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# Intertextual Relationships between Ming Period Dramas and Novels: Two Examples from the Han Xiangzi Narrative Complex

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## Introduction

The late Ming novel *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* 韓湘子全傳 (The complete story of Han Xiangzi) has long been neglected by traditional and modern scholarship, even though it is arguably one of the more refined and interesting works among the vernacular novels of this time period. Its value is both literary and religious in that it manages to combine a serious religious purpose with a well-crafted plot and a large variety of literary devices. Thus, it can be studied profitably by historians of both Chinese religions and Chinese literature. The focus of the present paper will be its literary rather than religious aspects.

My own interest in the Han Xiangzi theme goes back to 1992, when I attended two graduate seminars at the University of British Columbia in the doctoral programme in Asian Studies. Looking for a text to write a paper on, I stumbled across the *Story of the Immortal Han* (*Han xian zhuan* 韓仙傳), a novella from perhaps the Yuan or early Ming period. Intrigued by this story of the immortal Han Xiangzi, I decided to pursue it further in another seminar

the next semester by translating two chapters (6 & 7) of the late Ming dynasty vernacular novel *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* and analyzing their key theme of the trials and tests a candidate for immortality needs to undergo. Eventually, I published a full translation of the novel into English,<sup>1</sup> but this was merely an intermediate by-product of a long-term project to use the Han Xiangzi theme as a case-example for studying the interactions of religion and literature, as well as among different literary genres in the late Imperial period. The present paper makes another small step along this way by examining the intertextual relationships between two literary presentations of the Han Xiangzi theme: the already mentioned novel and the drama *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxianji* 韓湘子九度文公昇仙記 (Ascension to immortality: how Han Xiangzi attempted nine times to deliver Wengong - short: *Shengxianji*).

That many Ming novels have at least some of their antecedents in Yuan and early Ming dramas should come as no surprise, since the latter genre precedes the novel historically while at the same time often dealing with similar subject matter. A classic study in this regard is Glen Dudbridge's 1970 work on the antecedents of the *Xiyouji* 西遊記, in which Yuan-period *zaju* 雜劇 played a major role.<sup>2</sup> While Dudbridge was primarily interested in the evolution of narrative themes and motifs, in recent years more general studies of the interrelationships of drama and novel have appeared that also pay more attention to structural influences of drama on the novel (such as the

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1. *Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007).
  2. Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu Chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

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division into scenes prefiguring the novel chapters, the use of poetic genres to supplement prose narration, the structuring and use of dialogue etc.).<sup>3</sup> Here I propose to add to this field of inquiry by taking an experimental look at the textual relationship between the above-mentioned Han Xiangzi novel and drama.

## The Two Texts

Of the two base texts, the novel is more clearly datable, the earliest extant Jiurutang 九如堂 edition having a preface dated 1623.<sup>4</sup> Its author was Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾, a Hangzhou scholar-printer who left behind a number of works, including another novel, as well as books on painting and Daoist

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3. See, for example, Tu Xiuhong 涂秀虹, *Yuan-Ming xiaoshuo xiqu guanxi yanjiu* 元明小說戲曲關係研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian shudian, 2004); Shen Xinlin 沈新林, *Tongyuan er yipai: Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo xiqu bijiao yanjiu* 同源而異派——中國古代小說戲曲比較研究 (Nanjing: Fenghuang, 2007).
  4. While the preface date of 1623 (3rd year Tianqi 天啟) is not in doubt, the dating of the Jiurutang edition is. Wang Ruo argues that it may be an early Qing reprint of a Ming edition. Wang Ruo 王若, 「Han Xiangzi quanzhuan Jiurutang ben yi fei Ming kan」《韓湘子全傳》九如堂本疑非明刊, *Dushu* 讀書 1990.5: 149-150. Most commonly used are the facsimile editions in two major collectanea. See *Guben xiaoshuo congkan* 古本小說叢刊, series 34, vol.4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991); *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成, vol.200:1/2 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, no date). I worked primarily with the microfiche edition in the collection of Dutch sinologist Robert van Gulik (Leiden, Van Gulik collection microfiche CH-1289).

hagiography.<sup>5</sup> The play, on the other hand, does not seem to contain any obvious hints as to its date. The only extant version of the Fuchuntang 富春堂 edition.<sup>6</sup> A terminus ante quem for the play is provided by the known history of the publishing house Fuchuntang in Jinling 金陵 (= modern-day Nanjing). Ma Huaxiang uses various structural and typographical features to date the Fuchuntang edition of the *Shengxianji* to the early Wanli period (between 1572 and 1588).<sup>7</sup> The play itself may have been composed as early as the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign period (1522-1567).<sup>8</sup> However that may be, the publication date alone suffices to mark out the play as the earlier text and thus any study of its relationship with the novel must start out from the assumption that latter

5. For more on Yang Erzeng's biography and oeuvre, see Clart, *Alchemical Adventures*, xxiii-xxv. Since the appearance of this 2007 biographical sketch, other scholars have published similar and somewhat expanded accounts, apparently independently as they do not refer to my text. See Lin Li-chiang 林麗江, 「A Study of the *Xinjuan hainei qiguan*, a Ming Dynasty Book of Famous Sites,」 in *Bridges to Heaven: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Professor Wen C. Fong*, ed. Jerome Silbergeld, Dora C.Y. Ching, Judith G. Smith, and Alfreda Murck (Princeton: 頁 Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, Princeton University in association with Princeton University Press, 2011), 779-812; Kung Man 龔敏, 「Mingdai chubanjia Yang Erzeng bianzhan kanke kao」明代出版家楊爾曾編撰刊刻考, *Wenxue xinyao* 文學新鑰 10 (2009): 195-230.
6. *Guben xiqu congkan chuji* 古本戲曲叢刊初集, vol.47 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1954).
7. Ma Huaxiang 馬華祥, 「Wanli Jinling Fuchuntang kanben chuanqi banben kao」萬曆金陵富春堂刊本傳奇版本考, *Huaqiao Daxue xuebao* 華僑大學學報 (*zhexue shehui kexue ban* 哲學社會科學版) 2010.4: 99. See also Cheng Hong 程洪, 「Das *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxianji*: Literatur- und geistesgeschichtliche Analyse eines Ming-zeitlichen Dramas,」 MA thesis, University of Leipzig, 2012.
8. Wang Hanmin 王漢民, *Daojiao shenxian xiqu yanjiu* 道教神仙戲曲研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2007), 108.

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might have drawn on the former, but not the other way around.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning the concrete intertextual relationship between the two works, scholars differ in their estimation. Following Zheng Zhenduo's dictum that the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* probably evolved directly from the *Shengxianji*, Gao Yuhou attributes to the *Shengxianji* an important mediating function between the quite crude Eight Immortals stories of the novel *Dongyouji* 東遊記 (Journey to the East) and the refined *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*.<sup>10</sup> Tu Xiuhong argues that the plot lines of the two works are almost identical, except that the novel has more episodes and is generally more detailed.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Wang Yun postulates significant differences between the play and the novel and rejects the hypothesis that the former served as a direct model for the latter. Instead she argues that the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* is basically rewritten from one or more *daoqing* performance scripts (*shuochang daoqing* 說唱道情), which would account for the many *daoqing* tunes included in the novel, as well as a number of other structural features that distinguish it from other novels of the Ming period.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Pace Zhan Shichuang's 詹石窗 probably unintentionally misleading statement that the *Shengxianji* was based on the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*. See his *Daojiao yu xiju* 道教與戲劇 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1997), 271. (What he probably means in this passage is that the *Shengxianji* was based on the Han Xiangzi narrative tradition, of which the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* is also a product.)

10. Gao Yuhou 臬于厚, 「*Han Xiangzi quanzhuan manyi*」《韓湘子全傳》漫議, *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 1992.1: 122; cf. Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxueshi* 插圖本中國文學史 (Beijing: Rebin wenxue, 1957), 919.

11. Tu Xiuhong, *Yuan-Ming xiaoshuo xiqu guanxi yanjiu*, 402.

12. Wang Yun 王芸, 「*Han Xiangzi quanzhuan yu daoqing*」《韓湘子全傳》與道情, *Zhongguo Daojiao* 中國道教 2009.1: 52-55.

In the present paper, I will try to assess the nature of the intertextual relationship by looking at what seem to be direct textual borrowings from the *Shengxianji* in the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*. This is a very preliminary endeavour, limited to the collation of selected similar song pieces from the two texts.

### Textual Comparison

<i>Shengxianji</i>	<i>Han Xiangzi quanzhuan</i>	Notes
古洞閑雲已情關，香風縹緲遍塵文。 神仙豈肯臨凡世，為度韓公此一番。（第三折）	古洞閑雲已閉關，香風縹緲遍塵寰。 神仙豈肯臨凡世，為度文公走一番。（第十回）	Occurs in SXJ as concluding poem at end of scene 3, in HXZQZ in chapter 10. In both instances the context is Han Xiangzi's first appearance as immortal on his mission to convert Han Yu.
【駐雲飛】 壽旦開筵，壽菓盤中色色鮮。壽香金爐篆，壽酒霞盃泛。嗲，五福壽為先。永綿綿，壽比崗陵，壽算期長遠。惟願取，壽比蓬蒿不老仙。【前腔】 壽靄盤旋，壽燭高燒照壽筵。壽星南極現，壽桃西池獻。嗲，壽鶴舞蹁躚，壽長年。壽比喬松，歲寒顏非變。	有《駐雲飛》為證： 壽旦開筵，壽果盤中色色鮮。壽篆金爐現，壽酒霞杯豔。嗲，五福壽為先。壽綿綿，壽比崗陵，壽算真悠遠。惟願取，壽比南山不老仙。壽靄盤旋，壽燭高燒照壽筵。壽星南極現，壽桃西池獻。嗲，壽鶴舞蹁躚，壽萬年。壽比喬松，不怕風霜剪。惟願取，壽比蓬萊不老仙。壽祝南山，萬壽無疆福祿全。	Same context: Han Yu's birthday. Some graphic variations; expanded endings of three stanzas in HXZQZ.

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<i>Shengxianji</i>	<i>Han Xiangzi quanzhuan</i>	Notes
<p>【前腔】 壽祝南山，萬壽無疆福祿全。壽花枝枝艷，壽詞聲聲羨。唵，海屋壽籌添，壽無邊。壽日週流，歲歲年年轉。</p> <p>【前腔】 壽酒重添，壽客繽紛。列綺筵。壽比靈椿健，壽逐東風遠。唵，眉壽喜躋攀，壽彌堅。壽考惟祺，壽着南華傳。（第十二折）</p>	<p>壽花枝枝豔，壽詞聲聲羨。唵，海屋壽籌添，壽無邊。壽日周流，歲歲年年轉。惟願取，壽比東方不老仙。壽酒重添，壽客繽紛列綺筵。壽比靈椿健，壽看滄桑變。唵，得壽喜逢年，壽彌堅。壽考惟祺，蟠際真無限。惟願取，壽比崑崙不老仙。（第十三回）</p>	<p>Same context: Han Yu's birthday. Some graphic variations; expanded endings of three stanzas in HXZQZ.</p>
<p>野花不種年年有，煩惱無根日日生。（第三十二折）</p>	<p>真個是： 野花不種年年發，煩惱無根日日生。（第二十六回）</p>	<p>Almost identical.</p>
<p>【沽美酒】 傳與你進道功休暫輟，說與修真路要冽決。保守真陽莫泄洩。我與你，天邊月，月圓時金花自結，月缺時紅鉛又卸。任姹女嬰兒歡悅，看白雪黃芽茁，我呵，把工夫下者剔塵垢夫也做永長生客。（第三十六折）</p>	<p>真人又唱一闕《沽美酒》道： 傳與汝進道功休暫輟，說與汝修真路要烈訣。得守元陽休漏泄。我與汝，天邊月，月圓時金花自結，月缺時紅鉛又卸。任姹女嬰兒歡悅，看白雪黃芽茁，我呵，把工夫下著剔塵垢，做一個蓬萊仙客。（第二十七回）</p>	<p>Last aria of SXJ. In HXZQZ chapter 27 completes the conversion of Han Yu.</p>

## Analysis

This comparison proves that some of the lyric sections of *Shengxianji* reappear in *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*, with minor typographical variations and occasional rephrasings and additions. A further search may well reveal more



parallels, including looser ones such as the Goat-raising Songs (*yangyangge* 養羊歌) in chapter 14 of the novel and scene 12 of the play. At the same time, however, these clear parallels are isolated by wide swaths of unique prose and lyric material in the two texts. As a result, Wang Yun's recent hypothesis that the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* may not be primarily based on the *Shengxianji*, but instead represents a rewriting of one or more *daoqing* scripts seems to me worth pursuing. She adduces further traces of *daoqing* characteristics in the novel such as the larger than usual share of song tunes vis-à-vis prose text (she estimates that 30% of the text are lyrical), the greater than usual use of dialogue, and the alternation of prose and song which echo *shuochang* performances. She also points out that the novel's preface that explicitly refers to popular performances. This preface states:

His [Han Xiangzi's] story is only transmitted by the blind storytellers who either sing in a loud voice while holding documents like officials, or recite ballads in a wild manner dressed up as Daoist priests, sighing three times for every line they chant. These stories everywhere delight the hearts of ignorant people and village matrons, and are listened to by school teachers and their pupils. Yet their style is disorderly and erroneous, their poems are inept and awkward. If they are sung by boatmen while rowing their oars, those who listen will forget their fatigue. But if one were to ascend with them the stage of poetic appreciation, the audience would close their eyes in embarrassment.

As for those who nowadays transmit the story of Xiangzi, could

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there be one who, having a grasp of the marvels of pneuma ingestion, has thereby succeeded in lengthening his years, and who uses the figure of Xiangzi to divulge the general outline of such successful practice? Or, if this Xiangzi really exists, is there one who might use his story to express the wondrous insights of his own mind? Imitating romances and drawing on local traditions, such a writer compiled this book, telling the story in its general outlines. Having only limited experience, he spent three years pursuing Xiangzi's traces. He marked and divided his manuscript into chapters and published it as an original work. Its style is extraordinary, being written with a liberal brush and broadminded intentions. Its contents have both breadth and depth, being composed with a powerful pen in elegant diction.<sup>13</sup>

只以朦師瞽叟，執簡高歌；道扮狂謳，一唱三歎。熙熙然慊愚氓村嫗之心，洋洋乎入學究蒙童之耳，而章法龐雜舛錯，諺詞詰屈聳牙。以之當榜客鼓枻之歌，雖聽者忘疲；以之登騷卿鑒賞之壇，則觀者閉目。

今之傳湘子者，豈有得於神氣之奧，因駕長年之永轍，而托湘子以宜泄其梗概耶？抑果有是湘子而借其事以吐胸中之奇耶？仿模外史，引用方言，編輯成書，揚權故實。閱歷疏窗，三載搜羅。傳往跡，標分殘帙，如於目次；布新編，文章奇詭，筆縱意宏。識記博洽，鋒毫藻振。

Here the preface author seems explicitly to regard the author's work

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13. For the translation see Clart, *Alchemical Adventures*, 4-5.

as aiming to improve upon unsatisfactory and crude popular traditions. The compared passages above show some of this upgrading work being performed on cruder material, including the substitution of non-standard with standard characters and replacing phrases and words with more literary alternatives (e.g., *ru* 汝 for *ni* 你); a nice example of the author's work are the added verses in the last three stanzas of the longevity song in chapter 13, which bring structural regularity to a tune that seems truncated in the *Shengxianji* version.

Of course, if Yang Erzeng did not work with the *Shengxianji* directly, it would follow that the textual overlaps between *Shengxianji* and *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* are due to both texts drawing on a similar, but not identical body of *daoqing*. Whether Yang Erzeng improved the “Zhuyunfei” tune or simply had access to a different version than the *Shengxianji* author cannot be decided in the absence of this third text itself. However, since we are unlikely to find any of these Ming period popular *daoqing* scripts surviving to this day, further comparison of *Shengxianji* and *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* may end up offering us a way of triangulating the stories performed in the late Ming “by the blind storytellers who either sing in a loud voice while holding documents like officials, or recite ballads in a wild manner dressed up as Daoist priests, sighing three times for every line they chant.”

An additional promising line of inquiry is the Qing dynasty tradition of Han Xiangzi *daoqing* and *baojuan* 寶卷, which may preserve earlier material that also left traces in *Shengxianji* and *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*.<sup>14</sup> What is clearly

14. Cf. Wang Yun, *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan yu daoqing*, 53; Zan Jingyu 詹經宇, “Qing keben *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong quanben (daoqing quanzhuan) jianlun*” 清刻本《韓湘子九度文公全本（道情全傳）》簡論, *Cangsang* 滄桑 2009.1: 244-245.

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needed is thus a systematic intertextual inventory and comparison of the major texts of the Ming and Qing Han Xiangzi tradition, with a particular emphasis on types and contents of the tunes employed. Such an expanded database will assist us to some extent in reconstructing popular performance texts of the late Ming, while at the same time providing novel insights into the creative processes involved in compiling theatrical plays and novels of this time period.