多元一体的华人宗教与文化
苏庆华博士花甲纪念论文集
Diversity in Unity: Studies of Chinese Religion & Culture
A Festschrift in Honour of Dr Soo Khin Wah on His Sixtieth Birthday
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Han Xiangzi 韩湘子 in Popular Literature of the Qing Period: A Preliminary Investigation of the Han xian baozhuang 韩仙宝传

Philip Clart 柯若朴

1. Introduction

Han Xiangzi 韩湘子 is best known in popular culture nowadays as one of the “Eight Immortals” (Baxian 八仙), a group that consists of Zhongli Quan 钟离权, Lü Dongbin 吕洞宾, Zhang Guolao 张果老, Li Tieguai 李铁拐, He Xianggu 何仙姑, Lan Caihe 蓝采和, Cao Guojue 曹国舅, and Han Xiangzi. These immortals came together as a group by the late Song dynasty.

Note: My interest in the Han Xiangzi legends was first awakened during my doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia in the 1990s, where I came to know my xuesheng 学生, Soo Khim Wah 苏庆华, to whom I offer this research article on his sixtieth birthday. An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference on “文学：跨学科之可能,” Guangzhou University, 6 November 2014.

This introduction is based on material in my translation of the Ming-period novel Han Xiangzi quanzhuan 韩湘子全传, with some updates referring to secondary literature having appeared since its first publication. Of particular importance is Wu Guangzheng’s 吴光正 monograph, Baxian gushi xitong kaolu: neidandao zongjiao shenhua de jian ‘gou ji qi liubian 八仙故事系统考论: 内丹道宗教神话的建构及其流变 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), which had not yet been available to me when I published my translation. Cf. Yang Erzeng, trsl. by Philip Clart, Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007), xv-xxxv.
(twelfth/thirteenth centuries), with only occasional variations in their composition. 2 Probably the earliest appearance of a Baxian group is found in a wall painting of a Jin dynasty tomb (Taihe 泰和 period, 1201-1209), reflecting a popularity that continued into the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) with the immortals as motifs on incense burners, clothing, and folk art. 3 Dramatists of the Yuan period also got hold of their theme and produced the first literary codifications of their lore. In Yuan drama, the Eight Immortals appear in “deliverance plays” (dutuoju 度脱剧), which focus usually on only a few of the group, most prominently Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin. 4 By the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the Eight Immortals had come to occupy a firm place in the dramatic repertoire, both in the form of full-length plays 5 and in short skits performed on auspicious occasions such as birthdays (Baxian qingshou 八仙庆寿). 6 Especially the latter remain a fixture in local opera traditions across China. The Ming period also saw the first full narrative development of the Eight Immortals complex in the form of a novel, the Dongyou ji 东游记 (“Journey to the East”) by Wu Yuantai 吴元泰. 7 Much of the later Eight Immortals lore is linked with this important text, including the famous story of their crossing of the ocean (Baxian guohai 八仙过海), which became a staple motif in folk art and can still be found today painted on many Taiwanese temple walls and stitched on bright red cloths (baxiancai 八仙彩) that are hung over entrances to bring blessings to the building and its inhabitants. 8 Thus, since the Ming dynasty the Eight Immortals have found a firm place in Chinese popular culture, their stories transmitted through the theatre, folk art, story-

5 One of the best known examples is Tang Xianzu’s 汤显祖 Lü Dongbin play Handan ji 郢鄂记. Wu Xiuhua 吴秀华, Tang Xianzu Handan meng ji jiaoju 汤显祖《荆鄂梦记》校注 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004).

6 On the place of the Baxian in traditional opera, see Idema & West, Chinese Theater 1100-1450, 300-308; Wang Hammin, Baxian yu Zhongguo wenhua, chapter 5. Also, Chen Lingling 陈玲玲, “Baxian zai Yuan-Ming zaju he Taiwan banxianxí zhong de zhuanquanguan 八仙在元明杂剧和台湾扮仙戏中的状况” (M.A. thesis, Wenhua Xueyuan, 1978).


8 On the baxiancai, see Wang Jingshi 王静思 Shenling huoxian: jingyan baxiancai 神灵活现: 惊艳八仙彩 (Luzhou shi: Boyang wenhua, 2000). The story of the Baxian’s crossing of the ocean appears first in the
Baxian group. In this paper I will continue my exploration of the story cycle surrounding Han Xiangzi, which so far has produced an English translation of a late Ming novel, the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuang* 韩湘子全传, a journal article, and a forthcoming essay on a Ming period Han Xiangzi drama. 12

Han Xiangzi is said to be a nephew or grandnephew of the famous Tang dynasty Confucian scholar Han Yu 韩愈 (768-824). And indeed there are reliable indications that Han Yu did have a relative named Han Xiang. He was a son of Han Yu’s nephew Han Laocheng 韩老成. In 819 Han Xiang and his brother Han Pang 韩滂 followed Han Yu into his exile to

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11 Che Xilun 车锡伦 lists six Baxian baojuan in his bibliography *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中国宝卷总目 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenyan yanjiusuo choubeichu, 1998), 1-2. A fairly easily accessible one of these is the *Baxian da shangzhao baojuan* 八仙大上寿宝卷 ("Precious volume on the Eight Immortals' birth congratulations"), which is included in the collection *Baojuan chujji* 宝卷初集, ed. by Zhang Xishun 张西舜 et al., vol. 28 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, no date). An overview of Baxian motifs in folk art and folk literature can be found in Wang Hammin, *Baxian zhongguo wenhua*, chapter 4. See also Shan Man 山曼, *Baxian chuanhshuo yu xinyang* 八仙传说与信仰 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003).

Chaozhou 潮州, where he had been banished for criticizing the emperor's worship of a Buddha relic. In 820, Han Xiang followed his great-uncle to a new post in Yuanzhou 袁州, where his brother Han Pang died at the age of 19. According to the historical records, Han Xiang was born in 793 and passed the jinshi examination in 823, that is, when he was thirty years of age. His zi was Beizhu 北渚 and his highest official appointment was assistant minister in the Court of Judicial Review. His death date is unclear. The Complete Poems of the Tang Dynasty (Quan Tang shi 《全唐诗》) contains a handful of poems addressed to Han Xiang by various authors. The most famous of these is the one that is immediately connected with the appearance of the Han Xiangzi legend. It is Han Yu’s poem composed in 819 at the Blue Pass 蓝关 on his way to his exile in Chaozhou (modern Guangdong province):

《左迁至蓝关示侄孙湘》

一封朝奏九重天
夕贬潮州路八千
欲为圣明除弊事
肯将衰朽惜残年
云横秦岭家何在
雪拥蓝关马不前
知汝远来应有意
好收吾骨瘴江边

“Demoted I arrive at Lan-t’ien Pass and Show This Poem to My Brother’s Grandson Han Hsiang”

A sealed epistle submitted at dawn to Nine-fold Heaven—
Exiled at dusk to Ch’ao-chou eight thousand leagues to travel
Wishing to save his Sagacious Brilliance
from treacherous evils,
could I have cared for the years that remain
in my withered limbs?
Clouds straddle the mountains of Ch’in
where is my house?
snows crowd the pass at L an horses will not move.
I know what the reason must be
that makes you come so far—
the better to gather my bones
from shores of miasmic water.

The poem expresses Han Yu’s relief on seeing his nephew

13 Chen Keming 陈克明, Han Yu nianpu ji shiwen xinian 韩愈年谱及诗文系年 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1999), 526; Qian Zhonglian 钱仲联, Han Changli shi xinian jishi 韩昌黎诗集年集释 (Taipei: Xuehai chu-banshe, 1985), 1097.

arrive amidst the heavy snow at the Blue Pass in the Qin mountain range south of Chang’an. Nothing in the sparse existing biographical data on Han Xiang indicates any deeper meaning, yet this poem was to become central in the evolving Han Xiangzi lore. It was taken to refer to Han Xiangzi’s arrival at Han Yu’s side to rescue him by means of his supernatural powers, and to deliver him from his worldly delusions and allow him to become an immortal.

In terms of historical sources there is, of course, a serious problem. The historical Han Xiang seems to have led a fairly conventional life, enjoyed a moderately successful official career, and apparently had no particular Daoist leanings. So what does he have to do with the Daoist immortal who delivers Han Yu at Blue Pass? Well, possibly he was conflated with another relative of Han Yu’s who indeed is said to have possessed magical abilities. Among Han Yu’s writings we find a poem (dating to the year 799) in which he records the visit of a distant relative who claimed to possess extraordinary skills. The relevant passages are found in verses 15 through 22:

Han Yu thus receives a visitor who claims to be of his lineage, obviously of a lower generation than Han Yu, as the latter addresses him in the poem’s title as a “distant nephew” (zuòshí), a nephew in a generalized sense as a distant relative of a

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15 Chen Keming, Han Yu nianpu ji shiwen xinian, 92; Qian Zhonglian, Han Changli shi xinian jishi, 98.
older generation). The visitor claims to have magical skills and to be able to predict the future. Han Yu himself was thirty-two at the time of this event.

These two poems, one mentioning the visit of a supernaturally gifted "distant nephew" in 799, the other of Han Yu's encounter with his grandnephew Han Xiang at Blue Pass twenty years later together are the starting point for the Han Xiangzi legend. Its core features are Han Xiangzi's prediction of Han Yu's predicament at Blue Pass and his rescue of Han Yu when the prediction comes true. Chronologically it is impossible for Han Xiang to be the "distant nephew" mentioned in the 799 poem (he would have been about six years of age at the time), but attention to detail is not a great concern of myth-makers. And so very early on we find tales about an unusually gifted nephew of Han Yu. The first instance occurred in a text composed by a near-contemporary of Han Yu and Han Xiang, Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (803-863) Youyang zazu 酉陽雜俎. He records that a distant nephew of Han Yu was taken into his household and given an education. The nephew however turns out to be unruly and unwilling to study. When Han Yu confronts him, the nephew claims to have other skills, namely to grow multi-coloured peonies. He prepares such a plant for Han Yu and when after several weeks it blossoms, on its petals are inscribed the fifth and sixth verses of Han Yu's poem of 819. The nephew then declares his unwillingness to enter officialdom and leaves. The nephew is not named, but the story of the verses appearing on the flower petals becomes a part of later Han Xiangzi lore.

Through the Five Dynasties and early Song period we find more stories (in the anecdotal literature and also in Daoist hagiography) about the mysterious nephew of Han Yu, whose magical powers grow over time. The earliest explicit linking of the themes in the two poems appears in Du Guangting's 杜光庭 (850-933) Xianzhu shiyi 仙侶拾遺 where the nephew prepares the peonies and leaves. Han Yu is banished and encounters the same nephew at Blue Pass. The next spring the peonies open and are found to be inscribed with the two verses. Here for the first time it is also claimed that the nephew later transmitted the Dao to Han Yu. This version contains an implicit identification of the nephew with Han Xiang (though problematically the nephew here is called a waisheng 外甥, i.e., a nephew through a female member of Han Yu's lineage, which does not fit Han Xiang's profile—but again historical exactitude is not the first concern here). The first time this identification is made explicit is in Liu Fu's 刘斧 (ca. 1040-later than 1113) Qingsuo gaoyi 青琐高议. 17


18 Quoted under the title "Han Yu waisheng 韩愈外甥" in Taiping guangji 太平广记, juan 54 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 331.

19 Qingsuo gaoyi, qianji, juan 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 85-87.
From then on, the core of Han Xiangzi lore is established: Han Xiangzi as an unconventional and Daoist-leaning nephew who by means of a magical flower trick predicts Han Yu’s banishment, saves him in his predicament at Blue Pass, and later transmits the Dao to him. Later sources elaborate on that core and add additional elements such as Han Xiangzi’s earlier existence as a nunnous white crane, his apprenticeship with Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, his unconsummated marriage, and his later deliverance of his wife and his aunt. Some or all of these themes came together in Yuan drama, where we find four pieces specifically devoted to Han Xiangzi, of which none has survived. The earliest surviving texts with a fairly elaborate development of the Han Xiangzi theme (as separate from the Baxian lore) are:

- a novella called Han xian zhuán 韩仙传 which may date somewhere between the late Yuan and middle Ming periods;

20 Wilt L. Idema has tried to reconstruct the plots of some lost Han Xiangzi dramas. “Narrative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wanggong daoqing guanben,” Daoism: Religion, History and Society, no. 8 (2016): 111-115.

21 Two editions of the Han xian zhuán survive. One dates from the turn of the seventeenth century and is part of a Ming dynasty collection by the name of Baoyan tang miji 宝颜堂秘笈 (“Secret Bookbox of Baoyan Hall”), a very mixed collection of 226 works in 457 juàn, which share the quality of having been estimated “rare texts” by their editor. This editor is Chen Jiru 陈继儒 (1558-1639), a somewhat eccentric and exclusive private scholar with interests in all fields of literature. On Chen Jiru see Jamie Greenbaum, Chen Jiru (1558-1639): The Background to Development and Subsequent Uses of Literary Personae (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

- a Ming period drama (Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxian ji 韩湘子九度文公生仙记). 22

This development of Han Xiangzi lore finds its culmination in the late Ming novel Han Xiangzi quanzhuan 韓湘子全传, which was authored by Yang Erzeng 杨尔曾, a Hangzhou writer and book-seller/publisher active in the early seventeenth century. 23 The earliest surviving edition dates to 1623. 24 The storyline begins in the Han dynasty where Han Xiangzi’s previous incarnation is a beautiful, but haughty woman, who is consequently reborn as a white crane. The crane cultivates itself and meets Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin. They deliver it to be reborn as the son of Han Yu’s elder brother Han Hui 韩会. 23 After Han Hui’s and his wife’s death Han Xiangzi

The Baoyan Tang miji version can be found in Baiwu congshu jicheng zhi shiba 百部丛书集成之十八, vol. 65 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965). A reprint of the same edition is included in Zangwai daoshu 藏外道书, ed. by Hu Daojing 胡道静 et al., vol. 18 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992-1994), 802-814. The second edition is located in the Shufu 说孚 compiled by Tao Zongyi 陶宗仪 (1316-1403), which would give us a date ante quem in the Yuan dynasty. However, the only Shufu edition to contain the Han xian zhuán is the somewhat dubious 120 juàn version edited by Tao Ting 陶珽 of the early Qing period. Therefore, the only only thing we know for sure right now is that the text was in existence by the end of the 16th century, when Chen Jiru was compiling his collection. For an English translation of the Han xian zhuán, see my “The Story of the Immortal Han (Han xian zhuán): An Annotated Translation” (MS, 1992). A modern Chinese rendering of the text can be found in Baixian chuanqi 百仙传奇, ed. by Yuan Lükin 袁閔奎 (Zhonghe: Jianhong chubanshe, 1995), 437-462.

See my translation of the Han Xiangzi quanzhuang: The Story of Han Xiangzi. Aside from the Han Xiangzi quanzhuang, Yang Erzeng has been involved to differing degrees in the editing of at least six other works that still survive today: (1) the Hainei qiguan 海内奇观, an "armchair traveller's" collection of maps and illustrations of famous mountains and temples (In Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan er bian (di 8 ji) 中国 古代版画丛刊二编 (第八辑), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994); (2) the Xianxuan jishi 仙暇纪事, a collection of hagiographies of female immortals (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989); (3) the Dong Xi Jin yanyi 东西晋演义, a historical novel (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1971); (4) the Su Dongpo xiansheng chanxi ji 苏东坡先生禅集, a collection of Buddhist-inspired poetry of Su Shi, compiled by Chen Jiru 陈继儒 (Ming edition from the Wanli period held at the Fu Suu-nien Library, Academia Sinica); (5) the Xu Zhenjun jingming zongjiao lu 许真君净明宗教录, a collection of texts by and on the immortal Xu Xun 许逊 (1604 Zhan shi Xiqing Tang edition at the library of Beijing Daxue); (6) the Tuhui zongy i 图绘宗彝, an anthology of reproduced paintings (Wulin 武林: Yibai Tang 爽白堂, 1607). Of particular interest is Yang Erzeng's involvement as coeditor in Chen Jiru's collection of Chan poems by Su Shi. The reader may remember that Chen Jiru included the Han xian zhuang in his anthology Baoyan Tang miji (see above footnote 39). If it could be shown that Chen and Yang Erzeng were acquainted, this could explain how Yang came across the topic of Han Xiangzi, namely, through a suggestion from Chen or by borrowing Chen's copy of the Han xian zhuang. However, this is just a wild guess right now and needs further study. On the textual history of this collection, see Beata Grant, Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994), 3. Also see Greenbaum, Chen Jiru (1558-1639), 72. For further studies of Yang Erzeng and his works, see Lin Li-chiang 林丽江, “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: P.Y.and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, Princeton University in association with Princeton University Press, 2011), 779--812; Kuang Man 秦敏, “Mingdai chubanjia Yang Erzeng bianzhuang kanke kao 明代出版家杨尔曾编撰 刊考,” Wenxue xin yao 文学新潮 10 (2009): 195-230.

is raised in Han Yu's household where he is treated like a son (as he is the only male offspring of the Han family). Han Yu has great expectations of Han Xiangzi, but the latter follows his karmic destiny and runs away from home to join his masters Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin in the mountains. There he cultivates inner alchemy and becomes an immortal. The Jade Emperor sends him back to earth to deliver his uncle Han Yu, his aunt, and his wife Luying 芦英. After many failed attempts to break down Han Yu's Confucian obstinacy he delivers him at Blue Pass and later does the same for his aunt and wife. The story has a strong anti-Confucian element and was clearly written by an author knowledgeable in matters of internal alchemy. The prose narrative alternates with an unusually large number of poetic passages, many of which give rather profound summaries of alchemical wisdom. So this is certainly a didactic novel in that it teaches the superiority of Daoism over Confucianism and gives quite practical lessons in internal alchemy.

The preface to the Han Xiangzi quanzhuang 24 claims that the novel was based on crude storytellers' versions, which Yang Erzeng subjected to literary refinement:

His 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 there be one who, having a grasp of the marvels of pneumicide, has thereby succeeded in lengthening its years, and who uses the figure of Xiangzi to divulge the general outline of such a 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.

This statement of the novel’s preface makes it clear that Yang Erzeng reworked his plot from other, more popular texts and local traditions, but we are not able certain what these texts were. A possibility is the play *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxian ji*, some of whose arias re-appear in slightly modified in the novel; significantly, the modifications applied by Yang Erzeng often are exactly of the “refining” type alluded to in the preface. The play was published in the early Wanli period (between 1572 and 1588) in modern-day Nanjing and therefore definitely predates the novel. However, whether Yang Erzeng drew directly from the play’s libretto or whether

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25 Yang/Clart, *The Story of Han Xiangzi*, 4-5.
his novel and the play were both based on a third source cannot be finally decided at this point. 27 Wang Yun 王芸 has argued that both the novel and the play were in fact based on one or more daoqing. 28 This argument has been augmented recently by Wilt L. Iedema who claims to have discovered a Ming period daoqing that “served as one of the major sources of the early 17th-century novel Han Xiangzi quanzhuan”: *Han Xiangzi’s Twelvefold Conversion of Han Yu: Indigo Pass (Han Xiangzi shi’erdu Han Wengong Languan ji 韓湘子十二度韓文公藍關記)*. 29 This is certainly an intriguing hypothesis, but in my view Iedema’s Ming dating of the edition held in the Library of the Institute of Oriental Culture of the University of Tokyo is far from certain at this point. 30 Even if it were a Ming text, we would still need further confirmation by a detailed intertextual comparison before we can accept this text as an actual precursor of Yang Erzeng’s novel. 31

27 For more on the relationship of novel and play, see Clart, “Inter textual Relationships between Ming Period Dramas and Novels: Two Examples from the Han Xiangzi Narrative Complex.”


29 Wilt L. Iedema, “Narative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben,” 95.

30 See Iedema’s arguments for a Ming dating of the text: Iedema, “Narative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben,” 107.

31 A quick scan of the Han Xiangzi shi’erdu Han Wengong Languan ji did not yield any immediate and clear textual connections with the novel, but any more definite evaluation requires a careful textual study that cannot be provided here and now. See http://shanben.joc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/main_p.php?nu=D8500800&order=nn_no&no=01918 (last accessed on April 29, 2017).

In the following Qing period we find the Han Xiangzi theme being taken up in various forms of popular literature: baojuan, 32 tanci, dagushu, 33 daoqing, 34 local theatre, 35 The focus remains on the theme of deliverance, though in the popular texts attention often shifts from the deliverance of Han Yu to that of his wife Luying, or Lin Ying 林英 as she is

32 Che Xilun lists nine Han Xiangzi baojuan (Zhongguo baojuan zongmu, 101-102, 159, 203), though it is not clear whether these are really nine independent texts or whether some represent mere title variations. A broader overview of Han Xiangzi-related popular literature is provided by Wu Guangzheng, Baxian gushi xitong kaolun, chapter 13.

33 During a recent stay in Beijing (February and March 2017) I collected a significant number of late Qing, Republican, and early PRC period texts (among them baojuan, daoqing, and ballads) which still await careful comparison; these will be introduced in a forthcoming publication.


35 An overview of Han Xiangzi pieces in local opera traditions is given by Chen Liyu, “Han Xiangzi yanju,” 114-120. A Taiwan opera on Han Xiangzi’s deliverance of his wife (“Du qi” 除祟) is included in Tai wan suo jian de beiguan shouchaoben 台灣所見的北管手抄本, ed. Chen Xiufang 陈秀芳, vol. 3 (Taiuchung: Taiwan sheng wenxian weiyuanhui, 1981), 204-213.
usually called in the popular genres. Given the large female component in the audience for this literature, such a shift is understandable. There exists a significant enough number of such popular works to show that Han Xiangzi remained a well-known figure through the Qing period. In Ye County of Shandong province there even developed a specific local ballad genre based on the Han Xiangzi story (the Blue Pass Drama, Languan xi 藍關戲). Among the Eight Immortals, he is perhaps second only to Lü Dongbin in the number of surviving texts devoted to him as an individual, rather than as one of the Baxian.

2. The Han xian baozhuan

After my work on surviving Ming dynasty Han Xiangzi texts, the present paper opens the next phase of my research project by beginning to explore the Han Xiangzi storyline in Qing dynasty popular literature. The focus will be on a nineteenth-century baojuan called variously Han Xiangzi baozhuan 韩湘子宝传, Han xian baozhuan 韓仙宝传, Han xian baojian 韓仙宝鑑, Han xian zhuang 韓仙传, or Baihe zhuang 白鶴傳. I will refer to it by its arguably most common title, Han xian baozhuan (hereafter: HXBZ). I will here examine it with regard to its plot structure in comparison to that of the Ming-dynasty novel, Han Xiangzi quanzhuang (hereafter: HXZQZ). The point here is not to treat the HXBZ as a popularization of HXZQZ. Scholars are quite unanimous that few Qing dynasty works of popular literature are based directly on HXZQZ; instead they probably stand in the earlier daoqing tradition, on which the HXZQZ itself had drawn. However, a side by side comparison of the two texts will reveal plot differences that in my view are not accidental, but can be related to the texts’ respective genres and target audiences.


37 For a more detailed description of the literary tradition of the Han Xiangzi story, see the “Introduction” to my translation of the late Ming dynasty novel Han Xiangzi quanzhuang. Another member of the Baxian with a separate narrative tradition is He Xiangu, who has a number of baojuan to her name and appears occasionally as an independent deity in Taiwanese popular religion. In fact, from my experience among Taiwanese spirit-writing cults, she is perhaps a better-known figure nowadays than Han Xiangzi, even though her role in Late Imperial literature is less significant than that of Han Xiangzi. On the narrative traditions pertaining to He Xiangu, see Wu Guazheng, Baxian gushi xitong kaoheun, chapter 11.

38 An exception is an 18-chapter baojuan titled Han Xiang baojuan, which does indeed depend directly on the HXZQZ. See Ideema, “Narrative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben,” 123, citing a 2015 article by Bian Liangjun 卞良君.
I am working from four editions:


2) **Baihe zhuang**, 1883 woodblock print, Guangxizhou 广西州.

3) **Han Xiangzi baozhuan (Han xian zhuang)**, Taichung: Shengxiantang 圣贤堂, no date (1970/80s?).

4) **Baihe baozhuang** 白鹤宝传, photocopied and thread-bound undated manuscript copy (post Cultural Revolution?).

The editions only have minor textual differences. As for the geographical origins of this text, the only clear reference to time and place that we have is the preface by Fuyou Dijun 孽佑帝君 produced by spirit-writing on September 17, 1872 at the Ganlin shuguan in the Wenchanggong in Qiannan 黔南文昌宫内甘霖书馆 (present-day Guizhou province). This preface, however, only provides an endorsement of the baojuan presented by a follower of the Wenchanggong spirit-writing cult. A colophon defines the author as a certain Layman of South Mountain 南山居士 who wrote the text probably in 1872 at the Library of Accumulated Goodness.

积善书馆, whose location, however, is not known. Since the date of the colophon is likely the same as that of the preface and the location given is also a “shuguan,” we may speculate that the author was affiliated with another spirit-writing cult in the Guizhou area.

The text is divided into twelve chapters (**hui** 回). The following is a synopsis of the main story line as it evolves in these chapters, including a comparison with parallel elements in the late Ming novel **Han Xiangzi quanzhuang**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter # in HXBZ</th>
<th>Narrative elements in HXBZ</th>
<th>Comparison with parallel narrative elements in HXZQZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Pre-</td>
<td>Heavenly existence of HXZ (as a White Crane 白鹤) and Lin Ying 林英 (as an Immortal Reed 仙芦). Both punished for worldly thoughts (sifan 思凡), including for each other, by being reborn in the human world with the fate to be married to each other. HXZ as son of Han Xiu 韩休 and Mrs. Lü 吕氏; Lin Ying as daughter of Lin Guo 林国.</td>
<td>different: also a white crane, but no establishment of affinity with his future wife; instead relationship with a musk deer, whose deliverance is one of the final tasks of HXZ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2: Rebirth as son of Han Hui 韩会 and his wife, Mrs. Zheng 郑
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter # in HXBZ</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HXZ does not speak before the age of three sui. Han Xiu passes away soon afterwards; HXZ is raised by his uncle Han Yu and aunt Mrs. Du. HXZ's mother dies when HXZ is seven years old. Han Yu and his wife Mrs. Lu pass away when he is seven sui. Han Yu hires two teachers for HXZ: Zhongli Quan and Lu Yan, whom he meets on Sajin Bridge. They teach HXZ at a place called Wohushan; they offer him the options of immortality or worldly success; HXZ chooses the former and vows to deliver his parents once he has become an immortal.</td>
<td>Han Yu and Lin Guo, assisted by the official Li Hedong, as matchmaker, agree to have HXZ and Lin Ying marry each other when they are of age. Six years pass, HXZ turns thirteen sui and preparations for the wedding get under way. The wife of Lin Guo sends out two servants (Lin An &amp; Lin Fu) to find a carpenter who will make Lin Ying's trousseau chest &amp; furniture. The divine carpenter Lu Ban materializes and produces an exquisite trousseau set, rich in symbolic meaning. On the wedding day, Han Yu sends Zhang Qian to...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Li Wan 李万 to Wohushan to fetch HXZ; arriving there they witness HXZ and his teachers singing daoqing rather than studying the Classics. As HXZ and Lin Ying see each other at the wedding feast for the first time, HXZ remained unmoved, while Lin Ying is immediately enchanted by the bridegroom. In the bridal chamber HXZ vows to keep his purity and meditates instead of consummating the marriage. He eventually moves to a separate chamber. Lengthy dialogue and exchange of poems between HXZ and Lin Ying.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One year has passed since the wedding. Lin Ying leaves for the customary visit to her natal home. Han Yu discovers that HXZ has practised Daoist cultivation the whole time; he is greatly enraged and a crisis ensues. HXZ is beaten and his teachers are expelled. HXZ is locked up in his study room at Wohushan.</td>
<td>Subject matter dealt with in chapters 3 (visit to natal home) and 4 (beating of HXZ and expulsion of teachers).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Qian and Li Wan tempt HXZ with liquor, wealth, lust, and temper (酒、財、色、氣). HXZ preaches against these and flees from Wohushan</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Zhang Qian and Li Wan tempt HXZ with liquor, wealth, lust, and temper (酒、財、色、氣). HXZ preaches against these and flees from Shuihuishan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by climbing over the wall (guoqiang 过墙). Symbolic interpretation of this phrase: escape from imprisonment by liquor, wealth, lust, and temper. On his way he undergoes several trials:

1) a frightening dream of King Yama under a willow tree manifested by Lan Caihe at the command of Zhongli Quan;

2) Zhongli Quan changes into an old man and Lü Dongbin into his beautiful daughter, who tempt HXZ to marry and stay with them.

Having passed both trials, Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin manifest their true form and take HXZ to Zhongnanshan 终南山 (esoteric explanation of the mountain's name).

Back home, HXZ’s escape has been discovered; Han Yu is angry, his wife and Lin Ying are distraught. Lin Ying’s state of mind expressed in a wugeng 五更 song.

Chapter 6: Earth god produces inn with old man and beautiful maid, who try to make HXZ stay as son-in-law.

Chapter 7: HXZ threatened by tigers and demons; hears his masters slandered.

Chapter 8: Tempted by vision.

Chapter # in HXHZ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative elements in HXHZ</th>
<th>Comparison with parallel narrative elements in HXZQZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emperor commands Han Yu, Lin Guo and Li Hedong to pray for snow at the Southern Altar; if they fail, their life is forfeit. Zhongli Quan &amp; Lü Dongbin state that Han Yu used to be a divine general (juanlianjiang 卷帘将) who had been banished to the human world; previous attempts to deliver him were unsuccessful. They petition the Jade Emperor to induct HXZ as an immortal and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: HXZ inducted as an immortal, receives the title Kaiyuan yanfa da chanjiao jiaohua pujian xian 开元演法大阐教化普济仙. Obtains magical instruments: Three golden wits, headdress, robe, fisher drum, clappers, flower basket.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have him deliver his uncle. Jade Emperor confers on HXZ the title Tianhua Zhenren Pudu Xianqing and bestows on him various magical items (clappers, vajra, flower basket, gourd, flute).

HXZ sets out, meets two shepherds who recognize him as an immortal. So he chooses a better disguise and proceeds to the Southern Altar. There he forces courtesies from Han Yu (such as opening the central gate of the compound). He asks for three items to procure snow: a pig’s head, rice, and liquor. He changes himself into a wolf that devours these three items, then changes back and through recitation of a mantra lets exactly three feet and three inches of snowfall.

Chapter 11: HXZ sends dream to Mrs. Dou, who tells her adoptive son Han Qing 韩清 about it.

Chapter 12: HXZ prays for snow at Southern Altar. There he forces courtesies from Han Yu (such as opening the central gate of the compound). Ritual procedures much more involved, but similarly farcical. Result also three feet and three inches of snowfall.

Chapter 13: HXZ arrives at Han Yu’s birthday feast and exchanges poems with Han Yu.
children from his fisher drum who perform a symbolic trick to admonish Han Yu (climbing stairs to sixth step only = Han Yu’s present rank).

Scene switches to Mrs. Du. HXZ impersonates a Daoist who carries a letter from HXZ to Mrs. Dou. Pretends that he lost the letter on the way, but can recite it from memory. He follows it up with a long sermon on impermanence.

Chapter 11: HXZ

HXZ visits Han Yu’s birthday feast again. Presents a painting of a female immortal, who steps out of the picture to admonish Han Yu. HXZ performs trick with inexhaustible gourd and flower basket. Gourd contains a world of immortals. Basket made from celestial bamboo. HXZ orders Qingfeng 清风 and Mingyue 明月 to call forth a host of gods from the basket. HXZ makes prophecy about fate of Han Yu, then vanishes into thin air.

Scene switches to Mrs. Du and Lin Ying. They talk about the miseries
of childlessness. Mrs. Du recites a poem which Lin Ying takes as criticism of her barrenness; she replies with a poem that shifts the blame to HXZ. Lin Ying sends out her servants Chunxiang 春香 and Bitao 碧桃 to find a fortune-teller to cast her husband’s fortune. HXZ arrives in disguise as fortune-teller. In the guise of fortune-telling, he tells her that there is no hope of HXZ returning and that she should leave the world as well.

Chapter 5: Criticism of childlessness with reference to hibiscus.

HXZ comes visiting again, this time revealing his true identity. He presents peaches to his uncle; Han Yu throws one on the ground, where a yellow dog eats it and changes into a yellow crane.

Next he presents immortal wine to his uncle, as well as a landscape painting; Han Yu and HXZ enter the picture. They come to a narrow bridge to heaven, which can bestow different blessings to different people; Han Yu wishes for official promotion and steps on the bridge, but becomes afraid when he notices how high and narrow the bridge is. He starts calling out in fear, making HXZ afraid that the Jade Emperor might hear and so quickly sends Han Yu back to earth.

Chapter 18: HXZ presents magical peaches to the guests.

Chapter 17: Walkable landscape painting, but whole party enters instead of just Han Yu and HXZ. Han Yu’s refusal to step on a narrow bridge ends the excursion.
Scene switches to Lin Ying, who burns incense in the garden and prays to Heaven. HXZ takes the form of a Buddhist mendicant monk to admonish her.

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 18: Clappers are changed into the Buddha bone; Lan Caihe and HXZ take the shape of foreign monks. Death sentence of Han Yu.</td>
<td>Chapter 19: Sentence commuted to banishment to Chaozhou. Han Yu has to arrive there within three months. Han Yu sets out with Zhang Qian and Li Wan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After deliberations at the celestial court, the Jade Emperor commands HXZ to change his clappers into a Buddha bone; he himself and Lan Caihe should disguise themselves as foreign monks presenting the bone to the emperor. Han Yu criticizes the reception of the bone and is sentenced to death. HXZ influences the emperor to pardon Han Yu and banish him to Chaoyang. He has 49 days to get there, otherwise he and his family will die. Han Yu quickly sets out, accompanied by Zhang Qian and Li Wan.

Scene switches to Lin Ying, who has fallen ill with grief. HXZ comes to her disguised as physician. She takes his prescription, whereupon he reveals his true identity and admonishes her. She does not give in, but instead tries to tempt him sexually.

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Han Yu reaches Nanguanshan amidst heavy snowfall sent by HXZ. There on a stele he and his servants discover the first lines of Han Yu’s famous poem. Close by they encounter</td>
<td>Chapter 19: Episode of crossing river on a ferry boat (but not made of snow). Chapter 20: “Cold fish” exchange with fisherman. Discovery of the stele on which is inscribed the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a fisher angling for “cold fish” (hanyu 寒鱼). Next
the fisher produces a
boat made from snow and
offers to ferry Han Yu
across the river; Han Yu
and his servants distrust
the immortal and his boat
and refuse. Two tigers
(Qingfeng & Mingyue)
carry Li Wang and Zhang
Qian off. Han Yu is left
behind alone, cold and
starving. HXZ manifests
a straw hut, with some
mantou on a table. Han
Yu sings a wugeng song
to give expression to his
misery. Eventually he
repents and is delivered by
HXZ. He sends his uncle to
Zhuoweishan 卓韦山; HXZ
goes to Chaoyang disguised as his uncle and puts the
public affairs there in order.
He kills a monstrous fish
(name of the place (Qinling
Lantianguan 秦岭蓝田关).
Chapter 21: Zhang
Qian and Li Wan carried off
by tigers.
Han Yu stays in straw
hut and eats mantou given
by him to HXZ at his
birthday feast. Writes his
poem on wall.
Chapter 22: HXZ and
Han Yu go to Chaozhou
to put things in order and
subdue the crocodile.
Feigned death of Han Yu.
Chapter 23: HXZ sends
Han Yu to Zhuoweishan.
Chapter 30: Han Yu
returns to the ranks of the
immortals.

(shenyu 神鱼) that demands
sacrifices from the people
of Chaoyang. Eventually
he feigns the death of Han
Yu, which is reported back
to the capital. The emperor
bestowed the posthumous
name Wengong on him
and gives honours and
emoluments to Mrs. Du.
HXZ takes Han Yu up to
Heaven, where Han Yu
rejects to be reinstated as
juanlianjiang; instead he
prefers to become earth god
of Nanjing, where he will
receive rich sacrifices (我
爱南京都土地，猪羊鸡酒
用不完).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HXZ subjects Lin Ying to a trial and eventually has her delivered by Guanyin as</td>
<td>Chapter 29: Deliverance of Mrs. Dou and Lin Luying at Magu’s 麻姑 hermitage.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 11: The stone lion episode.

The latter two items are in my view the most significant and warrant further attention as they signal that the baojuan is not just a shorter version of the novel, but follows a narrative agenda of its own.

One effect of its different plot structure is to have women appear more regularly in the narrative. This begins in the first chapter with the karmic bond being created between Han Xiangzi and Lin Ying in their existence as crane and reed — a motif that is absent from the novel. 40 The only chapter without a significant role for the key female characters, Lin Ying and Mrs. Du, is chapter 11, which focuses on Han Yu’s journey, conversion, and apotheosis — a narrative sequence that covers four and a half chapters in the novel. The other chapters pay equal or sometimes greater attention to Lin Ying and Mrs. Du; this is achieved by three techniques:

1) Female themes are dealt with in more detail in the baojuan. An example is Han Xiangzi’s wedding, which takes up the whole of chapter 3 (out of twelve) in the baojuan, including the new motif of Lu Ban’s intervention in manufacturing Lin Ying’s lovingly described dowry suite. In the novel, the wedding is limited to about half of chapter 3 (out of thirty).

2) New episodes are created depicting Han Xiangzi’s efforts to convert his aunt and his wife, such as his appearances as fortune-teller, Buddhist monk, and physician in chapters 8, 9, and 10 respectively.

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40 The possible linkage of this theme with the novel’s female protagonist’s name, Luying (“reed flower”), awaits further investigation.
3) In the *baojuan*, such female-themed episodes are spliced into the narrative line of the novel. An example is the birthday feast sequence which in the novel covers four chapters (14-17) that focus primarily on Han Xiangzi’s interactions with the male birthday guests; in the *baojuan*, Han Yu’s birthday feast spreads over three chapters (7-9), but in each chapter is balanced by separate interactions between Han Xiangzi and his female relatives.

As a result the proportion of narrative matter dealing with female characters is higher in the *baojuan* than in the novel. A rough count of pages devoted to three main categories of subject matter in the *baojuan* and the novel makes this clear:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Percentage in HXBZ</th>
<th>Percentage in HXZQZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HXZ as an individual (self-cultivation, relations with his masters etc.)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Yu and HXZ’s interactions with him</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female characters and HXZ’s interactions with them</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other subject matter</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While in the novel episodes with parallels in the *baojuan* involving Han Xiangzi’s female relatives occur mostly in separate, unconnected chapters (3, 5, 11, 17), the more balanced distribution of “female interest” episodes in the narrative structure of the *baojuan* makes this narrative emphasis even more prominent than the mere percentages imply.

**Conclusion**

It is a well-known fact that narrative *baojuan* literature had (and was geared towards) a largely female audience. So it is not surprising per se to see a thematic shift towards Han Xiangzi’s interactions with female characters. One purpose of this paper has been to test this general assumption concerning the nature of *baojuan* literature by examining the specific narrative techniques by means of which this thematic shift is achieved in the case of the Han xian baozhuan. This is only a first step in a projected wider exploration of the Han Xiangzi theme.

41 On the other hand, the novel has a lengthy thematic block concerning the harassment of Mrs. Dou and Lin Luying by unwelcome suitors, which is completely left out of the *baojuan*. This theme moves to the foreground in chapters 23-26 and boosts the percentage of female-centred elements in the novel stated above.

42 Wilt Idema argues intriguingly (and plausibly) that it was Ming-dynasty drama, including the *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxian ji*, that first gave the female characters greater visibility in the story. He argues that this was due to the need to create additional parts for the actors of female roles in the large theatrical troupes of the Ming period. Idema, “Narrative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the *Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben*," 120.
in Qing-period popular literature, which will seek a broader understanding of the interplay of genre conventions, audience expectations, cultural frames, and intertextual linkages. I plan to pursue this with regard to other Han Xiangzi texts, placing them wherever possible in their local cultural context.

However, even in the case of the Han xian baozhuang, this paper is merely a beginning. The text raises a number of questions that require further investigation. These include (but are not limited to):

- reasons for the neglect in the baozhuang of a major female-centred thematic block in chapters 23 to 26 of the novel;
- other thematic shifts in the baozhuang (such as the markedly more negative depiction of the Tang emperor Xianzong in the baozhuang); 43
- a closer analysis of intertextual relationships between the HXBZ and the novel, as well as other works of popular literature (i.e., other baozhuang, but also daoqing, guci etc.). 44

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43 A new article by Bian Liangjun 卞良君 sketches the transformations of Han Yu’s depictions in Qing period popular literature; see Bian, “Qing-dai daoqing, baozhuang zhong Han Yu xingxiang de yanbian ji qi lishi wenhua jiazhì 清代道情、宝卷中韩愈形象的演变及其历史文化价值” Zhongzhou xuexian 中州学刊 2014, no. 2: 152-156. Rostislav Berezkin recently published an important article looking at the role of popular religious ideas played in the transformation of an image of a historical figure in Chinese vernacular literature.” See Rostislav Berezkin, “The Transformation of Historical Material in Religious Storytelling: The Story of Huang Chao (d. 884) in the Baozhuang of Midian Kescuing His Mother in Three Rebirths,” Late Imperial China 34, no. 2 (2013): 83-136.

44 Hu Hongbo, for example, detects guci 故事 features in the two Han Xiangzi baozhuang he studied. See Hu Hongbo, “Qingmo Minchu xiuxiang guci baisanshi zhong zonglun 清末民初故事情词百册种综论,” Chengdu zhongwen xuebao 成都中文学报 11 (2003): 228. Wilt Idema has provided us with a study and synopsis of an important daoqing in 22 hui 回, the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben 韩湘子九度文公道情全本. Idema, “Narrative daoqing, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing quanben,” 93-150. Increasing attention has been paid by Chinese scholars in recent years to the close relationship between and increasing intermixure of the genres of baozhuang and daoqing in the late Qing. See, for example, Wang Dingyong 王定勇, “Baozhuang yu daoqing guanxi lunli 景感修道情关系论．,” Wenhua yichuan 文化遗产 2015, no. 4: 123-131. Several studies have been made of the overlap between these text and performance genres in the local context of Yongji (Shanxi province). See, for example, Yang Yongbing 楊永兵, “Shanxi Yongji daoqing baozhuang yuanyuan chutan 山西永济道情宝卷渊源初探,” Dawutai 大舞台 2012, no. 11: 270-271; Yang Yongbing, “Shanxi Yongji daoqing baozhuang wenben yanju chutan 山西永济道情宝卷文本研究初探,” Zhongguo yinyue 中国音乐 2012, no. 3: 116-119; Zhang Xuejiao 张雪娇, Zhang Lu 张露, Liu Fengjiao 刘凤娇, “Shanxi Yongji daoqing yiren xuanxian baozhuang yanjiu 山西永济道情艺人宣唱宝卷研究,” Wenhua yichuan 文化遗产 2016, no. 4: 42-44; Shang Lixin 尚丽新 & Yuan Ye 袁野, “Shanxi Yongji baozhuang yu Hedong baozhuang 山西永济与河东宝卷,” Wenhua yichuan 文化遗产 2015, no. 4: 132-138.