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Bai Xingjian and His Dream World of Sex and Love

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Bai Xingjian and His Dream World of Sex and Love

Qianheng Jiang

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ABSTRACT

The work that brought Bai Xingjian, a less-famous Tang novelist, to modern attention was “Rhapsody on the Great Joy of the Intercourse of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang,” found at Dunhuang. The authorship is somewhat questionable due to its explicit sexual descriptions. Through a comparative analysis of Bai’s thematic consistency in his fictional works, “The Tale of Li Wa” and “Stories of Three Dreams,” both of which explore sex and love as innate human desires, we see that Bai appears more plausibly to be its author. Li Wa is an unconventional woman figure divergent from Confucian norms and perceived as a dream lover among the Tang literati. “Rhapsody on the Great Joy” is influenced by Buddhism’s recognition of human nature and is a departure from conservative attitudes toward sex. Regrettably, Bai’s pioneering ideas exceeded the societal norms of his time, resulting in the suppression of his visionary discourse on sex and love. Nonetheless, Bai’s work has been adapted in later generations, serving as a bridge connecting people’s explorations of human desires.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While attending Ms. Ma's tutorial class when I was a first-year senior high school student, I encountered Bai Juyi's "Preface to the Poems Composed at the Cave of Three Visitors." Then I discovered Bai Juyi had a younger brother named Bai Xingjian, a beautiful name¹³ that captured my interest. Eager to learn more, I delved into Bai Xingjian's works, stumbling upon "The Rhapsody of the Great Joy of Intercourse between Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth." I thought to myself, "How cool it would be if I could study this work one day!" Since then, the Bai brothers appeared in my dreams from time to time. Little did I know that seven years later, my dream would come true.

Foremost, my heartfelt gratitude extends to Professor Victor Mair, my "Grandpa Mei," whose unwavering guidance and encouragement over the past three semesters have been invaluable. Upon my enrollment, I shared my ideas with Professor Mair, who, initially shocked by a girl's knowledge of such a "scandalous work," chose not to dissuade me but instead provided unceasing support in my pursuit of this scholarly interest. He even devoted a Spring 2023 class to the exploration of the Rhapsody. I am immensely grateful to my classmates, Jingyuan Lu, Ming Sun, Zhengyuan Wang, Xinyan Chen, Yizhi Geng and Sijia Liu, and my husband, Zhiquan Lin, who accompanied me on the arduous yet rewarding journey of translating the entire Rhapsody. Their dedication and cooperation were truly remarkable.

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INTRODUCTION: THE OVERSHADOWED GENIUS, BAI XINGJIAN

Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) was one of the most eminent poets of the Tang dynasty, renowned for writing poems that could be easily understood by children and the elderly and for being a leading proponent of what modern critics call the New Yuefu (lit., “Music Bureau,” i.e., ballad) Movement (*Xin Yuefu Yundong* 新樂府運動).¹ In contrast, Bai Juyi’s younger brother, Bai Xingjian 白行簡 (776–826), who was also a proponent of the New Yuefu Movement and created easily comprehensible literary works, was far less celebrated. This huge gap in the extent of the brothers’ fame, to a great degree, may be attributed to the fact that the literary genre that Bai Xingjian specialized in was *chuanqi* 傳奇,² classical short stories or fiction, a term that literally means “transmission of the strange,” rather than “poetry.”

In the history of ancient Chinese literature, poetry reached its peak in the Tang dynasty (619–907). Fiction had bloomed during the Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589) and entered a period of rapid development, which paved the way for the prospering of drama in later dynasties.³ Unlike the fictional tales of the Northern and Southern dynasties, which were mainly about spirits and ghosts,

¹ The New Yuefu Movement was a literary reform movement launched by Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), and other poets in the Tang dynasty. They advocated the restoration of the ancient system of poetry collection and carried forward the traditions of *Shijing* 詩經 (the *Book of Songs*) and the old Yuefu in the Han dynasty and the Wei dynasty, so that poetry could continue to serve the purpose of “monitoring current political affairs” and “expressing common people’s feelings.” Although the New Yuefu Movement ended in failure after Bai Juyi was relegated to a position in Jiangzhou, it still had a great influence on the development of literature in China at that time and in later generations.

² Bai Xingjian’s most famous work of fiction is “The Tale of Li Wa 李娃傳,” a story of a righteous courtesan. I will elaborate on it in Chapter 2.

³ The characters and plots in several dramas of the Yuan dynasty and Chinese operas of the Ming and Qing dynasties referred to fiction of the Tang dynasty. For example, *Story of West Chamber* (*Xixiang Ji* 西廂記) by Wang Shifu 王實甫, a Yuan drama, referred to the *Tale of Yingying* (*Yingying Zhuan* 鶯鶯傳) by Yuan Zhen 元稹, a Tang work of fiction. Both stories were the love story of Cui Yingying, a young noble lady, and Scholar Zhang, while the endings were different. In the *Tale of Yingying*, Yingying was finally abandoned by Scholar Zhang. In the *Story of West Chamber*, Yingying and Scholar Zhang overcame obstacles and eventually married. These references show that Tang fiction had a profound influence on drama in later dynasties.

short in length, and lacking in specific and detailed descriptions. By contrast, the fictional accounts of the Tang dynasty were longer, “the narrative was more subtle, the language was more flamboyant; compared with the crude and scribbled ones of the six dynasties, the traces of evolution were very clear” (“敘述宛轉，文辭華艷，與六朝之粗陳梗概者較，演進之跡甚明”).⁴ Nevertheless, compared with the poetry of the Tang dynasty, which was rich in ideas and emotions, broad in subject matter, and elegant in language, the content of Tang fiction was often limited to romance or chivalry, and it lacked the depth of thought allegedly sought by the scholarly class. Therefore, fiction, as a relatively new literary genre, was not completely recognized and respected by the scholarly class, although it was popular among the general public as a way of entertainment. The neglect and even disdain for fiction among the scholarly class remained prevalent after the Tang dynasty. For example, Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693–1766),⁵ one of the most illustrious literary figures of the Qing dynasty, reckoned fiction as “fetid oil and rotten sauce,” and declared that scholars of taste should not read them.⁶ To a great extent, this disdain led to less attention being paid to the protection and transmission of fiction than to that of poetry. Many works of Tang dynasty fiction were lost, although some spread to Japan and some were buried in caves, while the less lucky ones were burned. Writers are made famous by the works they write; conversely, if the works are not famous enough—or are even unknown—then the writers themselves never become famous. Even though Bai Xingjian was one of the most distinguished writers in the field of fiction during the Tang dynasty, he was still not as big a name as his brother, Bai Juyi.

Bai Xingjian is not an isolated case; being ignored seems to be the fate of all fiction writers of the Tang dynasty. Verifying the biographical information of Tang fiction writers can be challenging, not

⁴ Lu Xun 魯迅, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* 中國小說史略 (Beijing: Minzhu Yu Jianshe Press, 2016), 121.

⁵ Zheng Xie, also known as Zheng Banqiao 鄭板橋, was a member of the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou 揚州八怪,” referring to eight outstanding and stylish calligraphers and painters from the mid-Kangxi period to the end of the Qianlong period in the Qing dynasty (around 1685–1795). Zheng was known for his eclectic paintings of orchid and bamboo as well as his unrestrained personality.

⁶ Zheng Xie wrote in *First Letter to My Younger Brother Mo Written in the Office of Wei County* 濰縣署中寄舍弟墨第一書, “If one also has a photographic memory of works of fiction writers, various kinds of vulgar operas, and limerick poems, he is like a broken kitchen cabinet where fetid oil and rotten sauce are stored. His boorish taste is unbearable. (更有小說家言，各種傳奇惡曲，及打油詩詞，亦復寓目不忘，如破爛櫥櫃，臭油壞醬悉貯其中，其齷齪亦耐不得。)”

to mention that some fiction writers cannot even be found in official historical books. Nevertheless, Bai Xingjian, much luckier than other Tang fiction writers, was the younger brother of Bai Juyi, so his life story was preserved in the historical records of Bai Juyi. In both *Old Book of Tang* (*Jiu Tang Shu* 舊唐書)⁷ and *New Book of Tang* (*Xin Tang Shu* 新唐書),⁸ the biography of Bai Xingjian was appended after the biography of Bai Juyi. Thus, on the one hand, his name and achievements were preserved, but on the other, being an "appendix" to his brother also resulted in depriving Bai Xingjian of his independence as a person and literatus, leaving him something like a shadow of his brother. The biography of Bai Xingjian was obviously not as complete and detailed as the biography of Bai Juyi. *New Book of Tang* and *Old Book of Tang* contained only a few lines about Bai Xingjian, sketchily introducing him with basic details such as the date he attained his scholarship, when and where he was an official, and praising his writing:

《舊唐書》卷一百六十六 元稹（庞严附）白居易（弟行簡 敏中附）：

行簡，字知退。貞元末，登進士第，授秘書省校書郎。元和中，盧坦鎮東蜀，闢為掌書記。府罷，歸潯陽。居易授江州司馬，從兄之郡。十五年，居易入朝為尚書郎，行簡亦授左拾遺。累遷司門員外郎、主客郎中。長慶末，振武奏水運營田使賀拔志言營田數過實，詔令行簡按覆之。不實，志懼，自刺死。行簡寶歷二年冬病卒，有文集一十卷。行簡文筆有兄風，辭賦尤稱精

7 The *Old Book of Tang*, compiled by Liu Xu 劉昫, Zhao Ying 趙瑩 and other historians in the Later Jin dynasty during Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, is listed as one of the "Twenty-four Official Histories of China." It recorded the history of the Tang dynasty through the biographies of emperors, ministers, and scholars. The original name of the *Old Book of Tang* was the *Book of Tang*. In order to distinguish this book from the *Book of Tang* compiled in the Song dynasty, the early one is called "old," and the later one "new."

8 The *New Book of Tang*, compiled by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and other scholars in the Northern Song dynasty, is listed as one of the "Twenty-four Official Histories of China." Similar to the *Old Book of Tang*, the *New Book of Tang* was also written as collected biographies. The difference is that the *New Book of Tang* was the first to include "Military Records 兵志," which systematically discussed the military system of the Tang dynasty. This was a major innovation in the genre of Chinese official history and was followed in this by the later Song dynasty history.

密，文士皆師法之。居易友愛過人，兄弟相待如賓客。行簡子龜兒，多自教習，以至成名。當時友悌，無以比焉。⁹

Old Book of Tang, volume 166, Yuan Zhen (Pang Yan appended) Bai Juyi (younger brother Xingjian and Minzhong appended):

Xingjian, his courtesy name is Zhitui. During the late Zhenyuan (785–805) period, he passed the central court examination and was awarded the post of a proofreader of the Palace Library. During the mid Yuanhe (806–821) period, Lu Tan guarded east Sichuan and employed Xingjian as the head secretary. After the dissolution of Tan's authority, Xingjian went back to Xunyang. When Juyi was demoted to being an auxiliary official in Jiangzhou, Juyi followed his elder brother to the county. Fifteen years later, Juyi entered the court and became an imperial secretary, and Xingjian was also granted a post, as a senior political criticism consultant. Xingjian was implicated and was degraded to the rank of conjunct official in the department of the city gate and a middle officer in charge of the reception of minority ethnic groups and foreign guests. During the late Changqing period (821–825), the Zhenwu military governor reported that the number of farmlands stated by Heba Zhi, an official in charge of water transportation and farming, was more than the actual amount. The imperial decree ordered Xingjian to investigate according to the situation. The result revealed that the reported number was inaccurate. Zhi was fearful and stabbed himself to death. Xingjian died from illness in the winter of the second year of the Baoli (825–827) period and left ten volumes of literary collections. Xingjian's writing employed a style similar to his elder brother's, and his rhetoric was particularly sophisticated. The literati all learned from and imitated him. Juyi was more friendly with him than ordinary people; the brothers treated each other like guests. Xingjian had a son named

⁹ Retrieved from <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=261580&reap=gb>

Gui'er. Juyi used to teach Gui'er studies on his own until Gui'er became famous. Nothing could compare to the friendship and love between brothers at that time.¹⁰

《新唐書》列傳四十四 武李賈白：

……行簡敏而有辭，後學所慕尚。¹¹

New Book of Tang Biographies of Scholars, volume 44, Wu, Li, Jia, Bai:

...Xingjian was clever and eloquent. He was admired and revered by later scholars.¹²

These rough records and general comments in the history books are not sufficient to restore Bai Xingjian to life as he really was, that is his characteristic personality, political stance, religious beliefs, hobbies, etc. To gain a deeper understanding of what kind of person Bai Xingjian was, we need to investigate his own literary works, supplemented by the literary works created by Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and other people close to him. This will help to reestablish the image of Bai Xingjian as an independent person and literatus, and not as a subordinate of Bai Juyi.

As to the name of Xingjian, "xing 行" means "behave" and "jian 簡" means "easy" or "simple." The two characters together imply "behave simply and be a pure person." "Xingjian" originates from "Yongye" in *The Analects*: "If he cherish in himself that easy feeling, and also carry it out in his practice, is not such an easy mode of procedure excessive? (居簡而行簡，無乃大簡乎？)"¹³ In addition, the courtesy name of Bai Xingjian is Zhitui 知退. The meaning of the word "zhi 知" is "to know" and "tui 退" is "to retreat." The two characters jointly indicate "to know to retreat in time when you encounter something bad." "Zhitui" derives from "The Great Learning": "To see bad men and not be able to remove

¹⁰ Translated by the author.

¹¹ Retrieved from <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=57249>.

¹² Translated by the author.

¹³ Retrieved from <https://ctext.org/analects/yong-ye>; translated by James Legge.

them; to remove them, but not to do so to a distance: this is weakness. (見不善而不能退，退而不能遠，過也。)¹⁴

It can be speculated that Bai Xingjian's father, Bai Jigeng 白季庚 (729–794),¹⁵ expected Bai Xingjian neither to live an extravagant life nor to be a dignified minister, but anticipated that he would keep his original simple heart and stay away from bad things. Bai Xingjian's name indeed reflects his political career. From *New Book of Tang* and *Old Book of Tang*, it appears that he did not realize any great accomplishments as an official. Besides, according to the “Biography of the Maestro of Mellow Versification 醉吟先生傳” by Bai Juyi, Bai Xingjian's official position at the time of his death was only a minister in the Ministry of Food in charge of cattle, beans, wines, and the meals used for the rituals of the tombs and temples and had no practical political power.¹⁶ Bai Xingjian's name may also suggest his writing career. Despite the fact that Bai Juyi compiled a collection of Bai Xingjian's writings after his death, this collection has been lost: those of Bai Xingjian's works that have actually come down to posterity include only seven poems, twenty rhapsodies, and two works of fiction.¹⁷ Most of these poems and rhapsodies were for school or examinations, which means that they were composed in a fixed format, and the main theme of these works was clichés that praised the virtue of the emperor and the era and lacked Bai Xingjian's own point of view.¹⁸ Therefore, at first glance, it appears that Bai Xingjian's

¹⁴ Retrieved from <https://ctext.org/liji/da-xue>; translated by James Legge.

¹⁵ Bai Jigeng was a city governor of Pengcheng. Throughout his life, he married only one woman, who gave birth to Bai Juyi and Bai Xingjian.

¹⁶ “My younger brother Xingjian, whose position was the senior official in the Ministry of Food of the Department of Imperial State Affairs. (弟行簡，皇尚書膳部郎中。)” Translated by the author.

¹⁷ Thanks to Professor Huang Dahong 黃大宏 from Southwest University in China for his comprehensive compilation of Bai Xingjian's entire body of works. Poems: 《春從何處來》、《貢院樓北新栽小松》、《金在鎔》、《歸馬華山》、《夫子鼓琴得其人》、《李都尉重陽日得蘇屬國書》、《在巴南望郡南山呈樂天》; Rhapsodies: 《新月誤驚魚賦》、《斗為帝車賦》、《五色露賦》、《望夫化為石賦》、《文王葬枯骨賦》、《君臣同德賦》、《垂衣治天下賦》、《振木铎賦》、《舞中成八卦賦》、《金躍求為鎡鋸賦》、《瀘水羅賦》、《石韞玉賦》、《沽美玉賦》、《澹台滅明斬龍毀壁賦》、《以德為車賦》一、《以德為車賦》二、《車同軌賦》、《狐死正首丘賦》、《歐冶子鑄劍賦》、《天地陰陽交歡大樂賦》; Fiction: 《三夢紀》、《李娃傳》.

¹⁸ Huang, “Bai Xingjian Nianpu 白行簡年譜.”

writing career was simple and even tedious. Some might argue that Bai Xingjian's emergence as a fiction writer made his writing career change from "simple" to "not simple." Though it cannot be denied that Bai Xingjian was an excellent fiction writer, his identity as a fiction writer and the two works of fiction he created were not adequate to match Bai Juyi's achievements in poetry. It would not be justified to say that Bai Xingjian was regarded as a unique and irreplaceable talent, as an independent literatus until, in 1908, Paul Eugène Pelliot (1878–1945),¹⁹ a French archaeologist, went on an expedition to the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China, where he discovered Bai Xingjian's "Rhapsody on the Great Joy of the Intercourse of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang 天地陰陽交歡大樂賦"²⁰ among a large number of religious manuscripts in the cave of scriptures. "Rhapsody on the Great Joy"²¹ (hereafter the Rhapsody) is a work of sexology that depicts people of different identities and social classes in the act of coitus and points out the significance of sex in the harmony of the Yin and Yang of human life. For Chinese people, sex has always been (and still is) a taboo subject. In ancient China, almost no one, especially the scholarly class holding high positions, dared to describe sex in such a straightforward and vivid way as Bai Xingjian. By writing the Rhapsody, Bai Xingjian transcended the writing of the fixed format and clichés, transforming himself into a writer no one can supersede in originality.

Although there are controversies over the attribution of some of Bai Xingjian's works, I believe that he in fact wrote, or at least organized and edited them, because they share a unified theme: sex and love. Bai Xingjian, in my interpretation, endeavors to convey a message emphasizing humanity's inherent desires for sex and love, which should not be negated but rather be accepted as an integral part of human nature. Our desires give birth to our emotions and ultimately contribute to myriad colorful stories in our lives. His ideas were considerably ahead of his time, which may have resulted in the overshadowing of his talent.

¹⁹ Paul Eugène Pelliot was a French Sinologist and Orientalist best known for his explorations of Central Asia and his discovery of many important Chinese texts such as the Dunhuang manuscripts.

²⁰ Translated by the author.

²¹ The original Chinese text of "Rhapsody on the Great Joy of the Intercourse of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang 天地陰陽交歡大樂賦" used in this paper is extracted from *Faguo guojia tushu guancang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian* 法國國家圖書館藏敦煌西域文獻 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994).

1. EROTOMANIAC OR PIONEER?

From excerpts of the Rhapsody, it can be observed that, although the description of sex is straightforward, it is not coarse at all; instead, it is extremely elegant. When Bai Xingjian mentions genitalia in the rhapsody, he often refers to them by comparing them to expensive noble objects, e.g., jade. Likewise, he uses gorgeous metaphors, such as by evoking musical instruments, to demonstrate the act of sexual intercourse.

Bai Xingjian started the Rhapsody with his explanation of why the title was “the Great Joy.”

天地交接而覆載均，男女交接而陰陽順。……具人之所樂、莫樂於此。所以名大樂賦。

Heaven and earth interact and what is between them is in balance, men and women have intercourse and yin yang is smooth.... The thing that furnishes what a complete person takes pleasure from, is nothing but this. For this reason, it is named “The Rhapsody on the Great Joy.”²²

Then, Bai described the gradual maturation of sexual organs in adolescent boys and girls, marking their initial beginning of the awareness of sex.

忽皮开而头露，俄肉偃而突起。

Suddenly the foreskin opens and the tip [of the penis] appears; Swiftly the labia stretches and the bulge [of the vagina] rises.²³

In the following paragraphs, Bai portrays intercourse in a more detailed and more straightforward

²² Translated by the MVS class.

²³ Translated by the MVS class.

manner, using the examples of married couples, masters and concubines or maids, emperors and the imperial harem.

女伏枕而支腰,男据床而峻膝。玉茎乃上下来去,左右揩。阳峰直入,邂逅过于琴弦。阴干斜冲,参差磨于谷实。

The woman lies on the bed and stretches her torso. The man, leaning on his hands, supports himself on the bed with his knees bent. The jade Stalk rises and falls, comes and goes, moving to the left and to the right. Then the Yang tip enters by the proper way and meets the Lyre Strings. Moving up and down, the man's penis rubs against the Grain-Shaped Cave, probing and striking it, rubbing and pressing it.²⁴

Bai also described how the physical and mental health of single men and men traveling far away from home were harmed because they did not have a normal sex life, in contrast with men whose sex lives were satisfactory.

宿旅館而鰥情不寐……念剛腸之欲斷，往往顛狂。

[Men traveling far away from home] live in inns and can't fall asleep due to the lonely feeling of being alone.... They miss [sex] so much that the masculine intestines are going to break, so they are usually mentally unstable.²⁵

Bai also introduced into the Rhapsody adulterers, ugly women, nuns and monks who ignored cautions against lust, and homosexuals.

24 Translated by Robert Hans van Gulik (1910–1967) in *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996), 204, slightly modified.

25 Translated by van Gulik.

候其深夜天长，闲庭月满，潜来偷窃，乌知畏惮？实此夜之危危，重当时之怛怛。……未嫁者失声如惊起，已嫁者佯睡而不妨。

Waiting till the night is late and the sky is clear, in a secluded court under the full moon. He prowls into her room like a thief, how could he know fear or dread? This night is truly dangerous and risky, the worries and fears of the moment are growing heavier and heavier.... Those who are not married cry out and wake up in terror, those who are married pretend they are asleep and do not fend him off.²⁶

Though Bai Xingjian's straightforward but elegant writing may be attributed to the writing requirements of the rhapsody genre itself,²⁷ it should also be considered that Bai Xingjian, as a scholar, must not go too far down the path of sexology, or he might probably be despised by the scholarly class and regarded as being engaged in pornography. Then why did Bai Xingjian nevertheless write "Rhapsody on the Great Joy," when he knew that sexual taboos had always existed and that writing this rhapsody might even affect his reputation? What was his purpose? Unfortunately, so far, no direct historical material has been found to answer these questions. It can only be speculated upon by sorting through the possible scenarios, in the context of the time.

Most later interpretations group the Rhapsody with medical writings created to study the bodily health of ancient Chinese individuals, and most of these studies have been published in journals and books related to Chinese medicine²⁸ Even if the scope is broadened to the field of ancient Chinese sexual or erotic arts, previous scholars who studied ancient Chinese sexual arts mainly connect them

²⁶ Translated by the MVS class.

²⁷ Rhapsody *fu* 賦 is an ancient Chinese genre that integrated the features of both poetry and prose. Though it emphasizes rhythm and rhetoric like poetry, like prose, there is no fixed number of characters per sentence (except for verse *pianwen* 駢文, parallel prose, a kind of prose-poem that consisted of four-character sentences and six-character sentences). The language of rhapsody is usually extremely ornate. It first appeared in the Warring States and gradually matured by the Tang dynasty.

²⁸ For instances, see: *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Medicine*, *Asian Society for History of Medicine*, *Symposium on the History of Medicine in Asia*, etc.

with medicine, Daoism, and the Immortal Cult,²⁹ and few scholars delve into the creative motives of the authors. Although reading the Rhapsody from a medical perspective is valuable for understanding the history of Chinese medicine and its modern development, I do not think that medicine was the primary intention behind Bai Xingjian’s writing, considering that he was not a doctor and that there is no medical terminology in the rhapsody. To obtain a more precise understanding of the purpose of Bai Xingjian’s writing and achieve a deeper comprehension of the Rhapsody’s significance, it is necessary to revisit the historical context of the Tang dynasty and its influence on Bai Xingjian’s life and mindset. We also need to figure out what sex symbolized in that era, aside from its medical meaning.

Before the Tang dynasty, literary works relevant to sex were usually prepared for didactic purposes rather than to please readers. During the Tang dynasty, however, there was a large market for erotic literature with sexual themes written in a witty tone, a genre represented by Zhang Zhuo 张鷟 (658–730)’s “The Cave of the Playful Fairies” (You Xian Ku 游仙窟).³⁰ In the centuries that followed, the majority of these were lost or destroyed. Fortunately, the discovery of Dunhuang has brought many of their works back to life. In contrast to the depictions of sexual acts in “The Cave of the Playful Fairies,” those in the Rhapsody are significantly more elaborate and graphic. This has led contemporary scholars to doubt the authenticity of the text and authorship attribution, primarily due to the perception that it would be inconceivable for Bai Xingjian, a Confucian scholar and esteemed government official responsible for upholding social morality, to have authored such a tabooed text.

Yanbing Shen 沈雁冰 (1896–1981),³¹ whose pen name was Mao Dun 茅盾, an eminent author, literary scholar, and critic, argued that the Rhapsody was forged by someone else under the name of Bai Xingjian.

29 Sumiyo Umekawa, “Transmission of Sexual Positioning in Relationship with Female Orgasm,” *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Medicine*, ed. Vivienne Lo et al. (New York: Routledge, 2022), 1.

30 “The Cave of the Playful Fairies” is written in *pianwen* with four-character and six-character sentences. It tells of the author’s first-hand account of visiting Heyuan, passing through Jishi mountains. He stayed in the fairy grotto and met two women: Cui Shiniang and Wu Sao. There they drank wine, wrote poetry, and bantered. That night, the man had sex with Cui Shiniang, an event described obscurely and elegantly.

31 Yanbing Shen 沈雁冰, best known by the pen name of Mao Dun 茅盾, was a Chinese essayist, journalist, novelist, and playwright, literary critic, and the Minister of Culture (1949–1965). He had a great number of achievements in literature and

要说作《李娃传》的人同时会忽然色情狂起来，作一篇《大乐赋》，无论如何是不合情理的。至于《三梦记》述三人之梦，幻异可喜，非但没有一毫色情狂的气味，更与性欲无关。³²

It is unreasonable to say that the person who wrote “The Tale of Li Wa” would suddenly become erotomaniac and write “Rhapsody on the Great Joy” at the same time. As for “Story of Three Dreams,” it told the dreams of three people, fantastical and delightful, which was not only spared from any scent of eroticism, but also not related to lust.³³

However, these scholars may be judging the Tang dynasty case from a traditional viewpoint that developed only at a later stage.³⁴ Although the primary function of sexual literature remained didactic from the Qin dynasty to the early Tang dynasty, there was a historical shift in the elite’s approach to sexuality in the mid to late Tang dynasty. On one hand, these Tang elites presented themselves as the inheritors of Confucianism; on the other hand, they were more open about sex in practice and might even have a wild sex life in private. In this context, the function of sexual literature began to shift to entertaining their readers. Focused on entertainment, the Rhapsody not only recorded the sex life of people from all classes in that era but also formed a new aesthetic of the Tang examination elite for erotic literary works with “a sophisticated writing style, and the exploration of the themes of pleasure, aesthetics, love, and spiritual intuition.”³⁵ Bai Xingjian, as a Tang examination elite, could have been a participant in the construction of such a new aesthetic. Shen’s comparison of the “Story of Three Dreams” and the Rhapsody may not prove that Bai could not have been the author of the Rhapsody;

believed that Chinese literature should have a place in the world.

³² Yanbing Shen, “Lust Descriptions in Chinese Literature 中国文学内的性欲描写,” 1926.

³³ Translated by the author.

³⁴ Ping Yao, “Historicizing ‘Great Bliss’: Erotica in Tang China (618–907),” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22 (no. 2, 2013): 213.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

instead, the comparison serves to showcase Bai's proficiency in writing across different genres, namely, fiction and rhapsody.

I disagree with Shen's view that "The Tale of Li Wa" and "Stories of Three Dreams" have nothing to do with the Rhapsody. I believe that the two works of fiction and the Rhapsody all fundamentally discuss human nature and desire. "The Tale of Li Wa" talks about the love between Li Wa, a sensitive and righteous courtesan, and Zheng Sheng, a stereotypical literati figure, and thereby conveys the human desire for love and sex. The lifestyle of some elite literati of the time is depicted through the detailed descriptions of lust, showing how Li Wa and Zheng Sheng get along with each other. It is believed by many that "The Tale of Li Wa" initially gathered fragmented pieces of folklore, which was then organized and embellished into a text by Bai Xingjian. The original folklore may have had a tragic ending, given Li Wa's profession as a courtesan, but Bai gave the story a happy ending.³⁶ This adaptation is indicative of Bai's unwavering pursuit of "joy," which parallels his quest for the "great joy" as presented in the Rhapsody. In Chapter 2, I will analyze in detail how Li Wa, as an idealized image of a lover, embodies Bai Xingjian's quest for sex and love.

Similarly, "Stories of Three Dreams" revolves around three unusual dreams that connect people who are not physically present, thereby expressing the desire to attain what is difficult to grasp in reality. Though sex does not appear directly in the story, Bai expresses it in an implicit way. In the first dream, Liu Youqiu sees his wife sitting in the temple with a dozen other men and women, mingling, dining, talking, and laughing. Liu regards his wife's behavior as an unforgivable indiscretion. When Liu returns home, he finds that the story turns out to be a dream his wife had. This could be interpreted as the husband thinking his wife might cheat on him and instinctively wanting to discover the suspected adultery, while the wife may have had the heart to cheat but no courage to act on it, so turned it into a dream. The projection of love and sexual desire manifesting in dreams has appeared in later literary works, including Tang Xianzu's *The Peony Pavilion*, in which Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei consummate their love in a dream, and Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, in which Jia Baoyu has intercourse with the Jinghuan Fairy in a dream. It is plausible that this was a revelation from Bai to

³⁶ Glen Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa: Study and Critical Edition of a Chinese Story from the Ninth Century* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983).

later generations as well. In short, it is likely that Bai explored dreams as a vehicle for desire through “Stories of Three Dreams.” This again corresponds to what Bai argues in the Rhapsody: that intercourse is the “great joy.”

2. LI WA: THE DREAM LOVER IN THE VISION OF BAI XINGJIAN

Considering the prevailing perception that a large number of premodern Chinese novels and plays may originate from orally transmitted folkloric narratives, which often took the form of *shuoshu* 說書 (telling books), the alleged authors of these works may not be their sole original creators but rather may have functioned more like editors and “second creators.”³⁷ Despite the absence of definitive historical documentation and the elusiveness of knowing whether the initial medium that transmitted the original folklore of Li Wa was oral or written, it was believed that “The Tale of Li Wa” may have undergone multiple iterations before reaching its current form.³⁸ As the earliest text of “The Tale of Li Wa” was handed down from the Song dynasty rather than the Tang dynasty when it was composed, authorship attribution may also be questionable. Nevertheless, Bai Xingjian was still most likely the author who applied a definitive structure to the original folklore, combining his personal experience with a retelling of the story of Li Wa.³⁹ It is believed that the original folklore may have had a tragic ending, because Li Wa was a courtesan, an occupation forbidden to Confucian women of conventional morality, but Bai Xingjian gave the story a happy ending. In addition, he also attached a prologue and an epilogue for Li Wa.⁴⁰

The textualization process of novels and plays invariably transpires under the impact of the contemporary cultural milieu. Accordingly, I believe that the representation of the courtesan persona within the narratives of novels and plays, exemplified by Li Wa, transcends a historical archetype or a

³⁷ Leo Tak-hung Chan, “Text and Talk: Classical Literary Tales in Traditional China and the Context of Casual Oral Storytelling,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 33–63.

³⁸ Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*.

³⁹ Sarah Allen, “Tales Retold: Narrative Variation in a Tang Story,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66, no. 1 (2006): 105–43.

⁴⁰ Dudbridge, *The Tale of Li Wa*.

real-life portrayal of courtesan existence, the world with which Bai Xingjian and his friends had close connections. It can be an amalgamation of courtesan figures that pervaded the life experiences of the people during that period, coalescing into the imagining of an idealized feminine construct, thus yielding a synthesized and collective ideational embodiment. The image of courtesans as female protagonists in novels and plays, which spanned successive dynasties, demonstrates a nuanced responsiveness to historical shifts and thus presents the image of an ideal female lover such as literati longed for and at the same time embodying the role that people expected women to play in a conjugal relationship.

It is imperative to understand the role distinctions inherent in the positions of a lover (情人) and a wife (妻子). Traditionally, a qualified wife was mandated to accord primacy to established ethical standards, epitomized by the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues (*san cong si de* 三從四德),⁴¹" while attributes such as talent, beauty, and sexual allure were less important and were even perceived as latent agents of familial disharmony: exceptional talent and independent thinking might emancipate a wife from the control of her husband; a wife with a bewitching appearance and sexual attractiveness might attract unwarranted covetousness, thereby precipitating undesirable consequences for the conjugal unit. Conversely, within the purview of a lover's role, the ethical strictures that rigorously bind a wife could be utterly jettisoned, and attributes that were construed as leading to instability can paradoxically accentuate her allure. As Daniel Hsieh argues in "Desire, Fantasy, and the Ideal Woman": "Traditional morality and fears did not lessen natural emotions and instincts; rather they forced them into strange, sometimes wonderful, sometimes tragic forms and directions."⁴² Owing to the conspicuous absence of moral encumbrances, a lover oftentimes perpetually occupied the role of a paramour, precluded from ascending to the status of wife. It was often concubines, maids, courtesans, and prostitutes who assumed the role of lovers. The role difference between wife and lovers is discussed in detail in the Rhapsody.

⁴¹ Three Obediences and Four Virtues is a set of moral principles and social code of behavior for women in Imperial China. Women were to obey their fathers, husbands, and sons, and to be modest and moral in their actions and speech.

⁴² Daniel Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008).

For a man, with his wife, the act of sexual intercourse functioned more as a Yin and Yang ceremony that consummated the relationship, rather than as purely physical pleasure.

既納徵於兩姓，聘交禮於同杯。於是青春之夜，紅燭之下，冠纓之際，花須將卸。……觀其童開點點，精漏汪汪。六帶用拭，承筐是將。然乃成於夫婦，所謂合乎陰陽。

The gifts have already been accepted by the two families, and they are betrothed, engaged by sharing a cup. Thereupon, on a young spring night, under the red candle, when (the male) wears the crown and tassels, and the floral filaments were about to be removed...

Seeing the drops of her broken hymen and the profusion of his ejaculated semen, she wiped them with a green girdle and stored them in a basket. After this, they then became complete husband and wife. This is called conforming to Yin Yang.⁴³

By contrast, with lovers, sex is a way of pursuing a sense of spiritual freshness and excitement, often perceived as absent within the marital obligations, thereby transcending mere physical gratification.

或有因事而遇，不施床鋪；或牆畔草邊，亂花深處。只恐人知，烏論禮度？或鋪裙而藉草，或伏地而倚柱。心胆驚飛，精神恐懼。當匆据之一回，勝安床上百度。更有久闕房事，常嗟獨自。不逢花艷之娘，乃遇人家之婢。摩挲乳肚，□滑膩之肥濃；掀起衣裳，散氛氲之香氣。共此婢之交歡，實娘子之無異。

Sometimes people encounter each other while handling other matters, so they have no time to set up a bed. Sometimes next to a wall and beside weeds, or deep among the dense flowers. They only fear that people would know about their affair, they do not

⁴³ Translated by the MVS class.

care about decency. Sometimes they spread her skirts to lie on the grass, sometimes they lie on the ground or lean on a column. They are terrified out of their wits. Occupying her in a rush one time surpasses doing it a hundred times in an undisturbed bed. All the more so when some people are deprived of the affairs of the chamber for a long time, often sighing in their loneliness. Perhaps he does not encounter a girl as gorgeous as a flower but rather meets a maid from another family. Rubbing and caressing her breasts and belly, which are smooth, tender, fleshy, and dense, he lifts her clothes, dispensing the fragrance of the mist. Sharing this moment of intercourse with this maid, it is not at all inferior to the mistress.⁴⁴

Unconventionally, Li Wa, however, breaks the line between lover and wife: the story ends with her going from being a lover to a wife with the approval of Zheng Sheng's family. In other words, she fulfills both the man's expectation of a virtuous wife and the sense of excitement and freshness he seeks. Li Wa seems to subvert the literary perception of lovers before the Tang dynasty. This may indicate an evolution in the aesthetic perception of women by male literati during the Tang.

The Tang dynasty witnessed a proliferation of novels and plays revolving around talented scholars and enchanting women (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人), a trend intricately interwoven with the dynamics of the imperial examination system. As the imperial examinations emerged as the preeminent avenue for selecting individuals of scholarly prowess to serve in the bureaucratic echelons, a multitude of aspiring scholars converged upon the imperial capital, conventionally Chang'an 長安, for the purpose of undertaking these examinations. This influx of scholars, in turn, engendered a burgeoning environment for the flourishing of various urban industries, including the sex trade. The central figure in these literary compositions, the *jiaren* (佳人), frequently featured in the role of heroine, exhibits a recurring characteristic in being drawn from a non-aristocratic lineage. Notably, a considerable subset of these widely disseminated characters hailed from the courtesan class. The narratives of "*caizi jiaren*" often bear the unmistakable vestiges of journeys undertaken, urban livelihoods pursued, and interpersonal encounters navigated. These experiences frequently constituted

⁴⁴ Translated by the MVS class.

the early phase for aspiring scholar-candidates prior to their formal assimilation into the bureaucratic system. A notable portion of these narratives converge upon the experiences befalling young male protagonists within the informal domains of urban life—markets, entertainment establishments, and brothels. This narrative construct finds its profound moorings in the historical and sociocultural context of Chang’an during the ninth century, an epoch that holds pivotal significance within the broader schema of the imperial examination system.⁴⁵ It was in the milieu of Chang’an that the tales of *caizi jiaren* were nurtured, created, refined, and disseminated.

In the course of creating the genre, these literati, definitely including Bai Xingjian, deconstructed the original idea of the lover before the Tang dynasty and added the qualities of a wife to construct the ideal lover. The erstwhile image of the lover, formerly encapsulated by legendary figures such as Daji 妲己, the femme fatale, or Luoshen 洛神, the unattainable goddess, underwent a gradual transformation: the lover appears in the Tang narratives as more than just a villainous or remote figure. A notable instance of this phenomenon can be observed in “The Tale of Li Wa.” How could Li Wa, a courtesan who seemed not to fit the standards of a wife, end up being the legitimate wife of Zheng Sheng and recognized by readers as virtuous?

The principal rationale underlying this transformation lies in the middle to late stages of the story, where Li Wa’s conduct follows moral rectitude—a stark divergence from her initial vocation as a courtesan, reliant on extracting money from men. Li Wa emerges as Zheng Sheng’s steadfast support, nursing him back to health after he has been expelled and beaten by his father and encouraging him to reembark on his pursuit of success in the imperial examination. The character traits of care, rectitude, and morality exhibited by Li Wa—qualities inherently associated with the notion of a wife—contrast with the prevailing portrayal of a courtesan as a lover. In the case of Li Wa, the designations of “lover” and “wife” coalesce harmoniously. Nevertheless, this ideal lover, imagined as a fusion of lover and wife, appears confined to the realm of fictional constructs. Even figures such as Bai Xingjian, the author of “The Tale of Li Wa,” and the literati who maintained close associations with courtesans, were prevented from taking a courtesan as a wife, irrespective of the extent to which the courtesan might have exhibited qualities congruent with the role of a wife. I suggest that these prototypes may have undergone multiple

45 Linda Rui Feng, “Chang’an and Narratives of Experience in Tang Tales,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71, no. 1 (2011): 35–68.

embellishments over the transmission of the story, formulating an archetype of female lovers, a product of idealization by the literati.

The depiction of the idealized female lover within these narratives also bears the contemplations of male literati regarding the structures of patriarchal society and the intricate delineation of their own roles. "The Tale of Li Wa" embodies the narrative of the misguided ambitions of a youthful scholar and represents a distortion of the norms inherent in the scholar's societal stratum. As Tsai suggests, "...alarmingly, the energy for maintaining patriarchal social order is diverted for sexual pleasure, as we will see later to be controlled by a socially inferior, subordinate element in this order."⁴⁶ That is, the fact that male literati of higher social class were lured astray by courtesans of lower social class could lead to a corruption of Confucian precepts.⁴⁷ For Tang literati, paramount among the pursuits of their lifetime aspirations was the attainment of eminence as erudite scholars, marriage with women of distinguished clans, and the prosperity of their own familial households.⁴⁸ Zheng Sheng's affection for Li Wa evidently presented a formidable impediment to the realization of these life pursuits. Additionally, Li Wa, despite her low-class background, assumed a position of ascendancy within their relationship. While their relationship did not entirely subvert the traditional paradigm of women's subordination to men, however, it posed a challenge to the established Confucian principles of men and women. The way Bai Xingjian demonstrates this unconventional relationship appears to be a subtle protest against established traditional Confucian tenets. Implicit in this narrative stance is the

46 S.-C. Kevin Tsai, "Ritual and Gender in the 'Tale of Li Wa,'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 26 (2004): 107.

47 Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Literature*.

48 "The World Inside a Pillow": Establishing a lofty reputation, rising to high-ranking positions such as Prime Minister or Great General, dining at an esteemed table, selecting words to listen to, thus enhancing the prosperity of the clan and enriching the family. (《枕中记》“建功樹名，出將入相，列鼎而食，選聲而聽，使族益昌而家益肥。”)；*Anecdotes of the Sui and Tang*: Xue Yuanchao said, 'I am not talented, yet I am exceedingly rich. But I have three regrets in my life: firstly, failing to attain the rank of a successful candidate in the imperial examinations; secondly, not marrying a woman from one of the five esteemed families; and thirdly, not having the opportunity to contribute to the national historical records. (《隋唐嘉話》薛元超“吾不才，富貴過人，平生有三恨，始不以進士擢第，不娶五姓女，不得修國史.....”)

contention that the pursuit of both romantic and sexual inclinations is inherent to human nature, and this innate propensity should not be unduly circumscribed by rigid ritualistic conventions. Regrettably, however, Bai Xingjian grapples with an inherent challenge: the paradox between individual values and the broader social ideology. Consequently, this love still had to be justified by the established rituals: both in the beginning and after the climax, the author finds it necessary, at the expense of plot economy, to recount in great detail the couple's return to social honor and virtue.⁴⁹

To conclude, the image of the idealized lover created by Bai Xingjian, integrating the lover and the wife, emerges as a product of the Tang literati's endeavor to depart from conventional norms while simultaneously grappling with their inability to entirely extricate themselves from the Confucian propriety paradigm.

3. TANG BUDDHIST INFLUENCE ON BAI XINGJIAN

Given Bai Xingjian's tentative bid to extricate himself from the constraints of Confucian propriety, it was inevitable that he would look to espouse ideas that diverged from Confucianism to substantiate his explorations of human nature. His choice was Buddhism, and the origin of this mindset was intricately tied to the era he lived in. Bai lived during a crucial juncture in the Tang dynasty's history, namely, the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763),⁵⁰ which marked the transition of the Tang dynasty from a period of prosperity to its decline. During this time, Buddhism wielded a significant political, economic, and cultural impact on the empire. Bai Xingjian, a Buddhist himself, authored the Rhapsody, and it later was discovered in a Buddhist sutra cave in Dunhuang. Considering both of these facts, it is clear that Buddhism had a significant influence on his life and work, and this demands considerable attention. In

49 Timothy C. Wong, "Self and Society in Tang Dynasty Love Tales," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99 (no. 1, 1979): 96.

50 The An Shi Rebellion was an uprising against the Tang dynasty of China around the mid-point of the dynasty (from 755 to 763), with an attempt to replace it with the Yan dynasty. The rebellion was originally led by An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757), a Turko-Sogdian general officer of the Tang military system. In addition to military activity and deaths from battle, the event also was immensely destructive because of population dislocations and significant associated population loss from famine.

the ensuing discussion, I shall elucidate the development of Buddhism during the Tang dynasty and its potential influence on Bai Xingjian and his composition of the "Rhapsody on the Great Joy."

To comprehend the influence of Buddhism on the Tang dynasty's literati and its evolution, it is imperative to examine the rulers' attitude toward the religion. The Tang emperors, for the most part, did not show an excessive interest in Buddhism. Although Daoism was officially declared the first ideology,⁵¹ Confucianism remained the primary guiding ideology of the Tang rulers. Consequently, the conflict between religions in the Tang dynasty can be summarized as a check and balance between Daoism and Buddhism. Despite the initial anti-Buddhist sentiments of the first two emperors of the Tang dynasty, Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (reign: 618–626) and Emperor Taizong 太宗 (reign: 626–649), were astute enough to acknowledge that Buddhism had devout followers across all societal levels, making it impossible for the court to ignore or suppress it without provoking a strong reaction.⁵² In addition, the erudite and esteemed monk Xuanzang 玄奘's personal charisma had a significant impact on the attitudes of Emperor Taizong and Emperor Gaozong (reign: 649–683) toward Buddhism.⁵³

During the reign of Wu Zetian 武則天 (690–705), Buddhism attained an unparalleled level of prestige and influence in China. Wu Zetian went so far as to rescind the honorific title Emperor Xuanyuan bestowed upon Laozi, thereby positioning Buddhism as the preeminent religion of the state. Besides Wu Zetian herself being a devout Buddhist, her motives for doing so were primarily pragmatic, as Confucianism was generally opposed to women in positions of power, and Daoism was under the patronage of the Li family. Thus, she sought to utilize Buddhism as a religious justification for her own rule by drawing upon the "Great Cloud Sutra 大雲經" as a precedent, showing a female ruler succeeding her father in India. After Wu Zetian ascended the throne in 690, she demanded that monks in temples all over the country needed to disseminate "Sutra of the Great Cloud" to the common people. Many new temples were also built during that time. The monk in charge of this sermon campaign was Xue Huaiyi

⁵¹ According to legend, the founder of Daoism, Laozi, was surnamed Li. Since the royal family of the Tang dynasty had the same surname, Li, they claimed to be the descendants of Laozi. Li Yuan 李淵, the founding emperor of the Tang dynasty, posthumously named Laozi as Xuan Yuan Emperor 玄元皇帝.

⁵² Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

⁵³ Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang*.

薛懷義 (662–695), the abbot monk of Baima Temple (“White Horse Temple”) 白馬寺 and one of the most famous of Wu Zetian’s lovers. He added many commentaries to “Sutra of the Great Cloud,” extolling the idea that Wu Zetian was the reincarnation of Maitreya Buddha, the empress born to illuminate the people, as prophesied in the Sutra. However, Xue was not a true believer in Buddhism; his private life was extravagant and debauched, and he did not follow the precepts a Buddhist should. Xue fell out of favor with Wu Zetian and died soon after.⁵⁴

Though mainstream scholarship considers “Sutra of the Great Cloud” to be a forgery, the Sutra nevertheless served as the basis for Wu Zetian’s ascension to the throne, thus fulfilling the procedural legal requirements for being a legitimate ruler of the empire. Wu Zetian’s example represents an extreme yet not isolated case of emperors in the Tang dynasty enabling monks to participate in politics or leveraging their religious influence to consolidate their power. In turn, Buddhist monks sought to increase their religious power by associating with the ruling class. Notable monks such as Fa Zang 法藏 (643–712)⁵⁵ of the Huayan Sect 華嚴宗⁵⁶ and Shenxiu 神秀 (606–706)⁵⁷ of the Zen Sect 禪宗⁵⁸

⁵⁴ As for how Xue Huaiyi died, stories differ. *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) says that Wu Youning assassinated Xue, and the *Old Book of Tang* says that Princess Taiping assassinated Xue.

⁵⁵ Fa Zang was the actual founder of the Huayan Sect, known within the sect as the Three Patriarchs 三祖. He translated and studied Buddhist sutras and was deeply trusted by Wu Zetian. He was one of the Buddhist elite representatives, according to Weinstein.

⁵⁶ The Huayan sect is a Mahayana Buddhist tradition that developed in China during the Tang dynasty. The Huayan worldview is based primarily on the Buddhāvataṃsaka Sutra (in Chinese, *Huayan Jing* 華嚴經). The ultimate teaching of the Buddha, according to the Huayan tradition, is the Flower Garland Sutra. In addition to this text, Huayan draws upon other important sources such as the Mahayana Awakening of Faith, and the Madhyamaka and Yogacara philosophical traditions. The doctrines of universal interpenetration, nature-origination (which holds that all phenomena arise from a single ontological source), and the omnipresence of Buddhahood are central to Huayan teachings. These doctrines had a profound impact on Chinese Buddhism and extended their influence on other regions of East Asia as well.

⁵⁷ Shenxiu was a disciple of Hongren (one of the five patriarchs of Zen Buddhism) and the founder of Northern Zen Buddhism. He was the teacher of Wu Zetian, Emperor Zhongzong, and Emperor Ruizong and had the title “national teacher.” He was also, according to Weinstein, one of the representatives of the Buddhist elite.

⁵⁸ This refers to Northern Zen, founded by Shenxiu. Centering on Chang’an and Luoyang, Shenxiu instructed his disciples in a step-by-step approach that led to a gradual understanding of Buddhism, known as “gradual enlightenment,” the

frequently visited the imperial palace, befriended princes and nobles, and were granted titles. The growing political influence of Buddhist monks led to a large number of middle-classed bureaucrats and literati scrambling to connect with them. Many Confucian literati even became lay disciples of famous monks and accepted Bodhisattva precepts, motivated primarily by the desire to reap political benefits. Lu Xun commented on such a phenomenon:

晉以來的名流，每一個人總有三種小玩意，一是《論語》和《孝經》，二是《老子》，三是《維摩詰經》，不但采作談資，並且常常做一點注解。唐有三教辯論，後來變成大家打諢；所謂名儒，做几篇伽藍碑文也不算什麼大事⁵⁹。

The celebrities since the Jin dynasty always had three kinds of gadgets: first were the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Book of Filial Piety*, second was *Laozi*, and third was the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*. In the Tang dynasty, there was a debate on the three religions, which later became a joke: even the so-called famous Confucians doing a few Sangharama ("temple; monastery") inscriptions was no big deal.

Lu Xun's comment criticizes the tendency of Tang literati to attach themselves to Buddhism for political power and further points out the profound influence of Buddhist thought on the works of Tang literati. Considering this historical background, there is no doubt that Bai Xingjian's writing should be influenced by Buddhism. The influence of Buddhism on the literati was not one-way. Many literati would create literary works that incorporated the three religions, which also contributed to the localization of Buddhism in China. It is of significance to recognize that the core of religion is still faith, while for literature it is aesthetic activity. Therefore, there exists a fundamental distinction between religion and literature. Artistic works that directly promote religion may face challenges in achieving a higher level of artistry, while creating better works might be possible by maintaining some distance

counterpart and opposite of the "sudden enlightenment" of the Southern Zen sect.

59 "Chi Jiao 吃教," *Zhun Feng Yue Tan* 准風月談, 1934.

from faith and utilizing the resources provided by religion to engage in creative endeavors.⁶⁰ Despite the Tang literati's lack of profound devotion and steadfastness toward religious faith, their role and contribution to the propagation of religion and the development of literature were not entirely negative.

In general, from the early to mid-Tang dynasty, Buddhists tried to expand their ideological position by adapting their teachings to traditional Chinese ethical and political concepts, which further contributed to the expansion of Buddhist thought among people of all classes. Besides, the construction of Buddhist temples and activities related to Buddhism also contributed to economic development.

In 710, Emperor Ruizong 睿宗 (reign: 710–712), soon after his accession to the throne, issued an edict depriving Buddhism of the priority it had gained over Daoism in 691. In 712, Emperor Xuan Zong 玄宗 (712–756), having realized the extent of the ideological and economic encroachment of Buddhism on the state in the preceding period, took a series of measures to suppress Buddhism. He forbade nobles from building new temples to evade taxes and forbade laymen from casting statues of Buddha and copying sutras. Monks and nuns were allowed to preach to the faithful only in the temples, and the content could only be related to the precepts. Nonetheless, Emperor Xuan Zong still respected esteemed great monks and supported the translation of Buddhist sutras. Stanley Weinstein writes in *Buddhism under the Tang* that Xuanzong was interested in these monks, specifically Bu Kong 不空,⁶¹ because they were practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism, just when Esoteric Buddhism had become popular. Weinstein suggests that Xuanzong became interested in Tantra because he had been fascinated by Daoist astrology, incantations, and illusions, and that Tantra had many similarities to Daoism in this regard. The practice of Esoteric Buddhism is called Tantra, which is a meditation method taught in secret, one-on-one, between a master and a disciple, hence its Chinese name is *mi zong* 密宗, referring to secret sect.

It is worth noting that there is a form of Tantric practice called tantric sexual yoga (in Chinese, *shuangshen fa* 雙身法, referring to dual-body practice between a man and a woman). Dual-body practice is a method of performing yogic practices through direct sexual acts or imagined sexual acts to

⁶⁰ Sun Changwu, "Tangdai Wenxue Yu Fojiao, Daojiao," in *Tangdai Wenxue Yu Fojiao: Sun Changwu Wenji* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2021), 517 (electronic version).

⁶¹ Amoghavajra.

achieve meditative liberation. This practice can be traced back to as far as a similar practice in Vedicism in India. Its Chinese name is alleged to be *Da Le Xiufa* 大樂修法, meaning the practice of the Great Joy, which coincides with the title of Bai Xingjian’s “Rhapsody on the Great Joy.” According to Anuttarayoga Tantra, a school of Tantric Buddhism that originated in India and is considered by Tibetan Buddhism to be the highest stage of Tantric Buddhism, the dual-body practice is not a sexual act performed simply for the sake of lust but a special meditation practice (in Tibetan Tantra it is called *yab yum* [“father-mother”]). The practitioners believe the practice, which is related to *qi* (the circulating life force), chakras, and luminous points in the human body, is the fastest shortcut to immediate bodily realization. They advocate the idea that to be free from desire and happiness in the midst of desire is true liberation from birth and death, as is written in *Treatise on the Foundation for Yoga Practitioners* (*Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* 瑜珈師地論⁶²):

……苦樂相雜故有淫欲。男女展轉二二交會不淨流出。欲界諸天雖行淫欲無此不淨。然於根門有風氣出煩惱便息。四大王眾天。二二交會熱惱方息。如四大王眾天。三十三天亦爾。時分天。唯互相抱熱惱便息。知足天。唯相執手熱惱便息。樂化天。相顧而笑熱惱便息。他化自在天。眼相顧視熱惱便息。

... The mixture of suffering and happiness is the cause of lust. Men and women roll over in bed and have intercourse in couples, and the unclean things⁶³ flow out. But although each heaven of the Desire Realm⁶⁴ practices lust, there is no flowing out of such unclean things. However, when the breath comes out of the Root Gates,⁶⁵ the worries

⁶² *Treatise on the Foundation for Yoga Practitioners* is a large and influential doctrinal compendium created in the fourth-fifth centuries, associated with Sanskrit Mahāyāna Buddhism (particularly Yogācāra). It is a massive treatise that brings together a wealth of material stemming from mainstream as well as Mahāyāna Buddhism.

⁶³ “Unclean things” may refer to body fluid such as semen, vaginal secretion, etc.

⁶⁴ Kāmadhātu.

⁶⁵ Root Gates refer to eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, which leak out all sorts of worries and lead to the portals of all sorts of delusional dusts.

immediately subside. At the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings,⁶⁶ only when, by having intercourse in couples, heat and worries can subside. Not just the Four Heavenly Kings, it is also the same at the Heaven of Belonging to Thirty-Three.⁶⁷ At the Heaven of Time Division,⁶⁸ by embracing each other, heat and worries right then subside. At the Heaven of Contentment,⁶⁹ only by holding each other's hands, heat and worries right then subside. At the Heaven of Happiness Formation,⁷⁰ by looking at each other and smiling, heat and worries right then subside. At the Heaven of Others Formation Freedom,⁷¹ by looking each other in the eyes, heat and worries right then subside.⁷²

This passage describes the cause of lust as an inability to relieve oneself of a mixture of pleasure and pain. Mortals relieve their lust by having unclean fluids flowing out during their coitus. In contrast, the devas, who are more advanced than humans, are not compelled to expel unclean fluids to alleviate the pangs of lust. Varied devas of different rankings employ distinct methods to mitigate their desires, with gods of the highest ranking requiring minimal body interactions to satiate their lustful urges. This discourse could be construed by the ascetics as advocating emulation of the devas' detachment from physical indulgence to foster spiritual enlightenment. Conversely, when viewed through the lens of Bai Xingjian, an opposing sentiment emerges: mortals do not need necessarily to contravene their inherent cravings for intimacy to approach divinity. The "mortality" of the mortals should be respected. *Natura Natarans* and the great happiness attained by which deserves proper appreciation. Considering the evidence of Bai Juyi's Buddhist beliefs and study on the sutras of different Buddhist sects, it is likely that Bai Xingjian, like his brother, was influenced by Tantric Buddhism. However, neither of the Bai brothers

66 Cāturmahārājikakāyika.

67 Trāyastriṃśā.

68 Yāma.

69 Tuṣita.

70 Nirmāṇarati.

71 Parinirmita-vaśavartin.

72 Translated by the author.

adhered strictly to the orthodox principles of Buddhism. Their attitude in everyday life reflected a propensity to selectively assimilate elements from various ideologies and integrate them into their personal practices in a manner that suited their individual needs and pursuits.

While Bai Xingjian may not always have been a devout Buddhist, his contemplations regarding the correlation between Buddhism and human desires are evident in the Rhapsody. This part declares that, if lust could not be dissolved, the minds of monks and nuns would interfere with their practices:

求净舍俗〈大僧也〉，髡发剃鬚……思心不触于佛法，手持岂忘于念珠〈女也〉？

Seeking purity and abandoning worldly desire (this refers to the great monks), cutting off their hair and shaving their beards....Their desires do not touch the Buddha's teachings, but they never forget to hold the prayer beads in their hands (This refers to women.)?⁷³

After the Tianbao period (742–756), the conflicts among members of the ruling class of the Tang dynasty intensified, and, in 755, the An-Shi Rebellion broke out. While the An-Shi Rebellion led to the collapse of the social order and economy of the Tang dynasty, it also forced Emperor Su Zong (reign: 756–762) to seek the support of Buddhism to suppress the rebellion. To fund the continuous warfare, imperial officials sold ordination certificates to individuals seeking to become monks without restrictions. The ruling class had to strive for the support of Buddhist monks with the local military governors. Emperor Su Zong frequently even held religious ceremonies in the imperial palace for the blessing of Buddha. Superficially, Buddhism experienced a resurgence during this period; however, the rebellion itself proved disastrous for the overall development of Buddhism in the empire⁷⁴: the number of monks and nuns doubled due to the indiscriminate issuance of ordinations, but their quality declined greatly; the war led to the destruction of Buddhist buildings, and, even worse, disrupted the

⁷³ Translated by the MVS class.

⁷⁴ Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang*, 62–63.

transmission of Buddhist scholarship, thereby bringing an end to the era of “elite” philosophical Buddhist schools that had flourished prior to the conflict. Consequently, Buddhism underwent a transformation from a philosophical and intellectually driven tradition to a more accessible and “popular” religion.

The Bai brothers were born after the An-Shi Rebellion, the period of popularization of Buddhism, during the reign of Emperor Dai Zong (762–779). Emperor Dai Zong, regarded as the most ardent Buddhist follower of the Tang rulers after Wu Zetian, was so supportive of Buddhism, both materially and ideologically, that such profligate support was seen by Confucian historians as a harbinger of economic ruin. The deterioration of the national financial situation prompted Emperor De Zong (779–805) gradually to enact a series of decisive economic reforms after ascending to the throne. Among these measures was a reduction in financial support for Buddhism aimed at enhancing the financial stability of the central government. However, during the brief reign of Emperor Shun Zong (805) and the subsequent reign of Emperor Xianzong (805–820), the imperial rulers displayed renewed enthusiasm for Buddhism. Despite the efforts of several emperors after the An-Shi Rebellion to reduce the public’s interest in Buddhism, the fervor of the people for this religion remained undiminished. The entire nation experienced a resurgence of Buddhist fervor during the reign of Emperor Xianzong. As recorded by Bai Juyi, the whole court at that time was “dressing in Confucian uniforms externally and practicing Buddhist teachings internally (外服儒风，内宗梵行).”⁷⁵ Consequently, Confucianists in the imperial court could no longer tolerate the status quo and attempted to challenge it. The most famous and influential among them was Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824).⁷⁶ At first, Han Yu’s anti-Buddhist proposals offended the emperor and were not adopted; he was relegated to the position of governor of Chaozhou. Han Yu launched the Classical Prose Movement 古文運動,⁷⁷ which was ostensibly a literary

75 《和夢遊春詩一百韻》。

76 Han Yu, commonly known by his posthumous name Han Wengong 韓文公, was a Chinese essayist, poet, philosopher, and politician during the Tang dynasty who significantly influenced the development of Neo-Confucianism and deeply opposed Buddhism. He is often considered to be among China’s best prose writers. His prose pieces were very straightforward and easy to understand, and the logic and reasoning were very powerful.

77 The Classical Prose Movement of the late Tang dynasty advocated clarity and precision rather than the *pianwen* that had been popular since the Han dynasty. The advocates of the movement criticized *pianwen* for being overly ornate at the

reform that advocated ancient texts and opposed *pianwen* ("parallel prose") 駢文, while it was actually a movement to promote his political ideas and Confucianism. It was not until twenty years after Han Yu's death that the anti-Buddhist proposal was adopted and implemented by the emperor.

What were the Bai brothers doing at that time? They were preoccupied with the New Yuefu Movement, which had objectives divergent from those of the Classical Prose Movement. The latter aimed to preserve the hegemony of the upper class and implement top-down reforms, while the former drew inspiration from the social realism of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770)⁷⁸ and sought to address the social ills and struggles faced by the common people through poetry. However, the implementation of reforms often resulted in the oppression of the lower classes, due to corruption and the abuse of power. Consequently, there was a misalignment between the interests of the upper and lower classes, leading to difficulties in implementing reforms effectively. While a considerable number of individuals in the mid to late Tang dynasty turned to Buddhism as a means of tax evasion, there were still a lot of people seeking spiritual solace in Buddhism, including the Bai brothers. The Bai brothers' formative years were marked by displacement and hardship, and they came of age during a tumultuous and crisis-ridden era. Since there are so few records of Bai Xingjian, we can only infer the relationship between Bai Xingjian and Buddhism through Bai Juyi's life and his experiences with Buddhism.

Bai Juyi found himself stymied by the pervasive corruption and political chaos at the time even though he had the aspirations to achieve great things. As internal strife within the dynasty intensified following the Changqing era (821–825), Bai Juyi became acutely aware of the struggles of ordinary people to survive amidst rampant crises. This left him feeling both indignant and powerless, while the fierce factional struggles in the imperial court led him to adopt a negative outlook focused on avoiding trouble and protecting himself. Consequently, characterizing his embrace of Buddhism as motivated solely by self-interest is insufficient and fails to capture the complexities of his situation. In fact, Bai Juyi turned to Buddhism as a means of achieving self-improvement, which reflected the contradictions and

expense of content. The aim of the advocates was to follow the spirit of pre-Han prose rather than to imitate it directly. They used elements of colloquial language to make their writings more direct.

⁷⁸ Du Fu was one of the most prominent poets of the Tang dynasty in China. He was renowned for his aspiration to serve the nation and its people, a sentiment that was reflected in his poetry through a strong realistic style, shaped by his experiences during the An-Shi Rebellion. Chinese literary critics have revered him as a Poet-Sage 詩聖.

ideological struggles of his era. It was precisely these factors that led to a series of contradictions in his attitudes toward Buddhism.⁷⁹ Bai Juyi was an eclectic Buddhist who did not adhere to any one sect, while it was the Hongzhou Sect of Southern Zen⁸⁰ that had the greatest influence on him. Bai Juyi did not make an in-depth study of Buddhist doctrines, treating them with a pragmatic attitude: keeping them if they fit and abandoning them if they did not. Zen meditation and enlightenment were the means by which he pursued a life of leisure. His acceptance of Buddhist thought was characterized by a shift from purely theoretical interest to a more thoroughgoing turn to the direct problems of life, reviewing and directing his own consciousness of life more fully in the light of Buddhist thought. He also became more skillful in harmonizing Buddhist thought with other ideas (e.g., Confucianism and Daoism), so as to integrate them more naturally into the political and spiritual pursuits of the scholarly life. On the question of his own life, he again borrowed Buddhist thought to seek a kind of liberation.

Bai Xingjian,⁸¹ being only four years younger than Bai Juyi, shared a close fraternal bond with him throughout most of their lives. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Bai Xingjian's life experiences were similar to those of Bai Juyi. According to the chronology of Bai Xingjian compiled by Huang Dahong, Bai Xingjian spent most of his life with Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen, or, when they were apart, kept in extremely frequent and close contact with them, until the fifteenth year of Yuanhe (806–821), when the three scattered. From the fourth year of Changqing to the winter of the second year of Baoli (825–827), Bai Xingjian was the only one left in Chang'an. It was during this time that Bai Xingjian's masterpiece, "The Tale of Li Wa," took shape. No one knows exactly what Bai Xingjian went through during this period—I would guess that Buddhism and writing were his only spiritual solace

79 Sun Changwu, "Bai Juyi de Fojiao Xinyang yu Shenghuo Taidu 白居易的佛教信仰與生活態度," 212.

80 Following the An-Shi Rebellion, a pivotal period in Chinese history, a shift in the power dynamics within Zen Buddhism emerged. The Southern Sect experienced a notable ascendancy, progressively supplanting the Northern Sect as the predominant paradigm within Chinese Zen. Therefore, in subsequent Zen discourse, there exists a tendency to conflate Zen directly with the Southern Sect. A defining hallmark of the Southern Sect lies in its doctrinal emphasis on "sudden enlightenment" as the primary mechanism driving the entire process of spiritual cultivation. The concept of "sudden enlightenment" encapsulates the notion of swiftly attaining the spiritual realm of the Buddha without the necessity of gradual accumulation or incremental progress.

81 Thanks to "Bai Xingjian Nianpu 白行簡年譜" by Huang Dahong, in which Bai Xingjian's life is chronologically compiled.

during these lonely years. Buddhism was both a way for him to free himself from the chaos of the world, and a weapon in his silent struggle against Confucianism propriety and the deteriorating imperial court.

4. "DEAR BROTHER, LIFE IS JUST A DREAM."

Throughout his life, Bai Xingjian received numerous poems from his elder brothers, Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen.⁸² These poems, such as Bai Juyi's "Sending to Xingjian on the Ninth Day 九日寄行簡":

摘得菊花携得酒，绕村骑马思悠悠。
下邳田地平如掌，何处登高望梓州。

Plucking chrysanthemums, carrying wine,
Around the village I ride on a horse, drowning in thoughts.
Fields of Xiagui stretch flat, like a palm.
Where can I ascend to gaze at Zizhou?⁸³

and Yuan Zhen's "Poem Written on a Moonlit Night after Farewell to Younger Brother with Letian 和樂天別弟後月夜作"

聞君別愛弟，明天照夜寒。
秋雁拂簷影，曉琴當砌彈。
悵望天澹澹，因思路漫漫。
吟為別弟操，聞者為辛酸。

82 Even though Bai Xingjian and Yuan Zhen were not related by blood, Yuan Zhen also treated Bai Xingjian as a younger brother, as he was very close to Bai Juyi.

83 Translated by the author.

況我兄弟遠，一身形影單。
江波浩無極，但見時歲闌。

Hearing you depart from your beloved little brother,
Bright sky illuminates night coldness.
Autumn geese fleet through the eaves, leaving shadows.
Morning zither strings upon the terrace abide.
Gazing at the tranquil sky,
Thoughts unravel wide.
Chanting verses for little brother's parting,
A bitter pill for those who hear it.
Especially as my brother is so far away,
All alone on his own.
There's no bounds or line for the river tides,
Only to witness the end of year after year.⁸⁴

depicted a strong fraternal bond. Being a younger brother, Bai Xingjian was adored and cherished by his elder brothers, accompanying them as they were traveling around. This harmonious relationship, however, faced the inevitable challenges of aging, illness, and separation. How does one navigate these inevitable aspects of life and sustain a positive mindset during such times of difficulty and loss?

In the fourth year of Yuanhe, at the age of thirty-four, Bai Xingjian journeyed with Bai Juyi and Li Shaozhi to the Qu River in Chang'an. During this time, Bai Juyi mentioned the anticipated arrival of Yuan Zhen in Liangzhou. Soon after, Yuan Zhen composed a poem recounting his dream about Bai Juyi's visit to the Qu River, which in reality happened exactly on the same day. Bai Xingjian documented this narrative in "Stories of Three Dreams" and offered commentary on it.

84 Translated by the author.

日月與遊寺題詩日月率同，蓋所謂此有所為而彼夢之者矣。

The date was almost the same as the day we visited the temple and wrote the poem. This was probably the fulfillment of something that happened to one person in another person's dream.

Bai Juyi's and Yuan Zhen's profound friendship fostered a deep connection that provided solace even when distance separated them. This emotional bond, potentially depicted as a dream, might have resonated with Bai Xingjian, especially in his later years when he was distant from his brother. Beyond the dreams depicting themes of friendship, the first dream in "Stories of Three Dreams," discussed in chapter 1, potentially may encapsulate elements of spousal betrayal or infidelity within marital relations. Although Bai Xingjian exhibited a keen interest in dreams, as is evident in "Stories in Three Dreams," he did not explore this subject in any subsequent work. Surprisingly, even in the Rhapsody, which delves into various aspects of sex, there is no reference to *chunmeng* 春夢 (literally, "spring dream," referring to a dream with sex fantasies). This absence seems somewhat unusual, especially when Bai Xingjian delineates the naïve understanding of adolescent boys and girls concerning matters of sexuality in the beginning part of the Rhapsody:

夫懷抱之時，總角之始；蟲帶米囊，花含玉蕊。

When we were in the arms of our parents and at the beginning of childhood, (the male genitalia) was like the nymphs of a worm with a rice capsule. (The female vulva) was like a jade pistil in flower.

忽皮開而頭露【原註：男也】，俄肉〔媮(2)〕而突起【原註：女也】；

Suddenly the foreskin opens and the tip [of the penis] appears [Commentary: that is male.]; Swiftly the labia stretch and the bulge [of the vagina] rises [Commentary: that is female.].

時遷歲改，生戢戢之烏毛【原註：男也】；

As time shifts and age changes, dense black pubic hair is grown. [Commentary: that is male.]

日往月來，流涓涓之紅水【原註：女也】。

As day goes and the month comes, there flows trickling red water [Commentary: this is the female.].

The concept of the spring dream traditionally aligns with the sexual awakening of adolescent boys and girls, symbolizing the onset of sexual maturity. However, Bai Xingjian appears to overlook this connection (though it may also be due to damage to the Rhapsody). Moreover, “spring dream” frequently serves as the meeting ground for protagonists in many ancient Chinese novels and dramas. One of the most renowned examples is Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖⁸⁵ (1550–1616) *The Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 from the Ming dynasty, in which Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei meet and fall in love in a dream. After waking up from the dream, Du Liniang dies of lovesickness and is buried under a willow. The ghost of Du Liniang appears in Liu Mengmei’s dream and asks him to dig up her body and bring her back to life. Liu Mengmei does as he is told, and they enjoy a happy ending. Without the spring dream, the story of “The Peony Pavilion” would not have happened, and Du Liniang would have remained an obedient girl

⁸⁵ Tang Xianzu was a playwright and politician in Ming. His major plays are collectively called the Four Dreams, because of the decisive role dreams play in the plot of each one. These plays continue to be staged in scenes or in modified complete renditions on the Chinese Kun opera (*kunqu* 昆曲) platform. Often hailed as his magnum opus, *Mudan Ting* (*The Peony Pavilion*) has undergone multiple English translations.

who would hardly step out of her boudoir. It is because of her dream that Du Liniang dares to show the wild side that is hidden deep inside her heart. Du Liniang embodies the struggle faced by many traditional Chinese women who are confined by Confucian norms, expected to be conservative, reserved, and submissive wives, repressing their yearning for genuine love due to societal expectations. This portrayal seems to reflect not just the plight of women but a broader societal struggle, as addressed in chapter 2. Bai Xingjian endeavors to challenge Confucian propriety, yet the stringent societal norms make it exceedingly challenging for him to break free from these constraints. Consequently, his aspirations are channeled into literature to express his ideals, as he is unable to effect substantial change within the societal framework. The relationship between "Stories of Three Dreams" and "The Peony Pavilion" might not be direct, but it is plausible that Tang Xianzu's work was influenced by "The Tale of Li Wa." Both Bai Xingjian and Tang Xianzu seemingly aimed to depict a non-traditional portrayal of women. However, Bai Xingjian's narrative, including the storyline and the conclusion, tends to maintain a more conservative approach compared to Tang Xianzu's work, in that the latter makes the lover Li Wa a qualified good wife.

In contrast to the widespread adaptations of the popular "The Tale of Li Wa" frequently staged in later dynasties, "Stories of Three Dreams" has never been theatrically performed. Each of the subsequent adaptations of "Stories of Three Dreams" was exclusively derived from only one of the dreams. The rewriting of the first dream started from "Stories of the East River: Dugu Xiashu (*He Dong ji, Dugu Xiashu* 河東紀·獨孤遐叔)" in *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping Guang Ji* 太平廣記) by Xue Yusi 薛漁思 of the Tang dynasty. Despite the hero's killing his wife in the dream, the storyline remains almost unchanged. An innovation to the story is the Late Tang dynasty novelist Li Mei 李玫's "Codification of the Strange: Zhang Sheng (*Cuan Yi Ji, Zhang Sheng* 纂異記·張生)." Li supplemented the storyline by attributing the hero's loss of emotional control and subsequent killing of his wife to the punishment meted out to him for his excessive drinking during the banquet and recitation of obscene lyrics and songs. Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646),⁸⁶ a novelist of the Ming dynasty, consolidated the above stories and created "Dugu Sheng's Chaotic Dream on His Way Back

⁸⁶ Feng Menglong was a Chinese novelist and poet of the late Ming dynasty. It was his aspiration to complete a trilogy of vernacular Chinese short story collections: *Stories Old and New*, *Stories to Caution the World*, and *Stories to Awaken the World* (喻世明言, 警世通言, and 醒世恆言),

Home 独孤生归途闹梦,” which was recorded in “Stories to Awaken the World (*Xingshi Heng Yan* 醒世恆言).”⁸⁷ Perhaps in tribute to Bai Xingjian, Feng named the heroine of the story “Ms. Juanjuan, daughter of Bai Xingjian 白行简女儿娟娟小姐.” When Dugu Sheng was away traveling, Ms. Juanjuan once had a dream of having sex with him as a prelude to Dugu Sheng’s dream of Ms. Juanjuan’s indulgence in a temple. Feng’s creative additions to the story indeed supply a key missing part of Bai Xingjian’s writing. By completing the cause and effect, Feng has portrayed in detail the struggle of a human being against desires.

Bai Xingjian likely never anticipated that his stories would endure across centuries, inspiring successive dreams for generations. Given the loss, damage, and continual adaptations by subsequent generations, the fixation on Bai Xingjian’s original intent during this writing period appears somewhat secondary. More significant is the recognition that Bai Xingjian and his works serve as a bridge between the past and the future, imparting profound insights to forthcoming generations.

Bai Xingjian never penned a poem about dreaming of Bai Juyi, or if he did, it might have gone unrecorded for various reasons. During his solitary later years, reminiscing about the spirited days with his elder brothers, Bai Xingjian might have been contemplating the ephemeral nature of life, when he penned this to them: “Dear brother, life is just a dream.”

CONCLUSION: THE BURIED DREAM WORLD

Bai Xingjian, a less celebrated but nevertheless transformative figure in ancient Chinese literature, though overshadowed by his brother Bai Juyi’s fame in poetry, found his creative niche in the genre of *chuanqi* (fiction). While fiction was gaining traction during the Tang dynasty, it lacked the scholarly esteem accorded to poetry, relegating fiction writers like Bai Xingjian to the margins of literary history. His literary explorations revolved primarily around themes of sex and love, challenging the constraints of Confucian propriety. His works, such as the “Rhapsody on the Great Joy of the Intercourse of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang,” showcased a daring and vivid portrayal of sexuality, transcending the

⁸⁷ Works in *Stories to Awaken the World* are mostly based on real life as well as folklore, and their contents are related to the mediocrity of officials, the lives of urban craftsmen, marriage, love, and so on.

conventions of his time. This bold depiction of human desire in his works marked Bai Xingjian as a pioneer, albeit one whose contributions were not fully recognized until much later.

Analysis of Bai Xingjian's works, including "The Tale of Li Wa" and "Stories of Three Dreams," reveals a deep understanding and strong portrayal of human nature and desires. These narratives go beyond mere eroticism, intertwining themes of love, societal expectations, and the pursuit of joy. Bai's stories reflect a struggle against societal norms and an exploration of the innate human yearning for love and sexual fulfillment. Bai Xingjian's embrace of Buddhism, especially the part that recognizes human desires, significantly influenced his literary creations. The Tang dynasty's complex religious landscape, with its interplay of Confucianism and Buddhism, provided a rich backdrop for Bai's exploration of themes of desire and spiritual liberation. Bai Xingjian, through his unique literary voice, ventured into realms that were largely unexplored by his contemporaries. His ability to weave intricate tales that delve into the depths of human emotion, coupled with his nuanced understanding of the societal and religious dynamics of his time, marks him as a writer significantly ahead of his era.

Bai Xingjian's literary journey provided a hidden treasure trove, a buried dream world waiting to be unearthed. The reason this buried dream world is not currently being properly exploited is largely that Bai Xingjian, as a pioneer too far ahead of his time, had a very limited impact on his world, and his literary works were not accepted by the mainstream public. Bai Xingjian's explorations into the domains of sex, love, and human nature under the shadow of Confucian propriety challenged the literary norms of his time but also paved the way for a more profound understanding of the complexities of human desire and societal constraint. His legacy, although obscured for centuries, emerges as a testament to the enduring power of literature to transcend time and cultural boundaries, offering insightful reflections on universal aspects of the human experience.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: TRANSLATION OF “THE RHAPSODY OF THE GREAT JOY OF INTERCOURSE BETWEEN YIN AND YANG, HEAVEN AND EARTH” (天地陰陽交歡大樂賦), BY BAI XINGJIAN⁸⁸

PREFACE BY QIANHENG JIANG

A year and a half have passed since my classmates and I completed the translation of *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy* (*Da Le Fu* 大樂賦). This period coincided precisely with the explosive advancement of AI large language models, whose literary prowess has often astonished me. These programs are capable of producing passages I could scarcely conceive of, even after racking my brain. Out of curiosity, I posed a question to an AI app (DeepSeek): “If you were to write a preface for this *Da Le Fu*, how would you do so?”

DeepSeek promptly displayed its virtuosity, effortlessly composing a magnificent preface in classical Chinese prose. It began with the historical resonance of “the Dunhuang cave libraries, secrets hidden for millennia (敦煌石窟，秘藏千年).” It introduced the author, Bai Xingjian, then offered a penetrating explanation of the philosophical foundation rooted in Yin-Yang theory. It proceeded to analyze the work’s literary originality, confront its moral controversies, reassess its historical value, and illuminate its contemporary significance.

After reading it, I couldn’t help but marvel. I then pressed DeepSeek further: “So, could you create a work like Bai Xingjian’s?”

DeepSeek paused briefly before replying: “The form can be copied; the spirit eludes replication. I can meticulously replicate the parallel couplets, allusions, and rhymes characteristic of Tang dynasty *fu* 賦 rhapsody. However, Bai Xingjian’s true innovation lies in his audacious incorporation of the unspeakably vulgar subject of human sexual desire into the exalted hall of the *fu* form. This constitutes a groundbreaking act of rebellion against Tang dynasty sexology culture and worldly desires. I am, in essence, a recombination of cultural data. What I most lack is that vital impulse of living beings to

⁸⁸ Three versions were consulted and referenced in this study: one from Chinese Text Project, one from the Dunhuang manuscripts held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France and published by Shanghai Classics Publishing House, and a Japanese annotated edition by Yoshiro Iida, published by Kyūko Shoin.

shatter the shackles of millennia of Confucian propriety. An AI can replicate the skeleton of *Da Le Fu*, but the soul that imbues that skeleton with life, animating its flesh and setting it dancing, was buried long ago with Bai Xingjian in the mournful night rain of ninth-century Chang'an. There are realms perceptible to humans that I may never reach and be unable to feel."

How true! This is precisely the chasm between humans and machines. It is also the fundamental reason why *Da Le Fu* originally captivated me like a magnet—Bai Xingjian, the author of this rhapsody, with his vast perceptual power, composed this magnificent philosophical meditation on sex and love, belonging to the very marrow of Chinese civilization. He perceived the cosmic origin of "the profound mystery of Heaven and Earth, the generative transformation of Yin and Yang," elevating the "great desire for intercourse" to the height of "the root of life and destiny" and the force sustaining cosmic order. This is not only a concrete enactment of Daoist Yin-Yang philosophy but also a deep resonance with the Confucian great principle of marriage, reflecting the harmony between human relations and the Heavenly Way within the torrent of passion.

Bai Xingjian was the younger brother of Bai Juyi, a colossus of the Mid-Tang poetry scene. Though both belonged to the elite scholar-official class, their creative paths diverged dramatically. Bai Juyi, as the "Poet King," voiced concerns for the nation and its people, satirizing reality. Bai Xingjian, however, blazed a unique trail, using the ornate *fu* and *chuanqi* 傳奇 (fiction) forms to explore humanity's most hidden and instinctive desires. This seemingly heretical writing was deeply rooted in the unique social soil of the Tang dynasty. At that time, remnants of the Northern Dynasties' nomadic cultures persisted, fostering a relatively open social atmosphere; Daoism flourished, with its bedchamber arts (*fang zhong shu* 房中術) circulating widely among the literati as a path to health and longevity; scholar-officials had close interactions with Daoist priestesses and courtesans, leading to a more frank and natural attitude toward sexual desire. It was precisely this era of multicultural fusion and relatively relaxed Confucian restraints that provided the necessary space for the direct and unflinching descriptions within *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy*.

The Rhapsody traverses the entire spectrum of human love and desire, from the stirrings of adolescence to the frailty of old age. It captures diverse experiences: the bashfulness of newlyweds, the intimate pleasures of the bedchamber, seasonal joys of union, and even ventures into taboo subjects like clandestine affairs between monks and laypeople, or secret trysts within palace walls. Its language

masterfully blends refinement and colloquialism, weaving in lyrical metaphors like “zither strings” and “grain-shaped cave” drawn from classical sexology texts alongside earthy, intimate terms like “sister” and “brother” plucked from the vernacular. The depictions are intensely vivid and sensual, ranging from explicit scenes of intercourse with phrases like “The jade stalk rises and falls” and “The golden channel trembles in fear and the lips open” to more suggestive imagery hinting at passionate abandon, including “her hairpin dangles and her hair bun is in disarray.” In its sheer scope, depth, and daring, this work eclipses and dwarfs the comparatively restrained and ornate “Palace Style”⁸⁹ poetry of the preceding Liang and Chen dynasties.

However, we must set the record straight about *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy*. It is absolutely not a lascivious work promoting debauchery. Its core purpose is to narrate human relations, harmonize husband and wife, unite the family, and explore the ultimate question of love and sex—the desires of human nature. The Great Joy depicted by Bai Xingjian is the life-affirming pleasure experienced by husband and wife in harmonious union, a physical and spiritual communion in accordance with natural rhythms. He portrays the joys of the boudoir across the seasons: the playful intimacy of sharing a silk fan to cool off in summer, the snug warmth of huddling close by the red stove in winter. These scenes brimming with life, along with the ideal vision of husband and wife growing old together, aim to show sexuality as a natural, healthy, and beautiful part of human life—a vital pathway to strengthening marital bonds, promoting family harmony, and even extending longevity. He elevates sexual love into an aesthetic experience concerning the harmony of life and cosmic order.

It is regrettable that the complete text of *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy* was lost long ago. Only a single precious manuscript copy (Pelliot chinois 2539) survived in the Dunhuang Library Cave, taken by the Frenchman Paul Pelliot and now housed in the Louvre Museum in France. Based on this version and texts retrieved from the China Text Project, we present the first ever complete English translation of this rhapsody. Our hope is not merely to fill a gap in literary history. More importantly, in an age where AI can simulate form, Bai Xingjian’s *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy* stands as a mirror, reflecting

89 “Palace Style” (*gongti shi* 宮體詩) poetry, prevalent in the Liang and Chen dynasties (sixth century AD), is characterized by its focus on themes of love, beauty, and the elegant life of the court, often with an emphasis on exquisite imagery and formal elegance. While initially criticized for its focus on frivolous subjects, it significantly influenced later poetic developments in China.

the irreplaceable, primal power of human perception, creation, and the breaking of shackles. It reminds us of what truly “imbues that skeleton with life, animating its flesh and setting it dancing.”

TRANSLATION OF “THE RHAPSODY OF THE GREAT JOY OF INTERCOURSE BETWEEN YIN AND YANG, HEAVEN AND EARTH,” BY STUDENTS IN THE MEDIEVAL VERNACULAR SINITIC CLASS OF SPRING 2023, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA: ⁹⁰ QIANHENG JIANG, JINGYUAN LU, ZHENGYUAN WANG, MING SUN, XINYAN CHEN; INSTRUCTED BY PROFESSOR VICTOR MAIR

FOOTNOTES BY QIANHENG JIANG

1 夫性命者，人之本；

Life is the basis of human beings.

嗜欲者，人之利。

Craving and desires, are what humans take their advantages from.

本存利資，莫甚乎衣食。

When the basis is preserved and the advantage is accumulated, nothing is greater than food and clothing.

〔衣食〕既足，莫遠乎歡娛。

When clothes and food are sufficient, nothing is more far-reaching than pleasure and entertainment.

〔歡娛〕至精，極乎夫婦之道，合乎男女之情。

When joy and pleasure are refined to an extreme degree, that pushes the “Way of husband and wife” to an extreme, conforming with the emotions of men and women.

情所知，莫甚交接【原注：交接者，夫婦行陰陽之道。】

Of what is known about emotions, nothing can be greater than intercourse, intercourse is husband and wife practicing the Way of Yin Yang. [Commentary: Coitus, is that husband and wife practice the Way of Yin and Yang.]

⁹⁰ Thanks to Professor Wilt Idema's Dutch translation version for references.

其餘官爵功名，實人情之衰也。

All the rest—such as official positions, titles, achievements, and fame—are actually waning in the affection of humans.

夫造構已為群倫之肇、造化之端。

Creation and formation have already brought about the genesis of all relations and the beginning of nature.

天地交接而覆載均，男女交接而陰陽順，故仲尼稱婚姻之大，詩人著《○螽斯》之篇。

Heaven and earth interact, and what's between them is in balance; men and women have intercourse and yin yang is smooth—that is why Confucius said marriage is great,⁹¹ and the poet composed the "chapter of locust."⁹²

考本尋根，不離此也。

Examining the fundament and seeking the root, it does not deviate from this.

遂想男女之志，形貌妍媸之類。

Then imagine the minds of men and women, the women with pretty or ugly appearances.

緣情立儀，因象取意，隱偽變機，無不盡有。

Conditions determine manners; based on appearance, judgments form, hiding artifice and tricks, nothing is not present here.

難字異名，並隨音註，

Hard characters and odd names are accompanied by phonological notes.

始自童稚之歲，卒乎人事之終。

It begins with the time of childhood and innocence, and it concludes with the end of people's lives.

91 Refer to Confucius Family Sayings: "The Great Marriage 孔子家語·大婚," retrieved from <https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=416876&if=en&remap=gb>.

92 Refer to "Locust (螽斯 *zhongsī*)" in the Zhounan 周南 volume of *Book of Songs* (詩經 *Shijing*). This was a folk song to pray for more children as bringing more blessings.

雖則猥談，理標佳境。

Even though there are vulgar speeches, I ought to aim for the enjoyable realm.

具人之所樂，莫樂於此，所以名《大樂賦》。

The thing that furnishes what a complete person takes pleasure from, is nothing but this. For this reason, it is named *The Rhapsody of the Great Joy*.

至於俚俗音號，輒無隱諱焉。

As for folk and vulgar pronunciations and phrases, there is no need to hide or avoid them.

惟迎笑於一時，□□惟素雅，□□□□，賦曰：

It is for the purpose of transient reverie. (My rhapsody is both) simple and elegant. The rhapsody says:

2 玄化初辟，洪爐耀奇，鑠勁成雄，熔柔制雌。

When the arcane transformation initially opened up [heaven and earth], the great furnace [of heaven and earth] shone with mystic light. Fuse the tough one to be male; melt the tender one to be female.

3 鑄男女之兩體，范陰陽之二儀。

Casting the two bodies of men and women, exemplifying the duality of Yin Yang.

4 觀其男之性，既稟剛而立矩；

Observing that in the nature of men, [they are] already bestowed with steadfastness, and thus they established rules.

5 女之質，亦葉順而成規。

As for the substance of women, it generated obedience and formed regularity.

6 夫懷抱之時，總角之始；蟲帶米囊，花含玉蕊。

When we were in the arms of our parents and at the beginning of childhood, (the male genitalia) were like larvae enwrapped within a cocoon. (The female genitalia) were like a jade pistil embraced within a flower.

7 忽皮開而頭露【原註：男也】，俄肉〔偃〕而突起【原註：女也】；

Suddenly the foreskin opens and the tip [of the penis] appears [Commentary: that is male.]; Suddenly the labia stretches and the bulge [of the vagina] rises [Commentary: that is female.].

- 8 時遷歲改，生戢戢之烏毛【原註：男也】；
As time shifts and age changes, dense black pubic hair grows. [Commentary: that is male.]
- 9 日往月來，流涓涓之紅水【原註：女也】。
As days go and the months come, trickling red water flows. [Commentary: this is the female.]
- 10 既而男已羈冠，女當笄年，
By this time, men have reached the age of wearing a cap, and women are of the hairpin age.⁹³
- 11 溫柔之容似玉，嬌羞之貌如仙。
The gentle mild countenance is like a jade; the dainty shy appearance is like a fairy.
- 12 英威燦爛，綺態嬋娟；素手雪淨，粉頸花團。
Outstanding and splendid, her gorgeous shape is graceful; her hands are as pure as snow, her powdered neck is like a floral bouquet.
- 13 睹昂藏之才，已知挺秀；
Witness his impressive talent, and you will already know his uprightness.
- 14 見窈窕之質，漸覺呈妍。
Seeing her gentle and graceful character, the beauty she presents is gradually acknowledged.
- 15 草木芳麗，雲水容裔；嫩葉絮花，香風繞砌。
Grass and trees are aromatic and beautiful; clouds and water sway and swirl. Delicate leaves and catkins, fragrant breezes whirl over the paving stones.
- 16 燕接翼想於男，分寸心為萬計。
A pair of swallows flying close together triggers the man's idea (to get married); in the woman's tiny heart, she has to come up with a complete plan (to capture the man's heart).
- 17 然乃求吉士，問良媒。
Thereupon, (he) sought a person who could augur and asked for a good matchmaker.
- 18 初六禮以盈止，復百兩而爰來。
In the beginning, he sends six kinds of gifts [to the matchmaking-targeted person] to satisfy [the person's requirements] and stop [the targeted person's mind from marrying someone else]; Moreover a hundred chariots escort her to his house.

93 Both refer to adulthood.

- 19 既納徵於兩姓，聘交禮於同杯。
The gifts have already accepted by the two families, and they are betrothed by sharing a cup.
- 20 於是青春之夜，紅燄之下，
Thereupon, on a young spring night, under the red candle,
- 21 冠纓之際，花須將卸。
when (the male) wears a crown with tassels, and the floral filaments were about to be removed.
- 22 思心靜默，有殊鸚鵡之言；
Their contemplative minds are in quiet silence, unlike the chatter between parrots.
- 23 柔情暗通，是念鳳凰之卦。
Tender feelings interconnect discreetly, thinking about them becoming phoenixes.
- 24 乃出朱雀，攬紅禪，抬素足，撫肉臀。
[The groom] then takes out his vermilion bird and loosens [the bride's] red trousers. [He] raises [her white] feet and strokes her fleshy buttocks.
- 25 女握男莖，而女心忐忑，男含女舌，而男意昏昏。
The woman holds the man's penis, and the woman's heart flutters. The man sucks the woman's tongue, and the man's mind is delirious.
- 26 方以津液塗抹，上下揩擦。
Then he smears her with vaginal fluid, rubbing her up and down.
- 27 含情仰受，縫微綻而不知；
Full of affection, she lies down and is receptive, her slit slightly opened without her realizing it.
- 28 用力前衝，莖突入而如割。
Charging forward with force, the phallus suddenly enters as though cutting [her vagina] apart.
- 29 觀其童開點點，精漏汪汪。六帶用拭，承筐是將。
Seeing the drops of her broken hymen and the profusion of his ejaculated semen, she wipes them with a green girdle and stores it in a basket.
- 30 然乃成於夫婦，所謂合乎陰陽。
After this, they become husband and wife. This is called conforming to Yin Yang.
- 31 從茲一度，永無閉固。
From this moment on, the gate (of sex) will never be closed.

- 32 或高樓月夜，或閑窗早暮；
Either in a tall building on a moonlit night, or next to a quiet window, morning and evening.
- 33 讀素女之經，看隱側之鋪。立障圓施，倚枕橫布。
Reading the *Classic of the White Madam*,⁹⁴ looking at erotic illustrations. Standing screens are arranged all around, they lean across the pillows.
- 34 美人乃脫羅裙，解繡袴，頰似花圍，腰如束素。
The beauty then takes off her gauze skirt, unties her embroidered pants, her forehead looks like a floral garland, her waist is like a roll of silk.
- 35 情婉轉以潛舒，眼低迷而下顧；
Their affection is mild and indirect, so it develops discreetly, her eyes are half open and droop.
- 36 初變體而拍搦，後從頭而扞勃揅。
First, he moves her body and caresses her, then he touches her from head to toe.
- 37 或掀腳而過肩，或宣裙而至肚。
Sometimes he lifts her feet over his shoulders, sometimes he raises her skirts up to her belly.
- 38 然更鳴口嚼舌，磳勒高抬。
Then they kiss each other's mouths and suck each other's tongues, raising their trembling ribs high.
- 39 玉莖振怒而頭舉男也，
The jade stem shakes furiously, and the tip arises—the man.
- 40 金溝顫懾而唇開女也。
The golden channel trembles in fear and the lips open—the woman.
- 41 屹若孤峰，似嵯峨之撻坎；
As steep as a lonely mountain, it seems like the peak of a precipitous precipice.

94 The *Classic of the White Madam* 素女經 (Su Nü Jing), is a Chinese sexology book dating back to before the Han dynasty (202 BC – 9 AD, 25–220 AD), which outlines Daoist sexual practices. In China, the original *Classic of the White Madam* was lost after the Tang dynasty (around 907 AD). However, copies of the text were preserved in Japan by Tanba Yasuyori 丹波康賴, who included it in his compilation *Essentials of Medicine* 醫心方 (*Ishinpō*) published in 982 AD. The current edition of *Classic of the White Madam* is derived from the version preserved in Tanba's collection.

42 湛如幽谷，動赳赳之雞台。

As serene as a secluded valley, her wattles shudder.

43 於是精液流漸，淫水洋溢。

Finally, his sperm flows forth till he is drained; she spurts, and her liquid splashes profusely till it brims over.

44 女伏枕而支腰，男據床而峻膝。

The woman crouches on the pillow and holds her waist up, the man props his knees against the bed.

45 玉莖乃上下來去，左右揩搯。

The jade stem then moves up and down, in and out, rubs and jabs left and right.

46 陽峰直入，邂逅過於琴弦；

The Yang peak penetrates straight in; unexpectedly, it is into her body deeper than the zither strings.

47 陰干邪沖，參差磨於谷實

The yin stem plunges sideways, unevenly rubs against the Fullness of the Valley.

{《交接經》-云-：男陰頭峰亦曰「陰干」。又《素女經》：女人陰深一寸曰琴弦，五寸曰谷實，過谷實則死也}。

The *Sutra of Intercourse*⁹⁵ says, “the tip of the male member is also called the hidden stock.” There is also the *Classic of the White Madam*, which says, “for the female, when you go one inch deep in the women’s part, this is called the zither strings. Five inches is called the Fullness of the Valley,”

48 莫不上挑下刺，側拗旁揩。

He keeps on dragging upward and poking downward, turning obliquely and rubbing the sides.

49 臀搖似振，？

〔尸+盖〕入如埋。

The buttocks tremble as if they are vibrating, the penis enters so deep it seems to be buried.

95 This book seems to have been lost. Similar to the *Classic of the White Madam*, it would have been a book on sexology research.

- 50 暖滑？
〔火亨〕？
〔火亨〕，□□深深，
(The vagina inside is) warm and smooth, (and the penis penetrates) deep.
- 51 或急抽，或慢？
〔肆，石旁〕。
To pull out abruptly, or slowly □.
- 52 淺插如嬰兒含乳，深刺似凍蛇入窟。
Shallowly insert it like an infant sucking a nipple, stick it in deeply as a gelid snake entering a cave.
- 53 扇簸而和核欲吞，衝擊而連根盡沒。
Flapping and flailing, she desires to swallow him, with his walnuts. Rushing and ramming, he sinks down even to the root.
- 54 乍淺乍深，再浮再沉。
By times shallow, by times deep, then floating, then sinking.
- 55 舌入其口，？〔尸+盖〕刺其心，
Her tongue enters his mouth, his phallus stabs her heart.
- 56 濕漉漉，嗚摎摎，或即據，或其捺。
Slippery with moisture, she utters moan after moan. Sometimes he leans on her body, sometimes he presses her body with his fingers.
- 57 或久浸而淹留，或急抽而滑脫。
Sometimes he soaks it for a long while and lets it stay immersed. Sometimes he pulls it out abruptly and it slides out.
- 58 方以帛子乾拭，再內其中。
Then they wipe it dry with a (silk) handkerchief and it enters her again.
- 59 袋闌單而亂擺，莖逼塞而深攻。
The scrotum is flaccid, and it shakes randomly, the stem fills all the space and invades deeply.
- 60 縱嬰嬰之聲，每聞氣促；
She whimpers and her panting becomes more insistent.

- 61 舉搖搖之足，時覺香風。
Raising her shaking feet, he smells fragrant scents.
- 62 然更縱枕上之淫，用房中之術，
Then they practice the lust of the pillows, applying the techniques of the bedchamber.
- 63 行九淺而一深，待十候而方畢。
Practicing shallow for nine times and deep for one, waiting for ten signs before culminating in orgasm.
- 64 既恣情而乍疾乍徐，亦下顧而看出看入。
To their heart's content, they accelerate and slow down; as well, they look down to witness it entering and exiting.
- 65 女乃色變聲顫，釵垂髻亂。
The woman blushes and her voice quivers, her hairpin dangles and her hair bun is in disarray.
- 66 慢眼而橫波入鬢，梳低而半月臨肩。
Her eyes are languid and glance sideways toward her temples. The comb hangs low, and the clasp is near her shoulder.
- 67 男亦彌茫兩目，攤垂四肢，
The man's eyes are dazed; the woman's limbs are spread out and dangling.
- 68 精透子宮之內，津流丹穴之池
《洞玄子》曰：女人陰孔為丹穴池也。
The semen enters the uterus, the bodily fluid flows into the pool of the cinnabar cave.
*The Master of the Cavernous Occult*⁹⁶ says: "Woman's Yin orifice is the pool of the cinnabar cave.
- 69 於是玉莖以退，金溝未蓋，氣力分張，形神散潰。
So the jade stem retreats, but the gold channel is not yet closed. The aura and strength disperse, the form and spirit dissipate.

96 *The Master of the Cavernous Occult* 洞玄子 (*Dong Xuan Zi*) is a book that asserts that sexual activities must align with the laws of heaven and earth and follow the principles of yin and yang in order to nurture one's nature and prolong life. Similar to the *Classic of the White Madam*, the original version was lost and the current version is derived from Tanba Yasuyori 丹波康賴's *Essentials of Medicine* 醫心方 (*Ishinpō*), published in 982 AD.

- 70 顛精尚濕，旁粘屛袋之間；
The semen on the foreskin is still wet, and some adheres to his scrotum.
- 71 ？〔尸扁〕汁猶多，流下尻門之外。
Her fluids are still plentiful, flowing to the outside of the anus.
- 72 侍女乃進羅帛、具香湯，洗拭陰畔，整頓禪襠。
The female servant then brings a gauze towel and prepares fragrant water, first to wipe the sides of the vulva, then to tidy the crotch.
- 73 開花箱而換服，攬寶鏡而重妝。
She opens the floral box to change the woman's clothes, then holds an elegant mirror for the woman to redo her makeup.
- 74 方乃正朱履，下銀床，含嬌調笑，接撫徜徉。
Then the woman puts on her red shoes and steps down from the ornate bed. With tenderness she begins to smile, she touches and caresses while dawdling.
- 75 當此時之可戲，實同穴之難忘。
Her seductiveness at this moment is truly something that will be hard to forget until the day they share a grave.
- 76 更有婉婉姝姬，輕盈愛妾，
Besides, there are amiable, graceful maids, and lithesome, beloved concubines.
- 77 細眼長眉，啼妝笑臉。
Narrow eyes, long eyebrows, tearful makeup, smiling face.
- 78 皓齒皦牡丹之唇，珠耳映芙蓉之頰。
Their bright, white teeth sparkle between peony lips, their pearl ears shine with hibiscus-like cheeks.
- 79 行步盤跚，言辭宛愜。
They walk swayingly, their words are tender and cheerful.
- 80 梳高髻之危峨，曳長裙之輝燁。
They comb their hair into tall, towering buns, trail their long skirts to display brightness and glory.

- 81 身輕若舞，向月里之瓊枝；
Their bodies are as light as if they are dancing, like coral branches in the moonlight.
- 82 聲妙能歌，碎雲間之玉葉。
Their voices are so wonderful that they can be great singers, piercing the jade leaves between the clouds.
- 83 回眸轉黑，發鳳藻之誇花；
They peer toward the back with dark pupils, sending praises that can only be expressed by the finest wording.
- 84 含喜舌銜，駐龍媒之蹀躞。
Containing joy, they hold each other's tongues in the mouth, causing the magnificent stallion to halt his prancing gait.
- 85 乃於明窗之下，白晝遷延，
Then under the bright window, the clear day extends again and again.
- 86 裙禪盡脫，花鈿皆棄。
The skirts and pants are all taken off, headdresses and jewelry are all put away.
- 87 且撫拍以抱坐，漸瞢頓而放眠。
He caresses and pats her while embracing her and letting her sit on his lap. They gradually become dazed and let sleepiness take over.
- 88 含妳(同“奶”)啣舌，抬腰束膝。
He licks her nipples and sucks her tongue; he lifts her waist and restrains her knees.
- 89 龍宛轉，蠶纏綿，眼瞢瞪，足踟躕。
The dragon is gentle, the silkworm is supple, his eyes are blurred, her feet are whirling.
- 90 鷹視須深，乃掀腳而細觀；
His eagle-like gaze must be deep, so he lifts up her feet to carefully observe.
- 91 鷓床徒窄，方側卧而斜穿。
The falcon bed is quite narrow, so he lies on his side and penetrates her diagonally.
- 92 上下捫摸，縱橫把握；姐姐哥哥，交相惹諾。
From top to bottom, he strokes and caresses her; vertical and horizontal, she holds and grasps him. “Dear sister” and “dear brother,” they call each other so intimately.

- 93 或逼向尻，或含口啣。
Sometimes he presses against her buttocks, sometimes she holds him in her mouth and sucks on him.
- 94 既臨床而伏揮，又騎肚而倒？
She leans on the bed and swings while facing down. She then rides on his belly and rocks back and forth.
- 95 是時也，脛藏核袋而羞為，夏姬掩屎而恥作。
At this time, her labia hide his walnut sac, and she is embarrassed by what she is doing. The beauty, like Princess Xia, covers her vagina and is ashamed to continue.
- 96 則有暎昧素體，迴轉輕身，回精禁液，吸氣咽津。
She possesses this beautiful and pure body, twists and turns its lightness; while he holds back his semen and prevents ejaculation, she breathes in the air and swallows his saliva.
- 97 是學道之全性，圖保壽以延神。
This is practicing the Way and preserving one's nature, aiming to protect one's longevity to prolong the existence of one's spirit.
- 98 若乃夫少妻嫩，夫順妻謙，
If the husband is young and the wife is tender, the husband is obedient and the wife is humble.
- 99 節候則天和日暖，閨閣亦繡(綉)戶朱簾。
The season and climate bring mild weather and warm sunshine. The lady's chamber has delicate windows and vermilion curtains.
- 100 鶯轉林而相對，燕接翼於相兼。羅幌朝捲，爐香暮添。
The orioles warble in the woods, facing each other; the swallows fly side by side to accompany one another. Gauze curtains are rolled up in the morning, incense in the burner is replenished in the evening.
- 101 佯羞偃僂，忍思腌醢。
Pretending to be shy and lying down, repressing her desire and letting it develop [make it salty].
- 102 枕上交頭，含朱唇之詫詫；
Lying head-to-head on the pillow, with intimate praise inside their red lips;

- 103 花间接步，握素手之纤纤。
Walking side by side among the flowers, holding the elegant fingers of her white hand.
- 104 其夏也，广院深房，红帟翠帐。
During summer, in a wide court with a secluded chamber, red mosquito nets and green curtains are set up.
- 105 笼日影于窗前，透花光于簟上。
The light cast by the sun is caged by the window, but the glow of the flowers goes through and reaches the bamboo mat.
- 106 荇荇水柳，摇翠影于莲池；
The drifting water willows are waving their green shadows on the lotus pond.
- 107 袅袅亭葵，散花光于画幃。
The upright sunflowers are waving in the wind, casting their floral glow on the painted screens.
- 108 莫不惬意过多，窈窕娉婷，含情体动，逍遥姿纵。
She is never not in the right mood, nor does she give way to overwhelming emotions, gracefully dancing, filled with desires, her body moves, carefree and indulgent.
- 109 妆薄衣轻，笑迎欢送。
With minimal makeup and light clothes, she welcomes him smilingly and cheerfully escorts him out.
- 110 执纨扇而共摇，折花枝而对弄。
Together they hold a silk fan and wave it, snap floral twigs and flirt with each other.
- 111 步砌香阶，登筵乐动。
As they walk, fragrance lingers on the stairs; as they enter the banquet, music starts to play.
- 112 俱□解浴，似池沼之鸳鸯；
Together they bathe in a pond, resembling a pair of mandarin ducks in a pool.
- 113 共寝匡床，如绣阁之鸾凤。
Sleeping on a square bed together, they are like phoenixes in a decorated pavilion.
- 114 其秋也，玉簟犹展，朱衾半熏，
It is autumn, the jade mat is still rolled out, the red blanket retains the scent [of their bodies].

- 115 □□□□□□，庭池荷茂而花纷。
The pond in the courtyard contains exuberant lotuses, and the flowers are flourishing.
- 116 收团扇而闭日，掩芳帐而垂云。
Holding the round fan close to shut out the sun, closing the elegant curtains to hold back the clouds.
- 117 弦调凤曲，锦织鸳纹。
The strings are tuned to perform the songs of the phoenix, the brocade is embroidered with the patterns of mandarin ducks.
- 118 透帘光而皎晶，散香气之氤氲。
Penetrating the curtains, the light is crystal clear, suffused by aromatic mists.
- 119 此时也，夫怜妇爱。不若奉倩于文君。
At this moment, the husband tenderly adores [the wife], while the wife loves [the husband]; their happiness is nothing like the tragedy of Feng Qian and Wen Jun.
- 120 其冬也，则暖室香闺，共会共携。
It is wintertime; in this warm chamber of her fragrant bedroom, they meet together and hold each other's hands.
- 121 披鸳鸯兮帔张翡翠，枕珊瑚兮镜似颇梨。
Draping their bodies with the blanket embroidered with Yuan and Yang (the mandarin ducks), they put up the jade curtain; their pillow is of coral, their mirror is of glass.
- 122 铺旃毡而雪敛，展绣被而花低。
As they lay under the felt blanket, the snow begins to melt; as they spread the embroidered quilt, blossoms start to emerge.
- 123 熏香则雕檀素象，插梳则镂掌红犀。
The incense in the ivory censer is engraved sandalwood, the inserted comb has a carved handle of red rhino horn.
- 124 綦凤带之花裙，点翠色之雪篔。
She wraps herself with a phoenix belt and a floral skirt, wearing a tuck comb of kingfisher green.

- 125 緣酒同傾，有春光之灼灼；
Together they pour the wine for their fortunate union; it reflects the brilliance of the spring scenery.
- 126 紅爐壓膝，無寒色之淒淒。
They heat the stove until it is red and sit on their knees, feeling no trace of coldness.
- 127 顏如半笑，眉似含啼。
Her face shows a subtle smile, her eyebrows make it seem as if she is pouting
- 128 嬌柔口之婉婉，翠姣眼之迷低。
Delicate and soft, her mouth speaks amiable and graceful words; emerald-like and pretty, her eyes look down, as though enchanted.
- 129 在一座之徘徊，何慚往燕？
Wandering in the same room, why would they lament the swallows that fly off [from beneath the eaves]?
- 130 當重衾之纏綰，惟恨鳴雞。
When they share the same quilt and are amorously enwrapped with each other, the only thing that could upset them is the rooster that crows early.
- 131 此夫婦四時之樂也，似桃李/李之成蹊。
This is the pleasure of husband and wife throughout the four seasons, just like how footpaths are formed under peach trees and plum trees.
- 132 至若夫婦俱老，陰陽枯槁，
As husband and wife grow old together, their yin and yang become withered and barren.
- 133 ？〔尸扁〕空皮而？
〔羸皮〕皸dai，
The skin of her vulva is like stretched leather.
- 134 ？〔尸+盖〕無力而？譟〔躁，高旁〕。
The male genitalia have lost their strength and can barely ejaculate.
- 135 尚猶縱快於心，不慮泄精於腦。
However, he still wholeheartedly surrenders to pleasure; he does not worry about leaking the essence of his brain.

- 136 信房中之至精，實人間之好妙。
Verily, these are the finest arts of the bedchamber, truly the most wonderful thing of the
mundane world.
- 137 若乃皇帝下南面，歸西殿，
When the emperor leaves his throne facing the south and returns to the west quarters,
- 138 綠服引前，香風後扇。妓女嬌迎，宮官拜見。
People wearing green robes come forward, servants bringing fragrant winds fan him from
behind. Female performers gracefully greet him, courtiers and the officials all bow to him.
- 139 新聲欲奏，梨園之樂來庭；
The new music is about to be played, musicians from the Pear Garden Theater are coming to
the court.
- 140 美果初嘗，上林之珍入貢。
The season for tasting luscious fruits has begun; the delicacies of the High Forest Kitchen are
brought as tribute.
- 141 於是闈童嚴衛，女奴進膳，昭儀起歌，婕妤侍宴。
Then the castrated boys keep strict watch, the palace maids present the meal, the courtesans
start to sing, the imperial concubines serve the banquet.
- 142 成貴妃於夢龍，幸皇後於飛燕。
He exalts the imperial consort to the dreamy dragon, favors the empress as soaring swallow.
- 143 然乃起鸞帳而選銀環，登龍媒而御花顏。
Then opening the phoenix net and choosing a silver equipage, riding a fine horse decorated
with floral trappings.
- 144 慢眼星轉，差眉月彎。
His languid eyes revolve like stars, his uneven eyebrows arch like crescent moons.
- 145 侍女前扶後助，嬌容左倚右攀。
The maids support in front and push her from behind; her delicate frame leans to the left, then
hangs to the right.
- 146 獻素臀之宛宛，內玉莖而閑閑。
She welcomes him from atop and receives him below; she tousles his hair.

- 147 三刺兩抽，縱武皇之情欲；
Stabbing and pulling out and stabbing again, indulging the sensual desire of the majestic emperor of Wu,
- 148 上迎下接，散天子之髣鬢。
She welcomes him from the top and accepts him from the bottom, spreading the hair of the son of heaven.
- 149 乘羊車於宮裡，插竹枝於戶前。
He rides in a goat chariot inside the palace; they insert bamboo sticks in front of the gate.
- 150 然乃夜御之時，則九女一朝；
But when he rides at night, he takes on nine women by morning.
- 151 月滿之數，則正后兩宵。
When a full month has passed, the empress should have spent two nights (with the emperor).
- 152 此乃典修之法，在女史彤管所標。
This is codified law, recorded by the red brushes of the female clerks.
- 153 今則南內西宮，三千其數，
Now in the South Mansion and the West Palace, there are as many as three thousand of them.
- 154 逞容者俱來，爭寵者相妒。
The ones who are confident about displaying their countenance, competing for the love of the emperor they envy one another.
- 155 矧夫萬人之軀，奉此一人之故。
More than ten thousand comely figures, serving the cause of this one man.
- 156 嗟呼！
Alas!
- 157 在室未婚，殊鄉異客，
Trapped in the chamber and not yet married, or traveling in a faraway place as an alien guest,
- 158 是事乖違，時多屈厄。
In all matters that go against him, most of the time there is distressing harshness.

- 159 宿旅馆而鰥情不寐，处闲房而同心有隔。
Staying in an inn, he can't fall asleep because he feels like a lonely bachelor; staying in her silent chamber, she is separated from her lover of the same heart.
- 160 有乘〔口之〕花貌（有素花貌），每恳交欢；
Seeing that she has a fair, floral appearance, he entreats her to share joy.
- 161 睹马上之玉颜，常思疋藕。
Seeing the jade-like face riding on that horse, she often yearns to form a connection with him.
- 162 羨委禽于庭弊，愿掷果于春陌。
Desiring to give a goose as a gift in a corner of the yard, she wishes to throw fruit on a spring road.
- 163 念刚肠/肠之欲断，往往颠狂；
Thinking that his tough bowels are nearly broken, he grows unhinged.
- 164 觉精神之散飞，看看瘦瘠。
Feeling her spirits distracted and flying asunder, she becomes noticeably emaciated.
- 165 是即睡食俱废，行止无惨，
This means they neglect sleeping and eating, and their behavior is pitiful.
- 166 梦中独见，暗处相招。
They can meet privately only in dreams, can only invite each other to a discreet corner.
- 167 信息稠于百度，顾眄希于一朝。
They exchange hundreds of messages but barely get to glance at each other once a day.
- 168 想美质，念纤腰，有时暗合，魄散魂销。
Thinking of her beautiful body, missing her slender waist; sometimes when they meet secretly, they become delirious with joy.
- 169 如女捉色乾贞，恼人肠断。
If the woman submits to her sensuality, she will be maddeningly heartbroken.
- 170 虽同居而会面，且殊门而异馆。
Even though they dwell in the same residence and can meet, they live behind separate doors and in different halls.

- 171 候其深夜天长，闲庭月满，
Waiting till the night is late and the sky is clear, in a secluded court under the full moon,
- 172 潜来偷窃，乌知畏惮？
He slips into her room like a thief; how could he know fear or dread?
- 173 实此夜之危危，重当时之怛怛。
This night is truly dangerous and risky; the worries and fears at that moment grow heavier and heavier.
- 174 彪也不吠（男淫急偷女也。彪，狗也。），乃深隐而无声；
Even the dog does not bark, it keeps deeply hidden and makes no sound.
- 175 女也不惊，或仰眠而露。〔尸扁〕
The woman is not startled, perhaps she is sleeping on her back with her vulva exposed.
- 176 于时入户兢兢，临床款款。
At that time, he enters the door cautiously and slowly approaches her bed.
- 177 精在阳峰之上，滴滴如流；
The semen accumulates on top of the masculine peak, one drop flows out after another.
- 178 指刺阴缝之间，噉噉似暖。
His fingers thrust inside the space between the labia, it is so bright and warm.
- 179 莫不心忒忒，意惶惶。
Their hearts pound incessantly, their minds are filled with anxiety
- 180 轻抬素足，疑纵揭裤裆。
Lightly lifting the white feet, he takes off her trousers.
- 181 抚拍胸前，虚转身如睡觉；
He strokes and pats her breasts, he is apprehensive that she would turn over as if she were awake.
- 182 摩挲腿上，恐神骇而惊忙。
Rubbing and caressing her thighs, fearing that her sleep would be disturbed, he is startled.
- 183 定知处所，安盖相当。
He certainly knows where things are, so the situation settles down properly.

- 184 未嫁者失声如惊起，已嫁者佯睡而不妨，
Those who are not married cry out and wake up in terror, those who are married pretend they are asleep and do not fend him off.
- 185 有婿者诈嗔而受敌，不同者违拒而改常。
Those who have husbands pretend to be furious and hostile, those who do not consent will stubbornly resist.
- 186 或有得便而不绝，或有因此而受殃。
Sometimes one would be satisfied and not refuse, sometimes one would be doomed because of this.
- 187 斯皆花色之间难，岂人事之可量。
These are the risks of the pleasure among flowers, it is not to be predicted by common people of the mundane world.
- 188 或有因事而遇，不施床铺；
Sometimes people encounter each other while handling other matters, so they have no time to set up a bed.
- 189 或墙畔草边，乱花深处。
Sometimes next to a wall amidst the weeds, or deep among the dense flowers.
- 190 只恐人知，乌论礼度？
They only fear that people would know of their affair, they do not care about decency.
- 191 或铺裙而藉草，或伏地而倚柱。
Sometimes they spread her skirts to lie on the grass, sometimes they lie on the ground or lean on a column.
- 192 心胆惊飞，精神恐惧。
They are terrified out of their wits, their spirits are full of dread
- 193 当匆据之一回，胜安床上百度。
Laying her once in a rush is better than doing it a hundred times in an undisturbed bed.
- 194 更有久阙房事，常嗟独自。
All the more do people deprived of the affairs of the chamber for a long time sigh at their loneliness.

- 195 不逢花艳之娘，乃遇人家之婢。
If he does not encounter a girl as gorgeous as a flower, he meets a maid from another family.
- 196 一言一笑，因兹而有意〈好意〉。
Exchanging a word and a smile, affection starts to sprout.
- 197 身衣绮罗，头簪翡翠，
Wearing clothes made of fine silk, with a kingfisher hairpin on her head.
- 198 或鸦角青衫，或即云鬓绣帔。
Sometimes having a raven bun and blue blouse, sometimes having dense and smooth hair and embroidered robe.
- 199 或十六十七，或十三十四。
Sometimes she is just sixteen or seventeen, sometimes she is just thirteen or fourteen.
- 200 笑足娇姿，言多巧智，
Her smile is filled with sweetness and softness, her words are often witty and clever.
- 201 貌若青衣之俦，意比绿(綠)珠之类。
Her countenance resembles an ingenue in dark blue robes; her affection is comparable to pure pearls/Lüzhu (Shi Chong's beautiful concubine⁹⁷).
- 202 摩挲乳肚，□滑膩之肥浓；
Rubbing and caressing her breasts and belly, which is smooth, tender, fleshy, and dense.
- 203 掀起衣裳，散氛氲之香气。
He lifts her clothes, spreading the aroma of her fragrance.
- 204 共此婢之交欢，实娘子之无异。
Sharing this moment of intercourse with this maid—it is not at all inferior to the mistress.

97 Lüzhu 綠珠 (?–300), renowned for her beauty and artistic talents, was acquired by Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300), an official under Emperor Wu of the Jin dynasty (266–420), and became his concubine. She gained fame as a courtesan and dancer, captivating Shi Chong's guests with her performances. As recorded in the "Biography of Shi Chong" from the *Book of Jin*, when Sung Xiu, a high-ranking official and rival of Shi Chong, sought to purchase Lüzhu, Shi Chong refused. This defiance led to Shi Chong's arrest and subsequent order to commit suicide. Following his death, Lüzhu also took her own life.

205 故郭璞设计而苦求，阮咸走趁而无愧。

So Guo Pu⁹⁸ plotted and eagerly sought a maid; Ruan Xian⁹⁹ did not feel ashamed riding after a maid.

206 更有恶者，丑黑矬肥，臀高面欹。

There are also those that are hideous, they are ugly, dark-skinned, short, and fat. They have high hips and slanted faces.

207 或口大而甑口，或鼻曲如累垂。

Some have mouths that are big as pots, some have crooked noses that dangle.

208 髻不梳而散乱，衣不敛而离帔。

Others may not comb her hair, so it is disheveled, or straighten their skirt, so it protrudes from under her robe.

98 Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324) was a celebrated historian, poet, and Daoist mystic of the Jin dynasty (266–420), renowned for his commentaries on ancient texts and his efforts in preserving works such as the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經 (*Shan Hai Jing*). He is also the author of the *Book of Burial* 葬書 (*Zang Shu*), the earliest and most authoritative text on *fengshui* 風水 (Chinese geomancy), which earned him the title of the “father of fengshui” in China. However, Guo Pu is mentioned here because of an anecdote recorded in “Biography of Guo Pu” in the *Book of Jin*. When Guo Pu traveled south through Lujiang, he became enamored with a maid serving Hu Mengkang 胡孟康, the governor of Lujiang. Unable to directly ask for her, Guo Pu secretly used mystical tricks to make Hu believe the maid was attracting evil spirits. When Hu sought Guo Pu’s help to resolve the issue, Guo Pu advised him to sell the maid at a low price in a village twenty miles southeast, claiming this would dispel the spirits. Hu complied, and Guo Pu had his family purchase the maid at a bargain price. Bai Xingjian references this story to show how the maid’s beauty and charm was no less captivating than that of her mistress.

99 Ruan Xian 阮咸 (dates of birth and death unknown) was one of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七贤” during the Wei (220–266) and Jin dynasties (266–420). He was a musician and the inventor of a musical instrument named after him, Ruan 阮, a copper, straight-necked thirteen-stringed instrument similar to Pipa. According to *A New Account of the Tales of the World* 世说新语, Ruan Xian in his youth had an affair with a maid from Xianbei 鲜卑, a low-class minority ethnic group, in his aunt’s household. After Ruan Xian’s mother passed away, his aunt planned to move away and initially promised to leave the maid to him, but finally took her when she departed. Upon learning of this, Ruan Xian, though still in mourning, borrowed a donkey from a guest, donned his mourning attire, and rushed after his aunt and the maid. When he caught up with them, he rode back on the donkey with the maid, declaring, “I can’t lose the child in her belly! (人种不可失!)” This anecdote is referenced in Bai Xingjian’s text, where the mention of a beautiful maid alludes to Ruan Xian’s story with the maid.

209 或即惊天之笑，吐棒地之词。

She may laugh so loud that it disturbs the heavens, she may spit out words that make the ground tremble.

210 唤嫫母为美姬，呼敦洽为妖姬。

Calling Momu¹⁰⁰ a beautiful gal, calling Dunqia¹⁰¹ a coquettish mistress.

211 遭宿瘤骂，被無塩欺。

She is scolded by Suliu,¹⁰² she is bullied by Wuyan.¹⁰³

212 梁鸿妻见之极哂，许允妇遇之大嗤。

When Liang Hong's wife¹⁰⁴ sees her, she would mock her; when Xun Yun's wife¹⁰⁵ meets her, she

100 Momu 嫫母 was the second consort of the Yellow Emperor 黄帝 (2717 BC–2600 BC) in ancient Chinese myths. According to *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* 呂氏春秋, despite Momu's ugly appearance, she was renowned for her virtues and assisted the Yellow Emperor in governing the tribe.

101 Dunqia 敦洽, known as an ugly woman, was described in *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* 呂氏春秋 as having a striking appearance, with a broad forehead, dark complexion, and unusual features, yet she was deeply admired by the Marquis of Chen for her virtuous character. Her name, Dunqia, literally means her harmonious and gentle nature.

102 According to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 BC – 6 BC)'s *Biographies of Exemplary Women* 列女傳, Suliu 宿瘤 was a mulberry gatherer from the eastern outskirts of the state of Qi 齊國, a was a regional state of the Zhou 周 (1046 BC–256 BC) in ancient China. She was named “Suliu” (meaning “lingering tumor”) due to a large tumor on her neck, and her unusual appearance led others to mock her as an ugly woman. However, her noble character and exceptional wisdom won the admiration of King Min of Qi 齊湣王, and she eventually became his queen.

103 Similar to Suliu, Wuyan 無塩, originally named Zhong Lichun 鍾離春, was a famously ugly woman from the state of Qi during China's Warring States period as recorded in *Biographies of Exemplary Women* 列女傳. She became Queen Consort to King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 due to her exceptional wisdom and talent. Renowned for her forthright advice, she once admonished King Xuan with her “Four Perils” discourse, helping him correct his faults and govern the state effectively.

104 The story of Meng Guang 孟光, Liang Hong's wife, originates from the “Biography of Liang Hong” in the “Biographies of Recluses” section of the *Book of the Later Han* (《後漢書·逸民列傳·梁鴻傳》). It recounts the deep marital bond between Liang Hong, a recluse of the Eastern Han dynasty, and his wife Meng Guang. Despite her ugly appearance, Meng Guang was renowned for her virtuous character. After marrying, they lived in humble seclusion in the mountains, where Meng Guang served meals to Liang Hong while raising the tray to her eyebrows, as a gesture of reverence—a practice immortalized in the idiom “raising the tray to eyebrow level” (舉案齊眉), referring to love between husband and wife..

105 The story of Xu Yun's wife, Ms. Ruan 阮氏, comes from the “Worthy Ladies” chapter of *A New Account of the Tales of*

would ridicule her.

213 姣（效）頻則人言精魅，倚門則鬼号钟馗。

If she (an ugly woman like Dongshi¹⁰⁶) imitates beautiful women (like Xishi), people would claim they have seen a demon; if she leans on a gate, a ghost would scream that Zhong Kui¹⁰⁷ is here.

214 艰难相遇，勉强为之。

Encountering obstacles, he forces himself to do it with her.

215 醋气时闻，每念糟糠之妇；

Every time he perceives the smell of vinegar, he thinks about the wife that lives through poverty with him.

216 荒淫不择，岂思〈同于〉枕席之姬？

Even though his overflowing lust makes him not picky, how could he think of her as the woman he shares a bed with.

217 此乃是旷绝之大急也，非厌饫之所宜。

This is a true urgency after a long absence from sex, it is not suitable for those who are sated.

218 更有金地名贤，祇园幼女〈即师姑是也〉。

There are also renowned and worthy temples, and nuns at respected monasteries.

the World (《世說新語·賢媛篇》). Initially, Xu Yun was dissatisfied with his wife due to her ugly appearance, but Ms. Ruan earned his respect through her intelligence and moral character. On one occasion, when Xu Yun faced imperial scrutiny for improper selection of officials, Ms. Ruan calmly analyzed the situation and advised him on how to respond, ultimately resolving the crisis..

¹⁰⁶ The story of "Dongshi imitating the frown of Xi Shi 東施效顰 (Dongshi Xiaopin)" comes from the "Heavenly Movement" in Zhuangzi (《莊子·天運》). It tells of Xi Shi 西施, a famous beauty from the Yue state, whose delicate frown while suffering from a headache captivated everyone. Seeing this, her neighbor Dongshi, an ugly girl, believing that frowning was the key to beauty, attempted to imitate Xi Shi, only to appear even more unattractive.

¹⁰⁷ Zhong Kui 鍾馗 is a famous Daoist deity in Chinese mythology, revered as a powerful vanquisher of ghosts and evil spirits. He is traditionally portrayed as a formidable figure with a commanding presence, characterized by a thick black beard, bulging eyes, and a fierce, wrathful expression.

- 219 各恨孤居，常思〈于〉同处。口虽不言，心常暗许。
Each of them resents the fact that they are living alone; they often think about each other's company. Even though they do not express that explicitly, their hearts secretly wish for it.
- 220 或是桑间丈夫，鼎族名儒，
Sometimes it's the men between the mulberry trees, members from prominent clans or famous Confucians.
- 221 求净舍俗〈大僧也〉，髡发剃鬚，
Seeking purity and abandoning worldly desire (this refers to the great monks), cutting off their hair and shaving their beards.
- 222 汉语胡貌，身长鬪。𪔐。
Speaking the words of the Han ethnic group but having the appearance of the Northern nomads, their bodies are blessed with burly cocks.
- 223 思心不触于佛法，手持岂忘于念珠〈女也〉
Their desires do not touch the Buddha's teachings, but they never forget to hold the prayer beads in their hands. (This refers to women.)
- 224 或年光盛小，闲情窈窕。不长不短，唯端唯妙。
Some nuns are in the prime of their youth, with unoccupied minds and gorgeous appearance. Neither too long nor too short, so dignified and so wonderful.
- 225 慢眼以菩萨争妍，嫩脸共桃花共笑。
Their longing eyes compete with the beauty of the Bodhisattva, their smooth cheeks smile at the same time as the peach blossoms.
- 226 圆圆翠顶，弯臣断袖于帝室。
Under the round emerald dome, the emperor cut off his own sleeve¹⁰⁸ for the handsome courtier

108 The story of "Cutting the Sleeve 断袖 (Duan Xiu)" originates from the *Book of Han* 漢書 (*Han Shu*), which recounts an anecdote in which Emperor Ai 漢哀帝 (reign: 7 BC – 1 BC) of the Western Han dynasty 西漢 (202 BC – 9 AD) shared a bed with his favored minister, Dong Xian 董賢 (22 BC – 16 BC). When Dong Xian fell asleep on the emperor's sleeve, Emperor Ai chose to cut off his sleeve rather than disturb Dong Xian's rest. This anecdote has become a classic metaphor for gay love in Chinese history, and the term "the proclivity of the cut sleeve 断袖之癖" is often used in later generations to denote romantic relationships between men.

who fell asleep on it.

227 然有连璧之貌，映珠之年，爱其娇小，或异慤怜。

But their countenances resemble linked jades; their youthfulness shines like polished pearls.

They are adored for their delicate daintiness and marveled at for their tender charm.

228 三交六入之时，□或搜获；

At the time of three thrusts and six stabs, he may be able to search and capture it;

百脉四肢之内，汝实通室。

Within the hundred veins and the four limbs, he fully occupies her inner chamber.

229 不然，则何似于陵阳君指花于君侧（侧），彌子瑕分桃于主前？

Otherwise, how does it resemble the Lord of Ling Yang¹⁰⁹ pointing to the flowers by the ruler's side and Mizi Xia sharing half of a peach in front of the lord?¹¹⁰

109 "Ling Yang 陵阳" here likely refers to two famous figures from the Warring States period: Lord Anling 安陵君 and Lord Longyang 龍陽君. These two individuals are often mentioned together in later generations' texts to refer to gay love. The story of Lord Anling primarily comes from *Strategies of the Warring States: Chu Strategies* 戰國策·楚策 (*Zhanguo Ce Chu Ce*). He was a favorite of King Xuan of Chu 楚宣王 (? – 340 BC) and was granted a fiefdom for his wit and loyalty. Lord Anling once moved the king by vowing to "sacrifice himself in burial," which earned him the title of Lord of Anling (a city in present-day Gushi 固始, Henan Province 河南省). Lord Longyang appears in *Strategies of the Warring States: Wei Strategies* 戰國策·魏策 (*Zhanguo Ce Wei Ce*) and was a minion of King Anxi of Wei 魏安釐王 (? – 243 BC). He is famous for the story of "Longyang's Tears for Fish." While fishing with the king, he used fish as a metaphor to express his fear of being replaced by new favorites, prompting the king to ban the presentation of beauties. Lord Longyang is not only the earliest recorded homosexual figure in official history but also a skilled swordsman and diplomat. His name, "Longyang," became a classic metaphor for gay love. Here, the "flowers" may refer to the beauties around the king.

110 The story of Mizi Xia Sharing a Peach comes from *Han Fei Zi* 韓非子, which recounts an anecdote during the Spring and Autumn period when Duke Ling of Wei 衛靈公 (540 BC – 493 BC) and his favored minister, Mizi Xia, shared a peach. Mizi Xia offered the remaining half of the peach to Duke Ling, who accepted it gladly. This act was seen as a symbol of the intimate relationship between a ruler and his subject, and in later generations, "sharing a peach 分桃" often alluded to ambiguous romantic affections between men.

230 汉高祖幸于籍孺，孝武帝宠于韩嫣。

Just like how the Emperor Gaozu of Han showed his affection for Ji Ru,¹¹¹ or how the Emperor Xiao Wu¹¹² spoiled Han Yan.¹¹³

231 故惠帝侍臣冠鷩鷩、载貂蝉，

The servants of Emperor Hui wear hats with legendary birds embossed on them, and bonnets with sable tails¹¹⁴.

232 傅脂粉于灵幄，曳罗带于花筵。

They put on face powder inside the tent of the emperor, dragging their silk sashes after them over the floral mat.

¹¹¹ Ji Ru (literally meaning a boy surnamed Ji) was a minion of Liu Bang 劉邦 (247 BC – 195 BC), known as the Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (reign: 202 BC – 195 BC), the founding emperor of the Western Han dynasty 西漢 (202 BC – 9 AD). According to the *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (*Shiji*), in the chapter “Biographies of the Petty Minions 佞幸列传 (Ningxing Liezhuan),” Ji Ru was described as “having no talent but being cherished for his obsequiousness.” In the chapter “Biographies of Fan, Li, Teng, and Guan 樊鄴滕灌列传 (*Fan Li Teng Guan Liezhuan*),” it is recorded that when Liu Bang feigned illness to avoid leading troops against the rebellion of Ying Bu 英布, the King of Huainan 淮南王, his ministers burst into his chambers and found him pretending to sleep with his head resting on Ji Ru’s lap. The ministers then admonished Liu Bang not to indulge in personal affections. Regarding this, western scholars, represented by Louis Crompton, speculate that Ji Ru was Gaozu’s pillow companion, or homosexual lover, and thus Ji Ru had more access to the emperor than did ministers (2006).

¹¹² This refers to Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (reign: 141 BC – 78 BC), Liu Che 劉徹 (165 BC – 87 BC).

¹¹³ Similar to Ji Ru, Han Yan was a minion of Liu Che, known as Emperor Wu of Han. Hailing from a noble family, Han Yan grew up with Emperor Wu and enjoyed deep favor. According to the *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (*Shiji*), in the chapter “Biographies of the Petty Minions 佞幸列传 (Ningxing Liezhuan),” Han Yan was skilled in horseback riding and archery, and was known for his wit. He often accompanied Emperor Wu on hunting trips and had unrestricted access to the palace, holding a prominent position. However, his arrogance and extravagant behavior led to controversy, such as when he used the emperor’s personal slingshot, which sparked outrage. Ultimately, he offended Liu Fei 劉非, the King of Jiangdu 江都王, and the Empress Dowager, leading to his execution by the Empress Dowager’s order.

¹¹⁴ This refers to Hong Ru 閔孺 (literally, a boy surnamed Hong), a minion of Emperor Hui 漢惠帝 (reign: 195 BC – 188 BC) of the Western Han dynasty, Liu Ying 劉盈 (211 BC – 188 BC). In the chapter “Biographies of the Petty Minions 佞幸列传 (Ningxing Liezhuan),” the two shared a close relationship, with Hong Ru often accompanying the emperor in his carriage and sharing his sleeping quarters. Emperor Hui even ordered the construction of a residence for Hong Ru, modeled after the imperial standards, reflecting the high level of favor he enjoyed.

- 233 岂女体之足厌，是人□之相沿。
It is not that people can be sated with the female body, it is just the mutual influence of people's habits.
- 234 更有山村之人，形容丑恶。
What's more, there are people from mountain villages whose bodies and appearances are ugly and disgusting.
- 235 男则崢嶸凌兢，女则兜毳醜削。
Their men are hulking and forbidding, their women huddle together, weaving hats and making felt.
- 236 面曲如匙，头长似杓，
Their faces are curved like a ladle; their heads are as long as the handle of a spoon.
- 237 眉毛乃逼侧如阴森，精神则瞢瞪而熄燹。
Their eyebrows are cramped like gloomy forests, their essence and spirit are hazy and dull.
- 238 日日系腰，年年赤脚，
Day by day, they wear waist-belts; year after year, they go barefoot.
- 239 缙□□以为□，倡□歌以为乐。
...wrap themselves in...to look like, sing...songs for entertainment.
- 240 攀花摘叶，比翟(瞿?)父以开怀，
They have fun with prostitutes, as though picking flowers and snatching foliage, even more than they enjoy possessing gold and jade from Mount Qu Fu.¹¹⁵

* The remaining part has been lost.

¹¹⁵ According to the Classic of Mountains and Seas 山海經 (Shan Hai Jing), "Three hundred and seventy li to the east is Mount Qu Fu. It has no vegetation but is rich in gold and jade. (又东三百七十里，曰翟父之山，无草木，多金玉。)" Given this, the phrase "攀花摘叶，比翟父以开怀" may contain a textual error where "Zhai Fu 翟父" is meant to be "Qu Fu 瞿父", referring to the mythological mountain known for its abundance of gold and jade.

APPENDIX B: PREFACE TO THE POEMS COMPOSED AT THE CAVE OF THREE VISITORS (三遊洞序)¹¹⁶BY BAI JUYI (白居易)¹¹⁷

TRANSLATED AND WITH FOOTNOTES BY QIANHENG JIANG

平淮西之明年冬，予自江州司馬授忠州刺史，微之自通州司馬授虢州長史。

In the winter of the second year, after pacifying the riots in Huaixi,¹¹⁸ I was reassigned from the post of Secretary of Jiangzhou¹¹⁹ to the post of Governor of Zhongzhou,¹²⁰ and Weizhi¹²¹ was reassigned from the

¹¹⁶ The Cave of Three Visitors is located in northwest of Yichang, Hubei province, at the mouth of Xilingxia, on the north bank of the Yangtze River. In addition to Bai Juyi 白居易, Bai Xingjian 白行簡, and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (known as *qian san you* 前三遊, which means the excursion of the former three), in the Song dynasty, Su Xun 蘇洵 (the father of Su Shi and Suzhe), Su Shi 蘇軾, and Su Zhe 蘇轍 (Su Shi's younger brother) also visited here (known as *hou san you* 後三遊, which means the excursion of the later three). Now Sanyou Cave is a National 4A Grade Tourist Scenic Area.

¹¹⁷ Bai Juyi (772–846), courtesy name Letian 樂天, was a Chinese musician, poet, and politician during the Tang dynasty. Many of his poems concern his career or observations made about everyday life, including as governor of three different provinces. He achieved fame as a writer of verse in a low-key, near-vernacular style that was popular throughout medieval East Asia. Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen together initiated the New Yuefu (lit., “Music Bureau,” i.e., ballad) Movement 新樂府運動, which aimed to restore the ancient system of poetry collection and carried forward the traditions of *Shijing* 詩經 (the *Book of Songs*) and the old Yuefu in the Han and Wei dynasties, so that poetry could continue to serve the purpose of “monitoring current political affairs” and “expressing common people’s feelings.”

¹¹⁸ Huaixi riots 淮西之亂: In the ninth year of Yuanhe 元和 (814) of Emperor Xianzong of the Tang dynasty 唐憲宗, Wu Yuanji 吳元濟, the local governor of Huaixi, rebelled. Emperor Xianzong sent troops to quell the riots and succeeded in 816. Therefore, the next year of Huaixi riots was the thirteenth year of Yuanhe (818).

¹¹⁹ Jiangzhou Sima 江州司馬: In the ninth year of Yuanhe (815), Bai Juyi was demoted to the post of secretary of Jiangzhou (present-day Jiujiang 九江, Jiangxi 江西), for offending his superior. Four years later, he was reappointed as Governor of Zhongzhou (present-day Zhong County 忠縣, Sichuan 四川). Sima was the secretary of a governor in the Tang dynasty.

¹²⁰ Zhongzhou Cishi 忠州刺史: Zhongzhou is present-day Zhong County 忠縣, Sichuan 四川. Cishi was a *zhou* (an administrative region) governor in the Tang dynasty.

¹²¹ Weizhi 微之 was the courtesy name of Yuan Zhen 元稹, who was a Chinese novelist, poet, and politician of the middle Tang dynasty. He was one of the closest friends of Bai Juyi and launched the New Yuefu Movement with him.

post of Secretary of Tongzhou¹²² to the post of Deputy Governor of Guozhou.¹²³

又明年春，各祇命之郡，與知退偕行。三月十日參會於夷陵。

By the following spring, each of us was ordered to arrive at our post. I traveled together with Zhitui.¹²⁴

On the tenth day of the third month,¹²⁵ we three gathered in Yiling.¹²⁶

翌日，微之反棹送予至下牢戍。又翌日，將別未忍，引舟上下者久之。

On the next day, Weizhi turned the boat around to send me to Xialao Shu.¹²⁷ On the following day, we were about to part but were reluctant to, so we pulled the boat back and forth for a long time.

酒酣，聞石間泉聲，因舍棹進策，步入缺岸。

While we were carousing, we heard the sound of a spring between the rocks, so we got off the boat, went ashore, and walked to the place where the cliff bank was notched.

初見石如疊如削，其怪者如引臂，如垂幢。

At first, we saw a stone that looked like it had been piled and pared. It was strange, resembling unfurled wings and a sagging flag.

次見泉，如瀉如灑，其奇者如懸練，如不絕線。

Then, we saw a spring that appeared to be venting and sprinkling. It was peculiar, resembling hanging white silk and an unending thread.

122 Tongzhou is present-day Da County 達縣 in Sichuan.

123 Guozhou Zhangshi 虢州長史: Guozhou is present-day Lingbao 靈寶 in Henan 河南. Zhangshi was the deputy governor in the Tang dynasty.

124 Zhitui 知退 was the courtesy name of Bai Xingjian 白行簡, Bai Juyi's younger brother. Bai Xingjian was a novelist during the Tang dynasty.

125 Chinese lunar calendar.

126 Yiling 夷陵 is the present-day Yichang 宜昌 in Hubei 湖北.

127 Xialao Shu 下牢戍, usually known as Xialao Guan 下牢关 (Shu means "garrison," Guan means "Pass"), which is to the west of Yichang.

遂相與維舟岩下，率僕夫芟蕪刈翳，梯危縋滑，休而複上者凡四五焉。

Then we together tied the boat under the rock and had the servants cut down the weeds and remove the obstacles. We set up ladders at the dangerous places and tied ropes at the slippery places. We rested and then proceeded to climb up about four or five times.

仰睇俯察，絕無人跡，但水石相薄，磷磷鑿鑿，跳珠濺玉，驚動耳目。

Looking up and down, there was no trace of human beings, only water and stone colliding with each other. The water was crystal clear, and the stone was distinctive-shaped. The spring water striking the stone was like pearls splashing upward against jade, which startled our ears and eyes.

自未訖戌，愛不能去。

We lingered from the Wei hour until the Xu hour,¹²⁸ appreciating it so much that we could not leave.

俄而峽山昏黑，雲破月出，光氣含吐，互相明滅，昌熒玲瓏，象生其中。

After a while, the gorge mountain dimmed black, the clouds broke, and the moon appeared. The moonlight was concealed or released; brightness and darkness alternating moment by moment. Dazzling and exquisite, all kinds of wonderful scenes existed here.

雖有敏口，不能名狀。

Even people with eloquence could not fully describe it.

既而，通夕不寐，迨旦將去，憐奇惜別，且歎且言。

Consequently, we stayed up all night until dawn before we were ready to leave. We yearned for the scenery and grieved for our separation, sighing while talking.

知退曰：「斯境勝絕，天地間其有幾乎？如之何府通津繇，歲代寂寥委置，罕有到者乎？」

Zhitui said, "This place is extremely magnificent. How many such places can there be in the world? This cave is connected to the ferry below, but for many years it was desolate, unheard of, and abandoned, with very few people coming here. Why?"

¹²⁸ *Wei* 未 and *Xu* 戌 are the names of hours in ancient China. *Wei* corresponds to 13:00 to 15:00 modern time. *Xu* corresponds to 19:00 to 21:00 modern time.

予曰：「借此喻彼，可為長太息者，豈獨是哉，豈獨是哉！」

I said, "This is not the only thing that can be used to illustrate something else, something that can be sighed over, is it? Is it?"

微之曰：「誠哉是言，矧吾人難相逢，斯境不易得；

Weizhi said, "Indeed what you said is true! Besides, we three rarely meet each other and this place is not easy to reach."

今兩偶於是，得無述乎？請各賦古調詩二十韻，書於石壁。」

"Now when two things coincidentally come together, how can we not write about it? Each of us, let us please write an ancient-genre poem with twenty rhymes on the stone wall."

乃命餘序而紀之。又以吾三人始遊，故目為三遊洞。

I was also asked to write a preface to recount this. Since we three were the first to visit here, we titled it "Cave of Three Visitors."¹²⁹

洞在峽州上二十里北峰下兩崖相鑿間。欲將來好事者知，故備書其事。

The cave is under the North Peak, twenty miles north of Xiazhou, where the two cliffs meet. We hope that, in the future, anyone interested will be able to know about this place, so we have recorded this excursion in detail.

唐元和十四年忠州刺史白居易撰。

Written by Bai Juyi, Governor of Zhongzhou, in the fourteenth year of Yuanhe¹³⁰ of Tang.

¹²⁹ Sanyou Cave 三游洞: *san* is three; *you* is excursion. Sanyou Cave literally means a cave to which three people once had an excursion.

¹³⁰ Yuanhe 元和 (806–821) is the name of reign years during the rule of Emperor Xianzong of Tang.

APPENDIX C: STORIES OF THREE DREAMS (三夢記)

BY BAI XINGJIAN

TRANSLATED AND FOOTNOTED BY QIANHENG JIANG

天後時，劉幽求為朝邑丞。嘗奉使，夜歸。

During the reign of the heavenly Empress,¹³¹ Liu Youqiu was the chancellor minister of Chao County. Once he was ordered to go on a mission, then went back at night.

未及家十餘裏，適有佛堂院，路出其側。

When he was less than ten *li*¹³² away from home, there happened to be a temple by the roadside.

聞寺中歌笑歡洽。寺垣短缺，盡得睹其中。

He heard singing and laughter in the temple, which was happy and harmonious. The temple wall was low and broken; from the gap, the scene inside could be completely seen.

劉俯身窺之，見十數人，兒女雜坐，羅列盤饌，環繞之而共食。

Liu Youqiu leaned down to peep inside, seeing more than ten people: men and women were sitting in mixed groups, and cups and plates were displayed on the table. People were surrounding the table in a circle, dining together.

見其妻在坐中語笑。劉初愕然，不測其故久之。

He then saw his wife sitting among them, laughing and talking. At first Liu was shocked and couldn't fathom why she was there.

¹³¹ Heavenly Empress refers to Wu Zetian, the only female ruler throughout Chinese history. Her personal name was Wu Zhao. She was the ruler of the Tang dynasty from 665 to 705, ruling first through others and then (from 690) in her own right.

¹³² *Li* 里, a Chinese unit of distance. One modern *li* is about 500 meters. *Li* is sometimes translated as "trident," i.e., three hundred paces.

且思其不當至此，復不能舍之。又熟視容止言笑，無異。

However, he thought she should not be here, and he could not leave her there. Again, he looked closely at that person's appearance, behavior, talking, and laughter. Nothing was different from his wife.

將就察之，寺門閉不得入。劉擲瓦擊之，中其盥洗，破迸走散，因忽不見。

He wanted to closely investigate it, but the temple's gate was locked and he could not enter. He threw tiles to hit them but hit the washbasin. The basin was broken and water splashed. Then, those people suddenly disappeared.

劉逾垣直入，與從者同視，殿序皆無人，寺局如故，劉訝益甚，遂馳歸。

Liu went in over the wall and also checked with his attendants, but the main hall and the east and west rooms were empty, and the temple gate was still locked outside. Liu was more shocked than ever and rushed back home.

比至其家，妻方寢。

When he arrived home, his wife was sleeping.

聞劉至，乃敘寒暄訖，妻笑曰：“向夢中與數十人遊一寺，皆不相識，會食於殿庭。有人自外以瓦礫投之，杯盤狼籍，因而遂覺。”

Hearing Liu was back, she greeted him and talked with him. His wife smiled and said, "Just now, I had a dream that I was having fun with dozens of people in a temple. I knew none of them. We were gathering and eating in the main hall. Somebody threw a stone inside from the outside, and the cups and plates were in ruins, so I woke up."

劉亦具陳其見。蓋所謂彼夢有所往而此遇之也。

Liu also told what he saw in detail. This was probably a person's dream happening to another person, causing Liu to this experience.

元和四年，河南元微之為監察禦史，奉使劍外。

In the fourth year of Yuanhe, Yuan Weizhi, a person from Henan, was appointed as the supervisor of the imperial court and was ordered to serve in the area south of Jiange in Sichuan.¹³³

去逾旬，予與仲兄樂天，隴西李杓直同遊曲江。

After going there for more than ten days, I traveled around Qujiang with my second elder brother, Letian, and Li Shaozhi, who is from Longxi.

詣慈恩佛舍，遍歷僧院，淹留移時。

We visited Ci'en Temple, looked around all the monks' rooms and yards, and stayed there for a long time.

日已晚，同詣杓直修行裏第，命酒對酬，甚歡暢。

In the evening, we went to the house of Li Shaozhi. He hosted us with wine, and we had a wonderful time.

兄停杯久之，曰：「微之當達梁矣。」命題一篇於屋壁。其詞曰：

My brother stopped drinking for a long time, then said, "I think Weizhi has arrived in Liangzhou." He then wrote a poem on the wall of the house. The poem says:

“春來無計破春愁，醉折花枝作酒籌。忽憶故人天際去，計程今日到梁州。”

“Spring has come; I have no idea how to eliminate the spring sorrow.

After becoming drunk, I fold down a flower branch as a drinking chip.

Suddenly, I think of my old friend who has been far away.

Having considered the journey, I see he should arrive in Liangzhou today.”

實二十一日也。十許日，會梁州使適至，獲微之書一函，後寄《紀夢詩》一篇，其詞曰：

That was actually the twenty-first of the month. After ten days, an envoy came from Liangzhou arrived here. We got a letter from Weizhi, and at the end of the letter, there was a poem titled “Poem to Record a Dream.” The poem says:

¹³³Jiange 劍閣 refers to a prosperous area in Sichuan.

“夢君兄弟曲江頭，也入慈恩院裏遊。屬吏喚人排馬去，覺來身在古梁州。”

"I dream of you brothers at the source of Qujiang,

Also traveling in the Ci'en Temple.

My attendant has asked someone to ride a horse there.

When I wake up, I feel like I'm in ancient Liangzhou."

日月與遊寺題詩日月率同，蓋所謂此有所為而彼夢之者矣。

The date was almost the same as the day we visited the temple and wrote the poem. This was probably the fulfillment of something that happened to one person in another person's dream.

貞元中，扶風竇質與京兆韋旬同自毫入秦，宿潼關逆旅。

In the year of Zhengyuan, Dou Zhi, a person from Fufeng, and Wei Xun, the governor of the capital, entered the Qin region from Bozhou and stayed at an inn in Tongguan.

竇夢至華嶽祠，見一女巫，黑而長。青裙素襦，迎路拜揖，請為之祝神。

At night, Dou dreamed that he went to Huayue Shrine and met a tall, dark-skinned witch. She was wearing a black robe and a white shirt. She greeted him on the road, bowed down, and asked him to allow her to pray to the gods for him.

竇不獲已，遂聽之。問其姓，自稱趙氏。

Dou had no choice but to let her go. He asked her name. She said her surname was Zhao.

及覺，具告於韋。明日，至祠下，有巫迎客，容質妝服，皆所夢也。

When he woke up, Dou told Wei the dream in detail. The next day, they went to the shrine, and a witch came out to welcome them. Her appearance, manner, make-up, and dress were the same as in the dream.

顧謂韋曰：“夢有征也。”乃命從者視囊中，得錢二環，與之。

Dou looked at Wei and said, "The dream has proved to be true!" He asked his servant to look in the bag and take two coins to reward the witch.

巫撫掌大笑，謂同輩曰：“如所夢矣！”

The witch clapped her hands, laughed, and said to her colleagues, “Look, it’s the same as my dream!”

韋驚問之，對曰：“昨夢二人從東來，一髯而短者祝醕，獲錢二環焉。及旦，乃遍述於同輩。今則驗矣。”

Wei was surprised and asked her why. The witch replied, “Yesterday I dreamed that two men came from the east, and a short man with a beard gave me two coins after a toast. After dawn, I told my colleagues what I had dreamed, and now it has come true.”

竇因問巫之姓氏。同輩曰：“趙氏。”

Dou then asked the surname of the witch. Her colleagues said, “Zhao.”

自始及末，若合符契。蓋所謂兩相通夢者矣。

The whole thing from beginning to end, both dreams corresponded and matched. That is how two people’s dreams interconnect with each other.

行簡曰：《春秋》及子史，言夢者多，然未有載此三夢者也。

Xingjian says: From *Spring and Autumn* to the writings of the nobles and the history books, there are many accounts of dreams, but none of them has recorded these three kinds of dreams.

世人之夢亦眾矣，亦未有此三夢。豈偶然也，抑亦必前定也？

There are also many folk stories about dreams, but there are no such three dreams. Is it by chance, or is it also predetermined?

予不能知。今備記其事，以存錄焉。

I cannot know. Now I write down these things to save it as a record.

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