typical by promoting the different, the unusual and the strange.

³²¹ Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 15.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The previous chapters analyze a selection of horror stories in *Youyang zazu* from different perspectives with the assistance of various theories and frameworks. It is worth noting that the reading of those stories should not be confined to a single theory or limited to a specific point of view, as the stories have many layers of components that are subject to multiple interpretations. A tale of monster horror may also inspire ambiguity and uncertainty; a story of cosmic horror may simultaneously involve threatening monsters. The fact that some stories are susceptible to more than one interpretation highlights the openness of these short narratives, enhances the pleasure of reading experience, and engenders the effect of *qi* in the text. The following tale provides us an example of stories that can be approached from various perspectives:

The Duke of Chu, Jiang Jiao³²² frequently paid visits to the Chan Ding temple where people in the capital often held banquets. One time, when the drinking started, a peerlessly beautiful attending girl appeared among the guests. She would offer cups of wine to the guest and tuck her hair occasionally, but no one could see her hands. The guests all found her manner curious. One guest was intoxicated and asked her “could it be that you have six fingers?” He then grabbed her, so he could see her hands.

³²² Jiang Jiao 姜皎 (713-741) was a high-ranking official during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. He was involved in the plot of deposing Xuanzong's empress and was later accused of leaking information. He was then exiled and died on his way into exile. See *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New History of Tang*), *juan* 76 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 3496.

The moment he pulled her, the girl fell down and turned into a skeleton.

Jiang later suffered a misfortune.

姜楚公常游禪定寺,京兆辦局甚盛.及飲酒,座上一妓絕色,獻杯整鬢,未嘗見手,眾怪之.有客被酒戲曰:“勿六指乎?”乃強牽視.妓隨牽而倒,乃枯骸也.姜竟及禍焉.³²³

The story can be first examined as a tale of monster horror, because it features a metamorphosing skeleton with deceptive disguise, whose encounter with human beings has deadly consequences. The dangerousness of the girl is initially suggested by her extreme beauty, which is often a sign of extreme wickedness in many *zhiguai* tales in which the temptation of the *femme fatale* is portrayed as threatening and possibly fatal. The suspicion raised by the girl's immaculate appearance is advanced by her odd behavior during the banquet. When one guest forcefully tries to see her hands, the girl does not try to flee or fight back. Rather, she immediately falls down and reveals her true nature as if she could not withstand the touch of human. The skeleton on the ground proves the reader's initial suspicion about her appearance and behavior. Note that although the girl's unusual actions do not go unnoticed by the guests, no one at the banquet regards her conduct as a serious matter. They rather consider it amusing and worthy of ridicule. The light-hearted banquet atmosphere provides a dramatic contrast to the subsequent horrific scene in which the beautiful girl suddenly transforms into a skeleton immediately before everyone's eyes. The skeleton is an intrusion into the everyday life of the humans constitutes what Tudor refers to as the schema of the “invasion narrative” in which the normal order of human environment is abruptly

³²³ *Youyang zazu*, 4.205, 50

disrupted, and disorder subsequently emerges. Only when the force of the disorder is vanquished, can normality and order resume. The fact that the skeleton has to reveal its true form seems to suggest, at least, that its power of deception vanishes upon human contact. The sudden revelation of the monster, however, does not offer the reader a sense of closure because so many questions remain unanswered. What is the skeleton doing in the banquet? Where does it come from? What is its intention? Jiang's subsequent death only adds to the mystery. Why is he the victim? He is not the one who offended the monster, nor is he the host of the banquet. Or is he the target of the attack from the very beginning? Is his death simply collateral damage? The ambiguity that surrounds Jiang's death may make the reader even wonder whether Jiang's death is related to the appearance of the monster at all.

Such uncertainty is a crucial element of fantastic horror, in which the reader experiences hesitation between two possible explanations of the same events. In this case, the hesitation does not involve the existence of the supernatural, but rather centers around the ambiguous relationship between the monster and the death of the protagonist. The reader either decides that the monster is responsible for Jiang's death or that Jiang's death is merely a coincidence that has nothing to do with the skeleton monster. Although the narrative strongly suggests that the former explanation is more plausible than the latter, no evidence is offered to completely rule out the possibility of a coincidence. The story simply ends with a statement of fact and does not provide crucial information as to how and why, and fails to convey closure. Troy. M. Troftgruben in his study of endings in literature points out that "endings do not always give closure. They may also convey openness. As the opposite of closure, openness gives the sense that the ending is

unjustified, that the narrative is incomplete, and that an overarching purpose is lacking.”

³²⁴ In light of this observation, the conclusion to the story above leaves the reader with questions that are not fully resolved, and therefore generates uncertainty and openness in the narrative.

The lack of apparent causal connection between the appearance of the monster and Jiang’s misfortune enables the story to be examined from another perspective as a tale of cosmic horror. In this case, the appearance of the monster is not the cause of Jiang’s disaster but rather an inauspicious sign from a mysterious cosmic force whose operation is beyond human control. Like other tales of cosmic horror, the sign is usually impossible to fully comprehend at the time, and it is only after the realization of a certain event that the meaning of the sign suddenly becomes clear. In the story, the appearance of the skeleton seems to have little relation to the protagonist: it does not seem to pay attention to him, nor does it have direct contact with him. Only when the last sentence introduces a new development is the reader finally able to grasp the implications of something he does not understand initially. Jiang’s death is now the only clue offered to make sense of the monster’s seemingly inexplicable appearance.

The fact that the “girl” does not resist the guest’s inappropriate behavior suggests that the revelation of her true form may be intentional and is an integral part of the sign that needs to be observed. Unfortunately, no one including the reader understands the implications of the monster until the death of the protagonist. Note that the victim does not seem to have control over any part of the process that leads to his death. He cannot prevent the “attending girl” from showing up during the banquet, nor can he predict the actions of a drunken guest. Yet he is not exempt from the impending disaster. Although

³²⁴ Troy M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 55.

the protagonists' death cannot be directly attributed to the appearance of the monster, the story suggests a relationship between the two. Thus, the monster can be taken as an inauspicious sign to predict the misfortune that awaits the protagonist. The lack of rationale behind Jiang's death makes it unjustified, yet it reveals an arbitrary fate at the mercy of an incomprehensible cosmic force.

The three different readings of the same story each emphasize a different aspect of the strange. From the entities that embody the strange to the cognitive effect the strange generates, to the incomprehensibility and uncontrollability of the strange; each reading offers a unique perspective on the role of horror in the representation of the anomalous. But these approaches are not meant to put labels on a story and confine the way it can be read and understood.

Tales that are susceptible to more than one interpretive framework are not uncommon in *Youyang zazu*. Another tale in "Nuogao ji" tells of the horrifying travel experience of a graduate of provincial examination (*juren* 舉人).

Before there was military activity in Dongping, the provincial graduate Meng Buyi was travelling in Zhaoyi prefecture. At night, he reached a government post station. He was just about to wash his feet when somebody known as Case Reviewer Zhang of Ziqing arrived. He had dozens of attendant servants in tow. Meng wished to pay his respects to him. But Zhang was drunk and did not pay attention to him at first. So Meng withdrew into the western room. Zhang repeatedly called for the attendant officer at the station, demanding pancakes. Meng watched him silently and felt angry at Zhang's haughtiness. After some time the

pancakes were ready, and Meng saw that, following the servant with the plate, a pig-like creature came into the room and stood in the shadow of the lamp. This happened five or six times, but Zhang was not aware of it. Meng was alarmed and frightened and could not sleep, but Zhang soon snored loudly. It was not until the third watch (11:00 pm-1:00 am) that Meng finally closed his eyes, but immediately he saw a man dressed in black who was wrestling with Zhang. They seized each other, wrestled for a long time, and moved into the eastern room. There was the sound of fists, beating like a pestle. In the time it takes to eat a meal Zhang came back with disheveled hair, naked. He then went back to his bed. When the fifth watch sounded, Zhang called his servants to set up candles and bring towels and hair comb. He then went to Meng and said, "Last night I was drunk and I did not know that I was sharing this lodge with you." Then he ordered a meal, and they chatted and laughed merrily. Occasionally he would lower his voice and say, "I am ashamed of what happened last night. I beg of you not to speak of it." Meng could only nod and say, "Yes, yes." Then Zhang said, "I have a journey which obligates me to set out early. You may leave first." Then he reached inside of his shoes and pulled out a stick of gold. He thrust it towards Meng, saying, "This isn't much. I beg you to keep the matter of which we spoke a secret." Meng did not dare to refuse, and he left straightaway. After a few days' journey, he happened to hear that they were trying to catch a murderer. Meng inquired among those on the way, and they all told of Case Reviewer Zhang. It seems that

Zhang had left early in the morning from some government post, and by dawn, his saddle was empty and he was nowhere to be seen. The officers from the post went back there to start their search, and in the western chamber they could see a corner of a mat. When they unrolled it, inside was nothing but white bones without even a speck of meat for flies. On the floor were drops of blood, and that was all. There was only one shoe, off to the side. It was said that the post was haunted, but no one ever knew by what strange thing. The provincial graduate Zhu Yuanying said that he had personally heard Meng Buyi speak of this. When eating at night, he always took precautions to hold a sacrifice first. Zhu also added that previously Meng hadn't believed in Buddhism in the least, and that he was rather good at writing poetry. Some of his lines go:

“Day breaks yet my old home is still far
It lies in the beautiful lines of the green hills.”

From then on, though, he always recited from the sutras and travelled about. He never again participated in the government examinations.

東平未用兵,有舉人孟不疑,客昭義。夜至一驛,方欲濯足,有稱淄青張評事者,僕從數十,孟欲參謁,張被酒,初不顧,孟因退就西間。張連呼驛吏索煎餅,孟默然窺之,且怒其傲。良久,煎餅熟,孟見一黑物如豬,隨盤至燈影而立。如此五六返,張竟不察。孟因恐懼,無睡,張尋大鼾。至三更後,孟才交睫,忽見一人皂衣,與張角力,久久相摔入東偏房中,拳聲如杵。一餉間,張被發雙袒而出,還寢牀上。入五更,張乃喚僕,使張燭巾櫛,就孟曰:“某昨醉中,都不知秀才同廳。”因命食,談笑甚歡,時時小聲曰:

“昨夜甚慚長者,乞不言也。”孟但唯唯。復曰:“某有程須早發,秀才可先也。”遂摸靴中,得金一挺授曰:“薄貺,乞密前事。”孟不敢辭,即為前去。行數日,方聽捕殺人賊。孟詢諸道路,皆曰淄青張評事至某驛早發,遲明,空鞍失所在。驛吏返至驛尋索,驛西閣中有席角,發之,白骨而已,無泊一蠅肉也。地上滴血無餘,惟一隻履在旁。相傳此驛舊凶,竟不知何怪。舉人祝元膺常言親見孟不疑說,每每誠夜食必須發祭也。祝又言孟素不信釋氏,頗能詩,其句雲:“白日故鄉遠,青山佳句中”後常持念遊覽,不復應舉。³²⁵

This tale is first a monster story. It clearly involves a pig-like monster and its suspicious behavior. When Zhang arrives at the post, the monster follows the servant and enters the room many times as if it is observing whether Zhang notices its existence. Later that night, a mysterious man who dresses in black suddenly appears in Zhang's room and attacks him. The text does not identify the man in black, but it strongly suggests that the appearance of the mysterious man is connected to the pig-like monster: he is either the monster itself or sent by the monster. The monster's malicious intention is evident through its previous probing behavior and the subsequent attack.

The story of Meng Buyi is also a tale of fantastic horror. The tale is so ambiguous that it leaves itself open to multiple interpretations. These interpretations, however, do not center on whether the tale is supernatural or not, because the existence of the pig-like monster already confirms the supernatural nature of the tale. Instead, the interpretations concern the identity of the skeleton. In other words, the interpretations revolve around one single question: who is murdered in the eastern room? One could certainly argue that

³²⁵ *Youyang zazu*, 15.576, 141.

Case Reviewer Zhang is just a regular traveler who falls victim to the haunting monster of the post. He dies in the battle against the evil force in the eastern room. And what Meng Buyi sees later in his room is rather the disguised monster itself. The monster tries to cover its tracks by pretending to be Zhang and bribing Meng to keep secret of the entire incident. After sending Meng on his way, it disguises as Zhang and leaves the post and later flees. The white bones left in the Western room are Zhang's remains. One could also argue that Zhang himself is also a supernatural being, another monster perhaps, or even a deity whose power surpasses the pig-like monster at the post. He wins the battle in the eastern room and kills his adversary. He later asks Meng to keep his knowledge of the incident confidential in order to draw less attention to his unusual ability. He later leaves the post and vanishes. In this case, the skeleton is most likely to be the remains of the man in black or even the monster itself. Another possible interpretation is that Zhang does kill the man in black at the post and leaves his remains at the western chamber, but he later is murdered by the monster who revenges the death of the man in black. These different interpretations are all plausible because of the vagueness and ambiguity inherent in the narrative. The story of Meng Buyi thus possesses the characteristics of monster horror and fantastic horror simultaneously.

We have shown above that horror stories in *Youyang zazu* may be susceptible to multiple interpretive frameworks and can be approached from different angles and with different perspectives. This study represents but a few of them and can by no means account for all the potential meanings and literary values that the text possesses.

It is therefore not an attempt to exhaust the possibilities through which *Youyang zazu* and its horror tales can be read and interpreted. It rather focuses on demonstrating how some

Western theories and concepts can be useful in addressing the literariness of horror narrative in the *Youyang zazu* collection.

The ongoing discussion has tried to uncover the artistic appeal and importance of horror tales in *Youyang zazu* with the assistance of Western concepts and theories and show that horror stories are integral components of the *Youyang zazu* collection. Chapters Three through Five show that the *Youyang zazu* collection includes more than simple informative and descriptive entries of strange objects and events. The collection encloses a great number of sophisticated narrative pieces that focus on eliciting emotions such as fear and anxiety in the reader of strange accounts. By adding vitality and tension to the representation of the anomalous through plot development and narrative techniques, these horror stories describe one's encounter with the strange and magnify one's emotion in dealing with the strange. These stories are quintessential to the aesthetic pursuit of *Youyang zazu*—a collection as we have shown in Chapter One and Two assembled according to the principle of *qi* which rejects the normal and the familiar, and embraces the unusual, the special, the unique, the odd and the particularized. Through the aesthetic pursuit of *qi* and employment of various plot devices and narrative techniques, *Youyang zazu* and its horror tales extend beyond simply representing the strange; rather they celebrate the strange through words and thrive on the astonishment and amazement the strange generates.

This study also argues that the historical and cultural values of the *zhiguai* genre should not confine its studies to the reconstruction of ancient society and history. By conducting close textual analysis of horror tales in *Youyang zazu*, the study shows that *zhiguai* tales have literary merit and aesthetic value and can be studied on its own terms

as a literary genre. Since very few studies have examined *zhiguai* tales from the perspective of horror narrative that intends to provoke anxiety and fear, this study also offers an alternative perspective on the literariness of the genre of *zhiguai* and wider implication for how other *zhiguai* texts can be approached and analyzed. The three approaches presented in this study—fantastic horror, monster horror and cosmic horror—each emphasize a different aspect in the representation of the strange. From entities that embody the strange, to the cognitive effect the strange generates, to the incomprehensibility and uncontrollability of the strange, these approaches provide valuable insight into how the effect of strangeness is conveyed and amplified through theme, plot and technique. Such insight is not only useful in investigating some understudied *zhiguai* collections such as *Youyang zazhi*, but also beneficial to the relatively well-studied texts such as *Sou shen ji*, *Liaozhai zhiji* and *Yuewei caotang biji* since they all contain abundant tales of the strange which can be understood as horror narratives.

APPENDIX

Juan one has three sections: “Zhong zhi” 忠志 (Records of Loyalty), “Li yi” 礼異 (Unusual Rituals) and “Tian zhi” 天咫 (The Little We Know of Heaven). Except for the first section, other two sections’ titles clearly suggest that their content concerns the unusual and the rarely known, both of which are important aspects of strangeness. The title of the second section indicates its focus on rituals that to some extent deviate from the normal practice of social rules, and the word “tian zhi” originated from the *Guoyu chuyu* 國語·楚語 (*Discourses of the States—Discourse of Chu*), and it refers to the fact that Heaven’s way is little known to us.³²⁶ The first section “Zhong zhi” exclusively describes the imperial life of the Tang dynasty emperors in a roughly chronological order. Some entries record the outstanding virtues and abilities of emperors, such as entries 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Several entries deal with the unusual natural phenomena related to certain emperors’ reign (7, 20) and a few entries relate the emperors’ unusual personal behaviors (15, 16). A number of entries list gifts that emperors bestowed upon officials during festivals. Although Duan did not provide further information about these gifts, judging by their exquisite names, we can safely assume that these gifts were not ordinary objects but items of a precious nature (10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18). The content of this section is predominately mundane, and the events, objects, or behaviors presented in this section are only strange to a degree or in Campany’s words, they “belong to a certain ‘normal’

³²⁶ *Guoyu* 國語, “Chuyu” 楚語: “是知天咫, 安知民則?” According to the interpretation of Wei Zhao 韋昭, “咫, 言少也, 此言少知天道耳, 何知治民之法.” See *Guoyu* 國語 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1967), 127.

category, but are anomalous because positioned at its outer edge or limit due to some special feature.”³²⁷ It is worth noting that although the supernatural is not the emphasis of the section, it is not completely absent either.³²⁸ One entry features an emperor’s dream as a portent for his death and another describes an emperor’s direct contact with a female deity (14, 19). These records of the supernatural are scattered among the mundane entries and disrupt the sense of coherence in the section’s subject matter. Because the supernatural entries do not appear until the later part of the section, the reader is misled from the beginning to expect that the whole “Zhong zhi” section exclusively concerns the mundane strangeness. The sudden introduction of the supernatural content therefore subverts the reader’s initial expectation regarding the progress of the section and causes a sense of disorder.

The second section “Li yi” comprises thirteenth entries, most of which deal with etiquette and ceremonies during special events or festivals. One entry, for example, introduces various rituals performed in each festival by women during the Northern Dynasty 北朝 (32). Three other entries describe engaging procedures and ancient wedding ceremonies, including “Disturbing the nuptial chamber” recorded in Han law 漢典 (29, 30, 31).³²⁹ The rest of the entries concerns court etiquette and diplomatic protocol. All of these rituals are special either because of the time of the customs or the places where these rituals are performed, but none of these entries include supernatural elements. One exception to the mundane content of this section is entry 22 which relates

³²⁷ Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*, 239.

³²⁸ I do not employ the term supernatural with modern scientific implications, but use it strictly to mean things or phenomena that are in contradistinction to the observable patterns that give worldly life coherence. More specifically, I use supernatural to refer to gods, fairies, spirits, demons, ghosts, metamorphic plants or animals, and all sorts of magical experience associated with Taoist priest and Buddhist monks.

³²⁹ Cheng shude 程樹德, *Jiuchao lükao·han lükao* 九朝律考·漢律考 vol.1 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1955).

how the headless wooden statue of Han emperor comes back to life and behaves as a living person.

The third section has only five entries, all of which are devoted to supernatural beings or powers. Two of them introduce mythological inhabitants of the moon, such as Chang'e 嫦娥 (the goddess of the moon), Wu Gang 吳剛 (the woodcutter) and the golden toad; two describe the unexpected contact between man and the supernatural; the other one relates the supernatural ability of monk Yixing.

The three sections that constitute this *juan* each have their own realms of emphasis and differ dramatically in their orientation of content. While the first two sections mainly address the mundane affairs with only a sprinkle of the supernatural elements, the third section is concerned exclusively with the supernatural. The topics included in these sections vary, ranging from ancient customs, court etiquette, royal anecdotes, to supernatural forces and mythological figures. Although the entries within each section roughly relate to each other, they do not seem to correlate with entries from other sections.³³⁰ The wide range of topics and the lack of overall consistency in the subject matters of these tales indicate that this *juan* is not constructed according to the mere content of these tales. Rather this *juan* is composed upon a characteristic feature that unites all of the tales: they all describe things, objects or events that are rather rare, unusual or extraordinary in some way. As the following analysis will show, this feature runs not only through the first *juan* but also through the remaining of the twenty-nine *juan* of *Youyang zazhi*.

³³⁰ Reed has made a similar observation that there is seemingly a lack of connection among topics in these sections. See Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 45. But she fails to discover the underlying connection that unites entries within the *juan* as she admits.

Juan two has two only sections: “Yu ge” 玉格 (Jade Frame) and “Hu shi” 壺史 (The Jug Chronicles). Compared with the first *juan*, the titles of *juan* two are less straightforward in their indication of the *juan*’s topics. “Yu ge” can mean ‘pen rack made of jade’, or ‘bookshelves’, but the usage of “Hu shi” is somehow difficult to trace. In this *juan*, judging from the content of the entries enclosed, both “Yu ge” and “Hu shi” suggest a Daoist orientation of the *juan*. It is not clear whether Duan has coined these terms or simply invested them with new meanings, but since these words are only found in works of later period,³³¹ perhaps Duan’s use of these words with reference to Daoism is likely unfamiliar to contemporary readers. Such choice of words may appear strange but is not a random act. Both jade and jug are highly regarded items in Daoist tradition. They appear frequently in Daoist texts and are often associated with Daoist immortals. By using these familiar items in an unfamiliar way, Duan successfully ignites the curiosity of the reader and creates a sense of obscurity and mystery that connects to the content of the *juan*.

Both the “Yu ge” and “Hu shi” sections deal exclusively with Daoism and related topics such as Daoist pantheon, heavens, sacred mountains, medicine, magic skills, methods to achieve transcendence, encounters between immortals and mortals as well as the marvelous experiences of mortals in the realm of the supernatural. The “Yu ge” section consists of forty entries and begins with relatively shorter expository and descriptive pieces that reveal information about Daoism and roughly describe the world of the immortals; it then moves to longer narrative pieces in which more detailed descriptions, sophisticated characters, and lively dialogues often dominate the depiction

³³¹ See Zhou Bida 周必大, *Yutang zaji* 玉堂雜記, 卷中: “御前設小案, 用牙尺壓蠟紙一幅, 傍有漆匣小歙硯, 置筆墨于玉格” and Zhang Junfang 張君房, *Yunji qijian* 雲笈七籤, *juan* 3: “宮內東殿, 金房玉格, 有寶經三百卷, 玉訣九千篇”.

of events. Entries in this section range from six characters to almost seven hundred characters in length. The “Hu shi” section continues the narrative style in the latter part of the previous section and solely relates anecdotes about practitioners of Daoist art and their magical abilities. Only ten entries are included in this section, and they are relatively long pieces that range from one to five-hundred characters in length.

Compared with *juan one*, *juan two* is more consistent in its subject matter: all entries included are related to Daoism as the titles indicate. In the process of revealing esoteric knowledge and relating supernatural realms and fantastic experiences beyond worldly life, *juan two* also continues the feature of the unusual as set forth in the first *juan*.

Unlike *juan one* and *juan two*, *juan three* is not divided into parts and remains a complete a book of seventy-nine entries. It focuses on Buddhist lore and tales and is appropriately entitled “Bei bian” 貝編 (Leaf Plait). Because ancient Buddhist scriptures were often written on leaves, Duan’s choice of name is obviously suggestive. The topics covered in this *juan* include all sorts of Buddhist information including Buddhist purgatories, heavens and hells, the pantheon and their various powers, energies and responsibilities, foreign Buddhist nations, and their unique customs and products as well as monks and their magical abilities. The entire *juan* is almost entirely centered on the divine, the eternal, the magical, the foreign, and the exotic.

Juan three is similar to *juan two* in its organization of the entries: it begins with short expository or descriptive pieces and concludes with longer narratives which often contain dialogues between characters. The repetition of such a pattern clearly suggests an

organizing attempt to keep various entries in order. This pattern will often repeat itself in sections in the following *juan*.

Juan four comprises four sections, each with a title of its own: “Jing yi” 境異 (Anomalies of the Borders), “Xi zhao” 喜兆 (Auspicious Portents), “Huo zhao” 禍兆 (Inauspicious Portents) and “Wu ge” 物革 (The Change of Things). The first section is mainly concerned with foreign people and their peculiar physical attributes, habits, customs and abilities as well as the unique geographical and conditions of distant regions. The first section constitutes the majority of the *juan* and consists of thirty-two entries of various lengths. These entries are mostly short informative and descriptive pieces and only one entry is narrative in nature that relates to the origin of Tujue’s human sacrifice (169). The second and the third sections both have only three entries and deal precisely with what their titles suggest: omens and predictions of forthcoming events. While the auspicious omens all relate to the protagonists’ promotions and career advancements in the bureaucratic system, inauspicious pieces exclusively focus on disasters and death. None of the omens are explained, and the connection between the preceding event and the succeeding one is apparent but inexplicable. Because of their ominous nature and the lack of interpretations in the narrative, stories in the “Huo zhao” section are especially horrifying. Along with the “Xi zhao” section, “Huo zhao” explores the relationship between human destiny and mysterious cosmic forces. The fourth section has six entries, all of which share the theme of transformation. Transformations across various categories are recorded in this section including the change from animal to insects (209) and from the inanimate to the living (208, 210, 211).

The structure of *juan* four is different from its previous *juan*. Because its entries are unevenly distributed among its four sections, the first section occupies more than seventy percent of the entries in the entire *juan*. *juan* four does not follow a progressive pattern in which shorter pieces are placed in the beginning and longer pieces are placed at the end. Rather, entries within this *juan* are all relatively short, and the longest piece is no more than two hundred characters. Anecdotes are concentrated in the second and the third sections while the first and the last sections have more informative and descriptive pieces.

Juan five is divided into two sections, “Gui xi” 詭習 (Bizarre Practices) and “Guai shu” 怪術 (Strange Skills). The titles of these sections clearly suggest the unusual quality of the following tales. The *juan* has only twenty-two entries, each of which concern people with remarkable skills. The first section has six pieces and focuses on strength or abilities that are certainly extraordinary and unusual but not necessarily supernatural. One entry describes an armless beggar whose right foot is cable of writing calligraphy better than people can with their hands (213). Another piece tells of a man who uses drumbeats to make spiders march and perform sequences of movements (214).

The protagonists in the second section are mostly monks, masters of esoteric, government officials, or people whom Duan knows personally, and their skills are often supernatural. One entry tells a story of a monk who can pass through walls and leave only his silhouette on the wall which disappears in eight days (220). *Juan* five differs from the previous *juan* in that the majority of the entries are narrative pieces. It also does not follow the pattern that appears in *juan* two and three in which informative and descriptive pieces are dominant.

Juan six includes three sections. The three sections are entitled respectively “Yi jue” 藝絕 (Consummate Art), “Qi qi” 器奇 (Marvelous Objects) and “Yue” 樂 (Music). True to its title, the first section deals exclusively with various artists and their amazing artistry and consummate craftsmanship. These skills are not necessarily uncommon, but the levels of artistry that these artists achieve are certainly beyond the normal range of human activity. A man can make a brush tube illuminate like jade in one entry (235). Another entry tells of a fortuneteller who has a peerless insight into the human mind (238). The title of the second section is also in association with its content. The marvelous objects include a sword hidden inside of a lotus root, a sword that has the spirit of its own, a magic mirror found underneath lily flowers that reflects the sunlight into a ring of light as well as a needle that can avoid dust. Most of these objects are either related to supernatural beings or have supernatural powers. Even items that do not appear supernatural are nevertheless strange because of unusual function or rare origin. The music section records extraordinary musical instruments and musical skills as well as strange events related to musical performance. In one entry, a man who has never played any musical instrument in his life suddenly falls asleep in the morning, and when he wakes up at night, he asks for a lute and effortlessly plays several tunes unknown to others. The music is so moving that everyone who listens cannot help but weep. Unfortunately, he forgets the tune right after the performance and the tunes are forever lost (251).

In *juan* six, descriptive pieces and narrative pieces are mixed together and entries that focus on mundane matters and entries about supernatural affairs are placed next to each other. The apparent lack of organization, however, has its significance in reinforcing

the effect of strangeness that is created through the unusual nature of the content. As Reed has pointed out, “the oddness of the entries’ topics is thus accentuated by the oddness of their organization.”³³² Further organizational effort to accentuate strangeness continues in the following *juan*.

Juan seven mostly concerns mundane matters of daily life, such as wine, food, and medicine and it does include a number of entries that do not feature anything special or extraordinary. Entries 265 through 270, for example, discuss only culinary tips and cooking methods. But the focus of this *juan* overall is not on the ordinary nature of these daily matters but on the unusual aspect of such common things. The first section “Jiu shi” 酒食 (Wine and Food) comprises twenty entries and introduces mostly rare food ingredients and recipes, ancient culinary traditions, bizarre cooking methods, magic drinking vessels, and exquisite tastes of various delicacies. One entry for example describes a special kind of walnut whose shell can turn water into delicious wine (256). Another entry lists more than one hundred items of rare and obscure delicacies including ape’s lips, steamed bear and tree worms (264). The next section “Yi” 醫 (Medicine) has only seven entries and focuses on effective medicines and miraculous medical skills. In one entry, a Daoist solves a mysterious food poison case and successfully pinpoints its cause simply by examining the patient’s pulse (277). The introduction of such unusual aspects to the otherwise ordinary mundane matters injects a dose of strangeness into familiarity.

Juan eight is divided into three sections: “Qiong” 黥 (Tattoo), “Lei” 雷 (Thunder) and “Meng” 夢 (Dream). The first section is concerned with various tattoo practices from

³³² Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 53.

ancient to contemporary as well as tattoo traditions and local customs in different Chinese regions and foreign cultures. This section explains that people who bear tattoos are slaves, criminals, bandits, thugs, bullies and soldiers. In some entries, tattoos are said to endow wearers with extraordinary strength. In others cases, tattoos are the trademarks of barbarians and violent men. In one entry, a local man whose tattoos cover his entire body is involved in four murder cases and when he is arrested, the official ordered that he be beaten to death without due process. The official report says that “The man embroiders his arms and legs and calls himself the third princess. There is no need for investigation. He is certainly not innocent.” (289) This anecdote shows that by the time of the Tang dynasty, tattoo had gradually evolved to a decorative technique; however, the origin of tattoos as a mark of punishment often causes tattoos to be negatively perceived. The official attitude toward tattoos reflected in this anecdote clearly indicates the socially marginal position of such practices.

The next section deals with thunders, or more specifically thunder related supernatural beings or experiences. This section has only eight entries, most of which are narrative pieces that tell stories about unusual thunderstorms and their various consequences. One entry records a strange experience of the famous poet Yuan Zhen 元稹 during a thunderstorm. The oil jars in the hall of his newly constructed home suddenly move themselves up to the main beam in conjunction with a thunder. In the same year, Yun zhen dies (310). Another describes a creature with a pig head falling off the sky during a huge storm. It grabs a red snake with its two-finger hands and two-toe feet and devours it. Immediately, the dark cloud disappears (311).

The third section is, as its title suggests, about dream experiences, interpretations, and predictions. The fifteen entries included deal with almost completely with supernatural incidents (with the exception of entry 321) and are narrative in nature. One entry explores the blurring boundary between dream and reality. It records a man who dreams of a girl whom he secretly falls in love with; in the dream, she feeds him cherries. When he wakes up, he discovers cherry pits by his pillow (322). Overall, the three sections of *juan* eight undergo a thematic shift from a more mundane orientation to a focus on the supernatural.

Juan nine is a fairly short book that comprises only twelve entries. It is divided into two parts: “Shi gan” 事感 (Responses to Things) and “Dao xia” 盜俠 (Outlaws and Knight-Errants). The first section has only three entries and deals with uncanny incidents. In one entry, a man finds the sack that he had lost three years ago in the belly of a giant fish that he accidentally catches in the flood (327). The second section is miscellaneous. It includes nine entries with anecdotes about bandits and their noteworthy skills and pieces that portray men with uncanny or supernatural abilities as well as a couple of entries that introduce several locations of the great bandit Zhi’s 黠 tomb.

Juan ten has only one section, which is entitled “Wu yi” 物異 (Unusual Things). Unlike *juan* nine which features narrative pieces, this *juan* mostly comprises short informative and descriptive entries about rare and unusual objects of various times and origins. One entry describes a special luminous plant with purple flower and bean size fruits. Eating one such fruit will illuminate one orifice of the heart. As a result, if seven fruits are eaten, all seven orifices of the heart will be illuminated. One can then read in the dark (346). Although most objects that appear in this *juan* are not supernatural in

nature, there is no lack of supernatural elements in these entries. In the *juan*, entries with supernatural content are scattered among mundane entries that are simply strange because of their remarkable features. The mixture of mundane strangeness and the supernatural achieves a diversification of the content of the entries, which adds interest to the *juan* and creates a stronger sense of wonder with a fuller picture of reality. At the same time, the entries' rough chronological order from the Qin dynasty to the Tang dynasty helps to give the *juan* a sense of structure.

Juan eleven is named “Guang zhi” 廣知 (To Broaden Knowledge). As the title suggests, this *juan* focuses on spreading knowledge and information about various miscellaneous topics. It does not have a unifying theme, and its topics include ancient proverbs, common beliefs, medical use of plants and herbs, diagnosis techniques, religious knowledge, calligraphy styles, smelting and fishing tips, dream interpretations, horoscope readings and magical abilities of Buddhist monks and Daoists, etc. One entry teaches how to determine the conditions of one's heart and liver through face's color while drinking (433). Another entry tells of the taboo that one should not undress, spit, relieve himself or have his hair cut when facing north (441). The various topics do not have obvious connections, but they all seem to be useful information that is rarely known and consequently should be brought to a wider audience. The implications of the title and the wide range of topics placed under the single *juan* shows that Duan intended this *juan* to be educational and informational in nature. Like *juan* ten, *juan* eleven also has practical pieces about everyday activities juxtaposed with pieces that concern the supernatural. But in general, entries that involve the same topic are grouped together.

This *juan* exhibits another recurring feature that we see among previous *juan*: a shift from a shorter descriptive mode to longer narrative mode.

Juan twelve includes only twenty five entries and is entitled “Yu zi” 語資 (Conversation Material). It first portrays actual intellectual conversations that occurred during various social gatherings. The topics of such conversations range from literature, music and sightseeing to political allusions. The *juan* then moves its focus to miscellaneous topics best characterized by their possible use as conversation material. The topics mainly involve anecdotes and rumors that regard royalty, high-ranking officials, famous poets and monks. One entry introduces the famous incident in which Tang poet Li Bai 李白 orders the favorite eunuch of the emperor Gao Lishi 高力士 to remove his shoes (486). Another entry tells of the remarkable ability of the Tang writer Zhang Wencheng 張文成—the author of the novel *Travelling to the Grotto of the Immortals* 游仙窟—who can predict one’s future through physiognomy (490). This *juan* has an obvious mundane orientation and many of its entries contain no strange content and convey a sense of gossip and small talk. The unofficial and entertaining content of *juan* twelve coincides with its title and provides a strong contrast to the educational *juan* eleven.

Juan thirteen consists of two sections “Ming ji” 冥跡 (Traces of the Netherworld) and “Shi xi” 屍窆 (Tomb of the Corpse). The titles alone suggest that the *juan* likely deals with experiences beyond the human realm. All of the thirty-five entries enclosed in this *juan* vary in length; they are all somehow concerned with death. Although all of them are not centered on the gods, ghosts, demons, or monsters, the first section with entries from 493 through 498 is made up entirely with supernatural anecdotes. Carrie Reed

correctly notes a break in the continuity of subject matter within this *juan*. The beginning of the second section “Shi xi” deviates from the supernatural content and focuses rather on mundane yet unusual mourning rituals and funeral customs. But as the second section moves towards the end, the supernatural gradually becomes the focal point again. The framework of the *juan* creates a contrast between pieces in the middle and those in the beginning and in the end, which causes the reader to be conscious of different categories of strangeness: the supernatural category and the non-supernatural category. This arrangement is itself a strange structural ordering: it not only violates the structural coherency, but upsets the reader’s expectation and creates a sense of unfamiliarity. Consequently, strangeness is extended from content to structural levels and intensifies the *juan*’s overall sense of strangeness.

Juan fourteen and fifteen should be considered together as a unit, since they share the title “Nuogao ji” 諾皋記 (Records of Nuogao). The two *juan* contain seventy entries and are preceded by a short preface that states Duan’s motivation for recording these pieces. The obscure title perfectly reflects the content of the *juan* as it focuses on entities or events that are beyond the realm of ordinary daily life. The entries included in the *juan* have an obvious orientation towards the foreign, the anomalous and the otherworldly. Many of them deal with monsters and strange occurrences that are not only physically threatening but also cognitively threatening. These horrific tales take the theme of strangeness to the next level by offering greater complexity to the narrative and deeper understanding of human world as well as the world beyond.

Juan sixteen through nineteen are four books that deal entirely with various plants and animals. They are appropriately called “Guang dongzhi” 廣動植 (An Expanded

Recording of Animals and Plants). *Juan* sixteen begins with an authorial preface in which Duan asserts his purpose for compiling these entries. In the preface, Duan argues that what the heaven and earth has generated is countless and books such as *Erya* 爾雅 and *Shanhaijing* 山海經 cannot explore all of these creations. He then states that his work focuses mainly on material or information about plants and animals that was previously unverified, unknown, or undocumented. He follows his statement with an attempt to summarize the laws and rules governing various flora and fauna between heaven and earth. He first describes the production and transformation process of various mythical and natural genera including the phoenix, dragons, birds and fish. He concludes his preface by identifying the taxonomic distinctions between different species, many of which are exotic and mythical. Preceding the four *juan* of diversified knowledge of flora and fauna, Duan's sophisticated preface not only shows the breadth of his knowledge but also offers a prelude to the extent and complexity of the content.

Juan sixteen is divided into two sections. The first part addresses various kinds of birds and is entitled "Yu pian" 羽篇 (Feathers). The second part is called "Mao pian" 毛篇 (Furs) and involves only furry animals. Most birds and animals included in this *juan* are either mythical or exotic creatures that originate from foreign origins. Even those domestic animals that are not strange per se have remarkable features or unusual phenomena associated with them. As such, the description of a phoenix is juxtaposed with the piece that claims that a peacock may become pregnant at the sound of thunder; the usage of a lion's tendons is mixed with how to physiognomize and phrenologize cattle.

The focus on the strangeness of creatures continues in *juan* seventeen whose subject matter includes water creatures, insects and snakes. The first part “Lin jie pian” 鳞介篇 (Scales and Shells), for example, introduces not only the physical characteristics of dragons, fish and shellfish but also their strange functions and abilities. One entry mentions that one kind of fish can turn seawater into delicious freshwater (676). Another entry claims that it always rains whenever a yellow fish is killed in the Sichuan area (679). The second part “Chong pian” 虫篇 (Insects) as its name suggests deals with mostly insects and worms, with a few entries on snakes. Venomous and metamorphic creatures appear frequently in this *juan*. While venom is often a feature of unfamiliar creatures of the south, metamorphosis is the result of insects transforming from other natural material.

Juan eighteen concerns woods and plants. Most entries in the first part of *juan* are informative pieces that describe a certain plant. The topics range from remarkable qualities of commonly seen plants to the exotic plants from foreign nations. When dealing with exotic plants, Duan explicitly points out the foreign location of each plant originated from and sometimes includes the name of the plant in the native language. According to Reed, the foreign places include Magadha, Persia, Malaysia, Silla, Jaguda, and even Syria.³³³ These locations seem to suggest that Duan’s notes in this *juan* are based more on extensive reading from many sources than on personal observation. The second section generally continues the descriptive mode as in the first section, but it also sprinkles the informative pieces with a few anecdotes which feature the historical and literary occurrences of a certain plant.

³³³ Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 69.

Juan nineteen is titled “Cao pian” 草篇 (Plants). Its content overlaps with the previous *juan* in that its focus on various plants. Its topics include precious fungus, rare medicinal herbs and fascinating features of plants. Entries in this *juan* are mostly short descriptive pieces with only few exceptions.

Juan twenty is called “Roujue bu” 肉攫部 (Predators of the Flesh). It focuses on carnivorous birds that hunt and kill other animals. Its entries describe the characteristics of various raptors including their unusual physical and behavior features and the method by which they are captured and trained. Eagles, hawks and falcons of different sizes and feather colors are all listed and carefully differentiated. Many birds mentioned in this *juan* include either exceptional examples of their kind or rare varieties that are only found in certain places. Considering the fact that Duan was an avid falconer himself, the breadth and depth of his knowledge on the subject is not surprising.

The twenty *juan* complete the first part of *Youyang zazhu* and the next ten *juan* constitute what we call the sequel (*xuji* 續集). *Juan* one through three are all entitled “Zhi Nuogao” 支諾皋 (Supplements to Nuogao) and they clearly resemble *juan* fourteen and fifteen of “Nuogao ji” in both content and mode of delivery. The seventy-eight entries in these *juan* are mostly narrative anecdotes of various lengths and share a fascination with the supernatural. Some entries deal with direct encounters between humans and explicit supernatural beings including deities, ghosts, monsters and spirits; others focus on more obscure and strange occurrences, such as omens, reincarnation and karmic retribution. Entries with different focuses are mixed together and form a seemingly random pattern of organization. Such arrangement shows that although Duan considers all these experience and phenomena strange, he does not clearly differentiate between the theme of

supernatural beings and the theme of supernatural occurrences. The randomness displayed through the organization, however, does not undermine the overall coherence of the *juan* in the subject matter. It enhances the strange aura of the supernatural content with a touch of disorder.

In contrast to its previous *juan*, *juan* four focuses on more mundane subject matters. Although the title of the *juan* is “Bian wu” 貶誤 (Criticizing Mistakes), its topics include not only debunking common misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding historical anecdotes and literary phrases, but it also provides explicit historical documentation for the less-known or unfamiliar origins of a diverse range of popular folklore and customs. Phrases, such as “cu rong” 蹙戎, “mao qin” 貌寢 and customs, such as evening wedding ceremonies are highly elaborated with critical documentation and historical evidence to either debunk or clarify the topic under discussion. Most entries are brief pieces, but they involve intense knowledge on many aspects of social, cultural, historical, and literary matters. The majority of the entries have no supernatural element but their strangeness comes from the fact that the knowledge these entries involve is either subversive to common expectation or previously unknown to common readers. In this particular *juan*, Duan seems to be very comfortable in revealing his presence and constantly makes reference to himself by describing his personal experiences and responses in a number of entries. These entries are typically not concerned with the strange; judging from its style, they are most likely to be the record of Duan’s own scholarly inquiry and research document.

The next two *juan* involve the same subject matters and share the same title of “Sita ji” 寺塔記 (Temples and Pagodas). They are preceded by an authorial preface that

states these two *juan* are the remainder of his previous records on temples and pagodas which Duan and his two (now dead) friends once visited ten years ago. Duan describes a total of seventeen temples in great detail. From gardens to chapels, from pavilions to pagodas, from statues to paintings, Duan carefully observes and portrays the scenery, the architect and the artwork of these temples. Duan places great emphasis on the visual effects of the artwork such as frescos, murals, and paintings and portraits. Since these two *juan* involve temples—sacred sites for religious and spiritual activities, elements of the supernatural are abundant in these entries. Almost every temple has witnessed some sort of miracle or supernatural occurrence. Temple statues are said to possess uncanny powers; trees in the courtyard of a temple seem to have spirits of their own, and flowers can fall from heaven when a monk gives a lecture on Sutra. In addition to these supernatural elements, Duan also emphasizes magic on a more mundane level, particularly the extraordinary mastery of visual illusion showed in the temple artwork. Duan often makes comments about how the portraits and statues are so vivid that they seem as though they could walk off the wall. Such artworks is so lifelike that it becomes unusual “not only by the ordinary standards of brushwork and design, but even more by their power to deceive the eye—at least in the first moment of delighted surprise. They seemed uncannily real, because they were rendered three-dimensionally; by painters who were masters of the art of solids and spaces, fully aware of the dramatic possibilities of their technique.”³³⁴ Alexander Soper’s comments precisely points out the unusual effect created by the combination of artistic skills and intents. *Juan* four and five distinguish from other *juan* in the collection in that they contain a great number of poems. The form

³³⁴ Alexander Soper, “A Vacation Glimpse of the T’ang Temples of Ch’ang-an. The Ssu-t’a chi by Tuan Ch’eng-shih”, *Arbitus Asiae* 23 (1963):18.

of poetry mixed with classic prose helps create stylistic and formal incoherence that is crucial to the making of a strange *juan*.

Juan seven comprises one authorial preface and twenty-one Buddhist miracle tales that illustrate the efficacy of the Diamond Sutra by describing the merits for chanting it. It is appropriately entitled “Jingang jing jiuyi” 金剛經鳩異 (Collections of Lost and Unusual Tales about the Diamond Sutra). In the preface, Duan describes how his father avoided a political disaster in his career because he was devoted to the Diamond Sutra. The *juan* has an obvious concern for the supernatural. For example, all entries in the *juan* involve some impressive miracle that relates to chanting one particular Sutra—the Diamond Sutra. It is interesting to note that all entries in this *juan* are positive miracle tales and describe rewards that follow religious dedication and none concerns punishment for the evil and wicked actions. In one tale, a man is saved from hell through his chanting of the Diamond Sutra despite the fact that he ate a lot of meat during his lifetime. Duan seems to be more interested in highlighting the miraculous power of the Diamond Sutra than demonstrating the inevitability of karmic punishment for the evil. This orientation is unique in collections of Buddhist tales. Reed points out, “in other miracle tale collections, an important purpose seems to instill a fear of purgatory, of retribution and of other kinds of punishment for evil acts.”³³⁵ Such difference sets this *juan* apart from other Buddhist miracle tales collection because the lack of vivid portrayal of gruesome and repugnant punishment suggests that although these tales are didactic in nature; their emphasis is not on any particular Buddhist conception or doctrine, i.e., the law of karma, but rather on the miraculous effects of one particular Sutra.

³³⁵ Reed, *A Tang Miscellany*, 75.

Juan eight, *juan* nine and *juan* ten are obviously considered by Duan to be supplementary to *juan* sixteen to nineteen and are entitled “Zhi dong” 支動 (Supplements to Animals) and “Zhi zhi” 支植 (Supplements to Plants). These three *juan* introduce animals or plants that are previously undocumented in *Youyang zazu* and emphasize their unusual characteristics or unfamiliar use. One entry describes that geese can warn against ghosts, and peacocks can ward off evil spirits (248). Another entry identifies a special kind of fish that can transform into a rat in a hundred years (282). Most creatures and plants described in these *juan* are not supernatural by nature, but Duan is able to seek out the unfamiliar in what seems the most familiar and discover strangeness that is firmly grounded in the mundane world. Some animals and plants are of foreign origin; some are species found only at certain locations; some are rare and previous, some have unusual qualities or unknown use; a few others involve historical anecdotes.

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