

第二十三期興大中文學報 增刊

- 文學與神話特刊 -

2008 年 11 月，頁 479-514

中興大學中國文學系

中國民間宗教中神話 與崇拜的關係：略論 韓湘子

德國萊比錫大學東亞學系 柯若樸

中國民間宗教中神話與崇拜的關係： 略論韓湘子

柯若樸*

摘要

本篇論文主要探索關於韓湘子（八仙之一）的敘述傳說。這傳說開始於唐朝，後逐漸形成戲劇、白話小說和各式的通俗文學作品如寶卷、俗曲等。它的主題是韓湘子修內丹、成仙以後回家而度化妻子、叔父（韓愈）等親戚。韓湘子故事結合道教教義宣傳與反儒爭論的方式反映著明末宗教與文學之間的互相作用。

除了分析韓湘子文學中的關鍵主題外，本文也儘可能提出一些韓湘子崇拜的例子。與其他神明的例子不同，韓湘子傳說的發展與其崇拜的流行並不符合。這可以當作明清與民初討論宗教、神話和文學關係課題的解答之一。

關鍵詞：八仙、韓湘子、韓愈、鸞堂、道教、宗教與文學、神話

* 德國萊比錫大學東亞學系教授

The Relationship of Myth and Cult in Chinese Popular Religion: Some Remarks on Han Xiangzi

Philip Clart*

Abstract

The paper explores the narrative tradition focussing on Han Xiangzi, one of the Eight Immortals (Baxian). This tradition began in the Tang dynasty and evolved to include dramatic pieces, vernacular novels, and various forms of popular literature such as precious scrolls and ballads. Its main themes are Han Xiangzi's efforts to achieve immortality through internal alchemy and his subsequent deliverance of his relatives, including most prominently his uncle Han Yu, the famous Tang dynasty scholar, and his wife Lin Ying (or Luying). Mixing Daoist proselytizing and anti-Confucian polemic, the Han Xiangzi story merges religious and literary concerns in a manner that throws an interesting light on the interplay of religion and literature in late Imperial China.

In addition to analyzing the key themes in the Han Xiangzi literature, the paper addresses instances of popular worship of Han Xiangzi and the degree to which his perception in this context was shaped by his literary images.

* Professor, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Leipzig, Germany

Given the often close relationship between cult and narrative literature in the cases of other deities, the question needs to be asked why the fairly well-developed Han Xiangzi lore does not correspond with an equally developed religious cult. As a number of interpretive options are explored in tackling this problem, general issues of the relationship of religion, myth, and literature in late Imperial and modern China are addressed.

Key words: Eight Immortals 八仙, Han Xiangzi 韓湘子, Han Yu 韓愈, spirit-writing cults 鸞堂, Daoism 道教, religion and literature 宗教與文學, mythology 神話

The Relationship of Myth and Cult in Chinese Popular Religion: Some Remarks on Han Xiangzi

As a number of interpretive opinions are explored in this paper, general trends in the relationship of religion, myth, and cult in late imperial and modern China are addressed.

Key words: Eight immortals / 八仙, Han Xiangzi / 韓湘子, Han Yu / 韓愈

First-writting author: 曹家, Daoism / 道教, religion and literature / 宗教與文學, myth / 神話, mythology / 神話學

Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between myth and cult in Chinese popular religion, with a focus on the figure of Han Xiangzi. It discusses the historical and literary contexts of Han Xiangzi's story, and examines the ways in which his myth has been used to promote religious and moral values. The paper also considers the role of Han Xiangzi in the development of the Eight Immortals legend, and the ways in which his story has been adapted for popular entertainment. The author argues that Han Xiangzi's story is a key text for understanding the relationship between myth and cult in Chinese popular religion, and that it provides a valuable insight into the ways in which religious and moral values are promoted through myth and cult.

In addition to analyzing the text of the Han Xiangzi legend, the author also explores the ways in which Han Xiangzi's story has been adapted for popular entertainment, such as in the opera and the novel. The author argues that these adaptations have played a significant role in the development of Han Xiangzi's myth, and that they have helped to make his story more accessible to a wider audience.

The Relationship of Myth and Cult in Chinese Popular Religion: Some Remarks on Han Xiangzi*

Philip Clart (柯若樸)

1. Introduction: Han Xiangzi, the Eight Immortals, and the Problem of the Absence of a Religious Cult

Han Xiangzi 韓湘子 is best known in popular culture nowadays as one of the “Eight Immortals” (Baxian 八仙), a group that consists of Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, Zhang Guolao 張果老, Li Tieguai 李鐵拐, He Xiangtu 何仙姑, Lan Caihe 藍采和, Cao Guojiu 曹國舅, and Han Xiangzi. These immortals came together as a group by the late Song dynasty (twelfth/thirteenth centuries), with only occasional variations in their composition.¹ 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

* This paper was presented at the “International Conference on Literature and Myth” at National Chung Hsing University in Taichung (Taiwan, R.O.C.), 28-29 March 2008. I would like to express my gratitude to the conference organizers for inviting me, and especially to my paper’s discussant, Prof. Wang Ch’iu-kuei 王秋桂, for his stimulating comments

¹ Wang Hanmin 王漢民, *Baxian yu Zhongguo wenhua* 八仙與中國文化 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 36.

immortals as motifs on incense burners, clothing, and folk art.² 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* 度脫劇), which focus usually on only a few of the group, most prominently Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin.³ 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 plays⁴ and in short skits performed on auspicious occasions such as birthdays (*Baxian qingshou* 八仙慶壽)⁵. 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* 東遊記 (“Journey to the East”) by Wu Yuantai 吳元泰.⁶ 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* 八仙過

² Wang Hanmin, *Baxian yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 37.

³ An example is the play *Han Zhongli dutuo Lan Caihe* 漢鍾離度脫藍采和 (“Zhongli of the Han delivers Lan Caihe”), which has been translated by Wilt Idema and Stephen H. West. See their *Chinese Theater 1100-1450: A Source Book* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 299-343. See *ibidem* for an analysis of the thematic structure of deliverance plays.

⁴ One of the best known examples is Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 Lü Dongbin play *Handan ji* 邯鄲記. Wu Xiuhua 吳秀華, *Tang Xianzu Handan meng ji jiaozhu* 湯顯祖《邯鄲夢記》校注 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004)

⁵ On the place of the Baxian in traditional opera, see Idema & West, *Chinese Theater 1100-1450*, 300-308; Wang Hanmin, *Baxian yu Zhongguo wenhua*, chapter 5. Also, Chen Lingling 陳玲玲, “Baxian zai Yuan-Ming zaju he Taiwan banxianxi zhong de zhuangkuang 八仙在元明雜劇和臺灣扮仙戲中的狀況” (M.A. thesis, Wenhua Xueyuan, 1978).

⁶ Numerous editions exist. See for example, *Si youji* 四遊記, comp. by Wang Jiquan 王繼權 (Harbin: Beifang wenxue chubanshe, 1985). Trsl. by Nadine Perront, *Pérégrination vers l'est* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

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.⁷ 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-telling⁸, novels⁹, and

⁷ On the *baxiancai*, see Wang Jingyi's 王静苾 *Shenling huoxian: jingyan baxiancai* 神靈活現：驚豔八仙彩 (Luzhou shi: Boyang wenhua, 2000). The story of the Baxian's crossing of the ocean appears first in the Yuan drama "Zheng yuban Baxian guo canghai" 爭玉板八仙過滄海 ("Struggling over jade clappers, the Eight Immortals cross the vast ocean"). On this play see Chen Lingling, "Baxian zai Yuan-Ming zaju", 35-36. Paul R. Katz describes a Yuan dynasty mural with the *Baxian guohai* motif at the Yongle Gong 永樂宮 in Shanxi. See his *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 188-189. A modern example of a Baxian temple mural is described in Zeng Qinliang's 曾勤良 *Sanxia Zushi Miao diaohui gushi tanyuan* 三峽祖師廟雕繪故事探原 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1996), 302-304.

⁸ Three recent collections of Baxian stories collected in different parts of the Chinese mainland are: *Baxian chuanshuo gushi ji* 八仙傳說故事集, ed. Yu Hang 俞航 (Beijing: Zhongguo minjian wenyi chubanshe, 1988); *Baxian renwu de chuanshuo* 八仙人物的傳說, ed. Liu Xicheng 劉錫誠, Xiao Rong 蕭蓉, and Feng Zhi 逢之 (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1995); and *Baxian de gushi* 八仙的故事, ed. Chen Delai 陳德來 & Liu Xunda 劉巽達 (Taipei: Jiangmen wenwu, 1995). There is considerable overlap between the books by Yu Hang and Liu Xicheng et al. Yu Hang's book has also been republished in Taiwan by a certain Ouyang Jingyi 歐陽晶宜 as *Baxian chuanqi* 八仙傳奇 (Banqiao: Kezhu shuju, 1992) and *Baxian de gushi* 八仙的故事 (Banqiao: Kezhu shuju, 1995).

⁹ In the 19th century, there appeared the novel *Baxian dedao* 八仙得道 ("The Eight Immortals Attain the Dao") by Wugou Daoren 無垢道人 (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1987). A modern example is Chen Sanfeng's 陳三峰 *Baxian chuanqi* 八仙傳奇 (Xinzhuang: Mantingfang, 1994). An overview of Baxian-related novels is given in Han Xiduo's 韓錫鐸 *Baxian xilie xiaoshuo* 八仙系列小說 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993).

popular literature (such as “precious volumes”, *baojuan* 寶卷).¹⁰ Be it in popular literature and theatre or in folk art such as woodblock prints or the colourful embroidery of the *baxiancai*, the Eight Immortals were ubiquitous in traditional local culture across many regions of China and to a considerable extent remain so today. What purpose do images of the Eight Immortals serve when they are hung over doors, temple altars, or at weddings? Typically, their function is described in general terms as “auspicious”, as “bringing in good fortune”. The Eight Immortals seem similar to other auspicious deities such as Hehe erxian 和合二仙, the God of Wealth (*caishen* 財神), or the gods of Blessings, Wealth, and Longevity (*fulushou* 福祿壽): They are well-known and widely present in popular iconography and narrative and performative literature—but they are seldom the object of serious religious veneration. Instead of on a temple’s main altar, their pictures are found on murals or on the inner beams and eaves of temple roofs, on New Year prints and fans, on paintings and embroidered cloths. This is not to say that organized cults for these deities do not exist. Just as there are temples to the God of Wealth, so we find temples to the Eight Immortals collectively or to individual members of their group. On Taiwan, we find a handful of Baxian temples, which are usually small,

¹⁰ Che Xilun 車錫倫 lists six Baxian *baojuan* in his bibliography *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo choubeichu, 1998), 1-2. A fairly easily accessible one of these is the *Baxian da shangshou baojuan* 八仙大上壽寶卷 (“Precious volume on the Eight Immortals’ birth congratulations”), which is included in the collection *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集, ed. by Zhang Xishun 張希舜 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 Hanmin, *Baxian yu Zhongguo wenhua*, chapter 4. See also Shan Man 山曼, *Baxian chuanshuo yu xinyang* 八仙傳說與信仰 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003).

privately-run shrines.¹¹ In addition there are shrines to individual members of the group, most of which are dedicated to Lü Dongbin, a.k.a. Patriarch Lü (Lüzü 呂祖) or Thearch of Reliable Succour (Fuyou Dijun 孚佑帝君).¹² Lü Dongbin has enjoyed a career quite separate from that of the other seven immortals and is worshipped as a powerful immortal in his own right in many areas of China. In Taiwan, we encounter numerous shrines and temples to this deity (often referred to as *xiangong* 仙公), the most famous being the Zhinan Gong 指南宮 in the Muzha 木柵 district of Taipei.¹³ His independence from the collective of the Eight Immortals is perhaps best seen in the fact that he can be part of other groupings of deities as well, such as the Benevolent Lords (Enzhu 恩主) worshipped by Taiwanese spirit-writing cults.¹⁴ In spite of his

¹¹ Web searches turned up references to Taiwanese temples called Baxian Gong 八仙宮 in Qingshui township 清水鎮 (Taizhong county 台中縣), Zhonggangxi 中港溪 (Miaoli county 苗栗縣), Sanzhi district 三芝鄉 (Taibei county 台北縣), and Su'ao township 蘇澳鎮 (Yilan county 宜蘭縣).

¹² On the web, I discovered one reference to a Taiwanese temple devoted to Li Tieguai: the Zhixuan Gong 指玄宮 in Jilong 基隆市. On the Chinese mainland, there exist a few temples to other members of the group, such as the well-known He Xianggu shrine 何仙姑家壇 of Zengcheng 增城 in Guangdong province, and the Guolao Miao 果老廟 (devoted to Zhang Guolao) in Huaibin county 淮濱縣 of Henan province. Both these temples are located in the putative hometowns of the immortals. On these two locations, see Shan Man, *Baxian chuanshuo yu xinyang*, 151-155.

¹³ On the Zhinan Gong, see Paul R. Katz, "The Wayward Phoenix? The Early History of the Palace of Guidance (Chih-nan Kung)," in *Yishi, miaohui yu shequ* 儀式、廟會與社區, ed. Chu Ron-guey 朱榮貴 and Li Feng-mao 李豐楙 (Taipei: Institute of Literature and Philosophy, 1996), 197-228. On a Xiangong temple in northern Taiwan, see Stephan Feuchtwang, "Spiritual Recovery: A Spirit-writing Shrine in Shifting under Japanese Rule," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* 88(1999): 63-89.

¹⁴ There are different groupings called the Three, Four, or Five Benevolent Lords, but most are

independent-mindedness, Lü Dongbin's link to the other seven immortals is rarely completely severed and we usually find iconographic references to the group as a whole in temples dedicated to Lü Dongbin as the main deity.¹⁵

This enduring link also exists in Daoist contexts (in distinction from popular temples). In spite of Pu Jiangqing's declaration that the Eight Immortals represent a popular tradition largely separate from Daoism,¹⁶ the high standing of Lü Dongbin in the Quanzhen school has produced a number of Quanzhen sanctuaries dedicated to the Eight Immortals. The best-known example is the Baxian Gong 八仙宮 (a.k.a. Baxian An 八仙庵, Palace/Hermitage of the Eight Immortals) in Xi'an 西安, whose history goes back to the Song dynasty and which is still one of the most popular temples in the metropolis of Xi'an today.¹⁷ The Quanzhen head monastery in Beijing, Baiyun Guan 白雲觀, has a Baxian shrine, and we find other such sanctuaries in places where the Quanzhen school maintained a strong presence.¹⁸ If we further take into account that

centred on an immutable core group of three deities: Guan Di 關帝, Fuyou Dijun, and Siming Zhenjun 司命真君. To these are then added others such as Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝 and Huoluo Lingguan 豁落靈官. See Philip Clart, "The Ritual Context of Morality Books: A Case-Study of a Taiwanese Spirit-Writing Cult," Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1997; Wang Zhiyu 王志宇, *Taiwan de Enzhugong xinyang: Ruzong Shenjiao yu feiluan quanhua* 臺灣的恩主公信仰：儒宗神教與飛鸞勸化 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1997).

¹⁵ See for example the elaborate Baxian statuary at the Xiangong Miao 仙宮廟 on Qingshan 青山 in Dongshan district 東山鄉 (Tainan county),

<http://www.tvts.cy.edu.tw/kcc/zsen/senkon1.htm>. Accessed on 29 September 2007.

¹⁶ Pu Jiangqing 浦江清, "Baxian kao 八仙考," *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 11 (1936): 103.

¹⁷ Shan Man, *Baxian chuanshuo yu xinyang*, 118-125.

¹⁸ For example on Mt. Wudang and in Sichuan. *Wudangshan zhi* 武當山志 (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1994), 145; Mei Li 梅莉, "Qingchu Wudangshan Quanzhen Longmenpai de zhongxing yu Wudangshan gongguan de fuxiu 清初武當山全真龍門派的中興與武當山宮觀

stories of all or some of the Eight Immortals appear in Daoist hagiographical works from the Tang dynasty onwards, then a clear distinction between popular and orthodox Daoist immortals becomes untenable. In fact, in the course of late Imperial Chinese history popular and Daoist strands of tradition have crossed frequently, exchanging mutual influences. Tales of the Eight Immortals have become part of Daoist hagiography and their protagonists have earned their places on the altars of Quanzhen shrines, while these merry immortals have at the same time become propagators of Quanzhen doctrine in media accessible to the general population (deliverance plays and narrative literature such as novels, ballads, and precious scrolls).¹⁹

However, both in the Quanzhen and the popular settings, formal worship of the Eight Immortals is still rare. Why is that? The existence of a number of Baxian shrines in both religious spheres demonstrates that there is no fundamental obstacle to their worship, so why is it not more widespread, given the immortals' otherwise high degree of recognition? In asking this question, I betray an underlying assumption, which indeed first motivated me to engage in this research project. Let me clarify this assumption: it is well known that the mythology of many popular deities is recorded in literature,

的復修,” paper presented at the International Symposium on Quanzhen Daoism in Modern Chinese Society and Culture, 2-3 November 2007, University of California-Berkeley.

¹⁹ In addition, I am aware of at least one more technical *neidan* 內丹 text whose authorship is ascribed to the collective of the Eight Immortals (presumably by means of spirit-writing). See *Jindan xinfa* 金丹心法, vol. 8/7 of *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 (Taipei: Ziyou chubanshe, 1998). It has also been argued that the Baxian birthday plays have a ritual origin and therefore are not just Daoist adaptations of an entertainment genre, but may themselves arise from within a Daoist liturgical context. See Wu Guangzheng 吳光正, *Baxian gushi xitong kaolun: neidandao zongjiao shenhua de jian'gou ji qi liubian* 八仙故事系統考論—內丹道宗教神話的建構及其流變 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 16-40.

specifically in drama, novels, and various forms of popular literature such as *baojuan*, *tanci* 彈詞, *dagushu* 打鼓書, local drama etc. Obvious examples of deities with a close link to novels are Guan Gong 關公 (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義),²⁰ Nezha San Taizi 哪吒三太子 (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義),²¹ Ji Gong 濟公 (*Ji Gong zhuan* 濟公傳),²² Qitian Dasheng 齊天大聖/Sun Wukong 孫悟空 (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記),²³ Zhenwu 真武 (*Beiyou ji* 北遊記),²⁴ and Zhong Kui 鍾馗 (*Zhong Kui zhanguai zhuan* 鍾馗斬鬼傳).²⁵

In my previous research on Taiwanese phoenix halls I discovered that much of the mythological knowledge of phoenix hall members was derived from novels (which are not regarded as fiction) and from morality books (*shanshu* 善書) that in turn draw on

²⁰ Numerous Chinese editions exist. Trsl. by C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, *San Kuo, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1925). On the historical process of Guan Yu's deification, see Gunter Diesinger, *Vom General zum Gott. Kuan Yü (gest. 220 n.Chr.) und seine "posthume Karriere"* (Heidelberg: Haag + Herchen, 1984).

²¹ Numerous Chinese editions exist. Partial trsl. by Wilhelm Grube, *Feng-shen-yen-i: Die Metamorphosen der Götter* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1912); full trsl. by Gu Zhizhong, *Creation of the Gods* (Beijing: New World Press, 1992).

²² See Meir Shahar, *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998). See also Vincent Durand-Dastès, "Le roman du maître de dhyana: Bodhidharma et Ji-le-Fou dans le roman chinois en langue vulgaire du XVIIIe siècle" (Th.doct., Paris, Inalco, 2000).

²³ Numerous Chinese editions exist. Trsl. by Anthony Yu, *The Journey to the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977-1980).

²⁴ Included in the *Si youji*, *op cit.* Trsl. Gary Seaman, *The Pei Yu Chi: Journey to the North* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

²⁵ Liu Zhang 劉璋, *Zhanguai zhuan* 斬鬼傳, in: *Hedian, Zhanguai zhuan, Tang Zhong Kui pinggui zhuan hekan* 何典、斬鬼傳、唐鍾馗平鬼傳合刊 (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1998). Trsl. Claude du Bois-Reymond, *Dschung-Kuei: Bezwiner der Teufel* (Potsdam: G. Kiepenheuer, 1923); Danielle Éliasberg, *Le Roman du Pourfendeur des Démons: traduction annotée et commentaires* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1976).

literature for some of their mythological themes (besides creating new myths of their own).²⁶ There thus appear to exist close links between narrative literature and religious cults, which in Taiwan have been traced very concretely by Zeng Qinliang 曾勤良 in his books on the *Fengshen yanyi* and the pictorial materials at the Zushi Gong in Sanxia.²⁷ That literature played an important role in defining a deity's image during the Late Imperial period has been shown by Ursula-Angelika Cedzich in her study of the role of the novel *Nanyou ji* ("Journey to the South", 南遊記) in the standardization of Huaguang's 華光 cult.²⁸ For the late twentieth century, Jean DeBernardi has emphasized the importance of the literary tradition in shaping the mythological imagination of Malaysian-Chinese spirit-mediums.²⁹

In the relationship of cult and literature, there arises the question of whether literature spread the cult, or whether authors selected deities as protagonists whose cult was already widespread, and hence well-known and likely popular with the readership.

²⁶ An example of a new myth created by spirit-writing and spread through morality books is the story of Guan Gong having become the new Jade Emperor. See Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Zhuanbian zhong de shenqi--Taiwan 'Guan Di dang Yuhuang' de youlai 轉變中的神祇—臺灣「關帝當玉皇」的由來," *Xingbie, shen'ge yu Taiwan zongjiao lunshu* 性別、神格與臺灣宗教論述, ed. Li Fengmao 李豐楙 & Chu Ron-guey 朱榮貴 (Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan, Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiusuo Chouben), 121-140.

²⁷ Zeng Qinliang 曾勤良, *Taiwan minjian xinyang yu Fengshen yanyi zhi bijiao yanjiu* 臺灣民間信仰與封神演義之比較研究 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1985); Zeng, *Sanxia Zushi Miao diaohui gushi tanyuan*.

²⁸ "The Cult of the Wu-t'ung/Wu-hsien in History and Fiction. The Religious Roots of the Journey to the South," in *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies*, ed. David Johnson (Berkeley: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), 137-218.

²⁹ DeBernardi, Jean, *The Way that Lives in the Heart: Chinese Popular Religion and Spirit Mediums in Penang, Malaysia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 145-165.

Common sense suggests that the relationship was dialectical, with authors picking up on popular cults and their texts then helping to further spread these cults, which in turn inspired further literary treatment. If this is the case, it is interesting to note that while there exists a significant body of Baxian literature, there does not exist a comparable corresponding religious cult tradition, except for Lü Dongbin. The question to be raised here is: if literature supplies mythological charters for religious cults (as can be shown for some popular deities), how do we account for the existence of a significant body of literature with such charter potential, while there does not exist (and never existed) a corresponding religious cult of the deities in question? Now, it is of course always more difficult to ascertain why something did not happen than why something did happen. Indeed, it is methodologically rather tricky and somewhat dubious to ask negative questions of history. In this case, however, the question may throw some useful light on the relationship between literature and religion in late Imperial and modern China.

In the rest of this essay, I will narrow my focus and pursue this question with regard to just one among the Eight Immortals: Han Xiangzi. After an overview of the historical development of the Han Xiangzi myth, I will briefly examine its reflections in popular religious worship of the immortal, with reference primarily to ethnographic samples from Taiwan. In conclusion, I will offer two hypotheses to explain Han Xiangzi's limited cultic appeal in the presence of a well-developed and popular narrative tradition devoted to this immortal.

2. Han Xiangzi and His Story

Let me start out by acknowledging my indebtedness to two earlier researchers working on Han Xiangzi: Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂 who published an essay on Han

Xiangzi in 1968, and Chen Liyu 陳麗宇 who wrote an M.A. thesis on Han Xiangzi in 1988.³⁰ Both of these authors provided me with excellent overviews of the available sources on Han Xiangzi, which greatly facilitated my research. There also exists a significant body of studies of the Eight Immortals, which also throws light on the figure of Han Xiangzi.³¹ The following summary is based largely on this body of secondary literature. My own contributions to this area of research will be (1) a closer reading and interpretation of these texts than has been provided so far, and (2) the asking of questions that so far have never been asked of this material.

Han Xiangzi is said to be a nephew or grandnephew of the famous Tang dynasty Confucian scholar Han Yu 韓愈 (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 韓老成. In 819 Han Xiang and his brother Han Pang 韓滂 followed Han Yu into his exile to 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* 《全唐詩》) 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

³⁰ Sawada Mizuho, "Kan Shōshi densetsu to zoku bungaku 韓湘子伝説と俗文学," *Zhongguo xuezhì* 中國學誌 5(1968): 345-380; Chen Liyu, "Han Xiangzi yanjiu 韓湘子研究" (M.A. thesis, Taiwan Shifan Daxue, 1988).

³¹ See notes on section I of this paper.

appearance of the Han Xiangzi legend. It is Han Yu's poem composed in 819 at the Blue Pass 藍關 on his way to his exile in Chaozhou (modern Guangdong province):

《左遷至藍關示姪孫湘》

一封朝奏九重天

夕貶潮州路八千

欲爲聖明除弊事

肯將衰朽惜殘年

雲橫秦嶺家何在

雪擁藍關馬不前

知汝遠來應有意

好收吾骨瘴江邊³²

In Charles Hartman's translation:

“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

³² Chen Keming 陳克明, *Han Yu nianpu ji shiwen xinian* 韓愈年譜及詩文集年, (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1999), 526; Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, *Han Changli shi xinian jishi* 韓昌黎詩集年集釋 (Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe, 1985), 1097.

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 Lan

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 miasmatic water.³³

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

³³ *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 86-87. Cf. Erwin von Zach's German translation in his *Han Yü's poetische Werke* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 276-277.

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.

《贈族侄》

我年十八九
壯氣起胸中
作書獻雲闕
辭家逐秋蓬
歲時易遷次
身命多厄窮
一名雖雲就
片祿不足充
今者復何事
卑棲寄徐戎
蕭條資用盡
濩落門巷空
朝眠未能起

遠懷方鬱悵

擊門者誰子

問言乃吾宗

自云有奇術

探妙知天工

既往悵何及

將來喜還通

期我語非佞

當爲佐時雍³⁴

The relevant passages are found in verses 15 through 22:

“Presented to a Distant Nephew”

[……]

Who is that knocks on the door?

To my inquiry he replies that he is of my clan.

He claims to possess magical powers,

That he has investigated the marvels of the cosmos and understands the workings
of Heaven.

It is of no use to regret the past,

But I will be glad to have success in the future.

If indeed yours are not just artful words,

I should become a man who is useful to his times.³⁵

³⁴ Chen Keming, *op.cit.*, p.92; Qian Zhonglian, *op.cit.*, p.98.

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" (*zuzhi*, a nephew in a generalized sense as a distant relative of a younger 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.³⁵ 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

³⁵ Cf. von Zach's translation, *op.cit.*, pp.294-295.

³⁶ *Youyang zazu, qianji, juan 18* (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 104. On the *Youyang zazu* see Carrie E. Reed, *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang zazu* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

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) *Xianzhuan shiyi* 仙傳拾遺 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.³⁷ 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 劉斧 (ca. 1040-later than 1113) *Qingsuo gaoyi* 青瑣高議.³⁸ 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 numinous white crane, his apprenticeship with Zhongli Quan and Lü

³⁷ Quoted under the title "Han Yu waisheng 韓愈外甥" in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, *juan* 54 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 331.

³⁸ *Qingsuo gaoyi, qianji*, *juan* 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 85-87.

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 zhuan* 韓仙傳 which may date somewhere between the late Yuan and middle Ming periods;³⁹

³⁹ Two editions of the *Han xian zhuan* survive. One dates from the turn of seventeenth century and is part of a Ming dynasty collection by the name of *Baoyan tang miji* 寶顏堂秘笈 (“Secret Bookbox of Baoyan Hall”), a very mixed collection of 226 works in 457 *juan*, which share the quality of having been estimated “rare texts” by their editor. This editor is Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), a somewhat eccentric and reclusive 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). The *Baoyan Tang miji* version can be found in *Baibu congshu jicheng zhi shiba* 百部叢書集成之十八, vol.65 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965). A reprint of the same edition is included in *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書, ed. by Hu Daojing 胡道靜 et al., vol. 18 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992-1994), 802-814. The second edition is located in the *Shuofu* 說乎 compiled by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1316-1403), which would give us a date *ante quem* in the Yuan dynasty. However, the only *Shuofu* edition to contain the *Han xian zhuan* is the somewhat dubious 120 *juan* version edited by Tao Ting 陶珽 of the early Qing period. Therefore, the 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 zhuan*, see my “The Story of the Immortal Han (*Han xian zhuan*): An Annotated Translation” (MS, 1992). A modern Chinese rendering of the text can be found in *Baixian chuanqi* 百仙傳奇, ed. by Yuan Lükun 袁閣琨 (Zhonghe: Jianhong chubanshe, 1995), 437-462.

- a drama from the early Ming period (*Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong shengxian ji* 韓湘子九度文公昇仙記).⁴⁰

This development of Han Xiangzi lore finds its culmination in the late Ming novel *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* 韓湘子全傳, which was authored by Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾, a Hangzhou writer and book-seller/publisher active in the early seventeenth century.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In: *Guben xiqu congkan chuji* 古本戲曲叢刊初集, vol.47 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1954).

⁴¹ See my translation of the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan: The Story of Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). Aside from the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*, 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* 海內奇觀, an “armchair traveller’s” collection of maps and illustrations of famous mountains and temples (In *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan er bian* (di 8 ji) 中國古代版畫叢刊二編 (第八輯), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994); (2) the *Xianyuan jishi* 仙媛紀事, a collection of hagiographies of female immortals (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989); (3) the *Dong-Xi Jin yanyi* 東西晉演義, a historical novel (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1971); (4) the *Su Dongpo xiansheng chanxi ji* 蘇東坡先生禪喜集, a collection of Buddhist-inspired poetry of Su Shi, compiled by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (Ming edition from the Wanli period held at the Fu Ssu-nien Library, Academia Sinica); (5) the *Xu Zhenjun jingming zongjiao lu* 許真君淨明宗教錄, a collection of texts by and on the immortal Xu Xun 許遜 (1604 Zhan shi Xiqing Tang edition at the library of Beijing Daxue); (6) the *Tuhui zongyi* 圖繪宗彝, an anthology of reproduced paintings (Wulin 武林: Yibai Tang 夷白堂, 1607). Of particular interest is Yang Erzeng’s involvement as collator in Chen Jiru’s collection of Chan poems by Su Shi. The reader may remember that Chen Jiru included the *Han xian zhuan* 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 zhuan*. However, this is just a wild guess right now and needs further study. On the textual history of this collection, see *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih*, by Beata

The earliest surviving edition dates to 1623.⁴² 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 韓會. After Han Hui's and his wife's death Han Xiangzi 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



Frontispiece, *Han Xiangzi*

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 蘆英. 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

Grant (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 3. Also see Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558-1639)*, 72.

⁴² Jinling 金陵: Jiuru Tang 九如堂, 1623 (Van Gulik collection microfiche CH-1289). Another edition from the Tianqi reign period entitled simply *Han Xiangzi* survives in the Naikaku Bunko and is reproduced in Liu Shide 劉世德 et al. eds., *Guben xiaoshuo congkan* 古本小說叢刊, series 34, vol.4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991). Also in *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成, vol.200:1/2 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, no date).

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.

This novel is the great summa of Han Xiangzi lore and as such had an enormous influence on the Han Xiangzi literature of the following Qing period. Here we find the Han Xiangzi theme being taken up in various forms of popular literature: *baojuan*,⁴³ *tanci*, *dagushu*,⁴⁴ local theatre.⁴⁵ 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 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 掖縣 of Shandong province there even developed a specific local ballad genre

⁴³ Che Xilun lists nine Han Xiangzi *baojuan* (*op.cit.*, pp.101-102, 159, 203), though it is not clear whether these are really nine independent texts or whether some represent mere title variations. I have been able to collect four texts: (1) *Han xian baozhuàn* 韓仙寶傳 (Taichung: Shengxian zazhishe, no date); (2) *Han Zu chengxian baozhuàn* 韓祖成仙寶傳 (Shanghai: Jinzhang tushuju, 1930); (3) *Xiangzi du Lin Ying baojuan* 湘子度林英寶卷, in *Hexi baojuan xuxuan* 河西寶卷續選, ed. Duan Ping 段平 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1994), vol.1, 1-196; (4) *Quantu Han Xiang baojuan* 全圖韓湘寶卷 (no place or date given). The last-named item was graciously provided by Professor Soo Khin Wah 蘇慶華 of the University of Malaya.

⁴⁴ Chen Liyu discusses various ballads on the Han Xiangzi theme on pp.131-162 of her thesis.

⁴⁵ An overview of Han Xiangzi pieces in local opera traditions is given by Chen Liyu, *op.cit.*, pp.114-120. A Taiwan opera on Han Xiangzi's deliverance of his wife ("Du qi" 渡妻) is included in *Taiwan suo jian de beiguan shouchaoben* 臺灣所見的北管手抄本, ed. Chen Xiufang 陳秀芳, vol.3 (Taichung: Taiwan sheng wenxian weiyuanhui, 1981), 204-213.

based on the Han Xiangzi story (the Blue Pass Drama, *Languan xi* 藍關戲).⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

3. Han Xiangzi in Modern Taiwan

While the Baxian are still very much part of people's consciousness in Taiwan and China, Han Xiangzi as an individual is a little known figure nowadays. The *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* is still being reprinted in several editions in China and apparently has a readership.⁴⁸ No mass *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* edition is currently in print in Taiwan, though two were published from the 1970s to the early 1990s.⁴⁹ In my search for the

⁴⁶ Wang Hanmin, *op.cit.*, p.109. See also Wu Yimin 武藝民, *Zhongguo daoqing yishu gailun* 中國道情藝術概論 (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1997), 135 et passim.

⁴⁷ 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 quan zhuan*. 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. She is the heroine of a recent martial arts novel by Xiao Yuhan 蕭玉寒, titled *He Xiangu chuanqi* 何仙姑傳奇 (Hong Kong: Xinghui tushu, 1994).

⁴⁸ Modern PRC trade editions include: (1) Shenyang : Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1987; (2) Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989; (3) Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990; (4) Beijing: Baowen Tang shudian, 1990; (5) Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1999; (6) Beijing: Zhongguo zhigong chubanshe, 2001.

⁴⁹ (1) Taipei: Fenghuang chubanshe, 1974; (2) Taipei: Wenhua tushu, 1983, 1992. An expensive, traditionally bound edition was produced by Tianyi chubanshe (Taipei) in 1985. An interesting

modern significance of Han Xiangzi, I kept asking people about him (friends, taxi drivers etc.), but knowledge was very limited. I visited three temples in southern Taiwan where Han Xiangzi is worshipped as a secondary deity:

- the Changli ci 昌黎祠 in Neipu 內埔 (Pingdong County 屏東縣),
- the Sanshan Guowang Miao 三山國王廟 in Tainan City 台南市,
- the Guangning Gong 廣寧宮 in Chiayi City 嘉義市.⁵⁰

All three of these temples are derived from immigrant communities from Chaozhou in Guangdong province. In none of the temples was I able to collect detailed knowledge of Han Xiangzi and his relationship with Han Yu. A management committee member of the Tainan temple just knew that Xiangzi was Han Yu's nephew. Several committee members in Neipu told me that he was Han Yu's grandnephew and that he rescued Han Yu at the Blue Pass. Han Yu's 819 poem is inscribed on a wooden board and hung on the wall of the Neipu temple. The chairwoman of the Guangning Gong in Chiayi thought that Han Xiangzi and Han Yu had no relationship with each other and were not even of the same dynasty. The committee member in Tainan knew that the two attendants of Han Yu are called Zhang Qian 張千 and Li Wan 李萬 (two servant figures from the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*), a fact not known to the committee members in Neipu.

development is the appearance of a simplified retelling of the novel in modern Chinese: See Zhiheng Shanren 制衡山人, *Shuang-Han wuyu* 雙韓物語 (Taipei: Miaolun chubanshe, 1994). Another modern paraphrase is Zhuo Zhuojie's 周濯街 *Han Xiangzi* 韓湘子 (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2007).

⁵⁰ Descriptions of these temples may be found in Zhang Zhizhong 張志忠 & Zheng Shuwen 鄭淑文, "Taiwan diqu Han Wengong xinyang chukao 台灣地區韓文公信仰初考," in: *Wenhua Taiwan* 文化臺灣, ed. by Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, vol.1 (Zhonghe: Dadao wenhua bianji zhongxin, 1996), 245-272.

All in all, knowledge of Han Xiangzi's background was rather slim. I surmise that this knowledge may have been greater in the past, otherwise Han Xiangzi would never have been installed in these temples and there would not be obvious links to the Han Xiangzi myth such as the Zhang Qian und Li Wan figures, and (in Neipu) the Han Yu poem, the clearly Daoist appearance of the Han Xiangzi figure, and a mural depicting a white crane behind the Han Xiangzi figure (in the Tainan temple). However, this knowledge apparently was lost at some time, and Han Xiangzi worship continues more or less by force of tradition only. In two of the three temples Han Xiangzi is an appendage to Han Yu--a situation derived apparently from the Chaozhou background.⁵¹ In the Guangning Gong in Chiayi the situation may have been similar until even that link was forgotten.

Knowledge of Han Xiangzi was somewhat better in a Taichung 台中 spirit-writing cult ("phoenix hall", *luantang* 鸞堂) called Wumiao Mingzheng Tang 武廟明正堂.⁵² Han Xiangzi is the hall's main medium's "immortal teacher" (*xianshi* 仙師) and an interview with that medium (Mingbi 明筆) revealed that he knew the basic features of the Han Xiangzi story. Mingbi gave me copy of a Han Xiangzi *baojuan*, the

⁵¹ During the Qing dynasty, the major shrine devoted to Han Yu in Chaozhou (the Han Wengong Ci 韓文公祠) had a statue of Han Yu, flanked by Zhang Qian and Li Wan. On his left was a secondary altar devoted to Han Xiangzi. All of these figures were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. When the shrine was restored in 1984, apparently only a new Han Yu figure was installed. According to Qing eyewitness accounts, Han Xiangzi was portrayed as smiling and standing on clouds. His altar was framed by a couplet drawn from a poem ascribed to Han Xiangzi, in which he speaks of his magical powers to produce instant wine and flowers. See Zeng Chu'nan 曾楚楠, *Han Yu zai Chaozhou* 韓愈在潮州 (Shantou: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993), 68, 74-75.

⁵² This cult group was the object of my dissertation research. See Philip Clart, "The Ritual Context of Morality Books: A Case-Study of a Taiwanese Spirit-writing Cult" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1997).

Han xian baozhuan 韓仙寶傳, telling me that the whole story was in there.⁵³ He did not know the *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*. Mingbi recently channelled a new scripture devoted to the Baxian, which may lead to a new focus for a phoenix hall he has recently founded, but that remains to be seen.⁵⁴

The reprint of the *Han xian baozhuan* was done at the behest of a man called Kang Tianxin 康天心 by the Shengxian Zazhishe 聖賢雜誌社, a publishing house linked with another Taichung spirit-writing cult, the Shengxian Tang 聖賢堂 (“Hall of Sages and Worthies”). In an interview with Kang (who must be in his eighties), I learned that he hailed from Changting 長汀 City in Fujian, right on the border with Guangdong. His uncle ran a planchette cult there and one night Han Xiangzi descended into the planchette and asked Kang and several others to become his disciples. Since then Mr. Kang has had a special relationship with the immortal, which however apparently did not lead him to do deep research into the background of Han Xiangzi. His knowledge too is mainly derived from the *Han xian baozhuan*, a copy of which he picked up in Taiwan and later had reprinted by the Shengxian Zazhishe. Generally speaking, I found a much higher level of knowledge about Han Xiangzi among phoenix disciples than among the temples that actually worship him as a deity—a sign of the greater theological interest of sectarians.

4. Han Xiangzi's Cult and Story: Preliminary Conclusions

⁵³ *Han xian baozhuan* (Taichung: Shengxian zazhishe, no date). Alternative title on cover: *Han Xiangzi baozhuan* 韓湘子寶傳.

⁵⁴ *Ba Xianweng lingying zhenjing* 八仙翁靈應真經 (Taichung: Xuyuan zazhishe 虛原雜誌社, 2004). On this scripture, see Philip Clart, “The Eight Immortals between Daoism and Popular Religion: Evidence from a New Spirit-written Scripture,” paper presented at the symposium “Foundations of Daoist Ritual”, Humboldt-Universität Berlin, 9–11 December 2007.

There are some indications that at least in the Chaozhou area of Guangdong and in areas settled by Teochiu in Taiwan there was an active tradition of Han Xiangzi worship with some corresponding knowledge of his story. However, even there Han Xiangzi apparently was never worshipped as a main deity, but only in conjunction with his (great-)uncle Han Yu.⁵⁵ Just as for the Baxian as a group, in the case of Han Xiangzi too we are faced with a situation where we have a well-developed literary tradition with a strong impact on popular literature in the Qing dynasty, but little corresponding cult activity. If we think back to the questions first raised in the introduction, we have to ask ourselves: why doesn't the supposed link between popular literature and religious cult work in this case?

⁵⁵ At the time of the original writing of this essay, the only temples with Han Xiangzi worship of which I was aware had his (great-)uncle Han Yu as their main deity and were linked geographically or culturally with the Chaozhou region of Guangdong province. During the final revisions to the paper, however, I came across a reference to one temple devoted to Han Xiangzi as its main deity: the Xiangzi miao 湘子廟 in Xi'an. According to local legend, this temple is located at the old residence of Han Xiangzi and "flourished during the Yuan and Ming dynasties". Recently it was renovated with the financial help of the municipal authorities and the Baxian Gong; from 27 to 28 October 2006 a consecration rite was held with the participation of many Daoist dignitaries. See Sun Changde 孫常德, "Xi'an Xiangzi Miao juxing xiufu jungong ji shenxiang kaiguang qingdian huodong 西安湘子廟舉行修復竣工暨神像開光慶典活動," *Zhongguo Daojiao* 中國道教 6/2006: 55; Dang Fangli 黨芳莉, *Baxian xinyang yu wenxue yanjiu: wenhua chuanbo de shijiao* 八仙信仰與文學研究—文化傳播的視角 (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), 55. This temple and its history will become the subject of a future publication; for the purposes of the present paper, this discovery does not change the overall picture of a very sparsely developed religious cult juxtaposed with a (at least until the Qing dynasty) very rich narrative tradition.

I would like to suggest two factors that might explain the case of Han Xiangzi--and may be applicable in other cases as well:

(1) In the relationship of literature and religious cults, the latter may occupy the primary position, i.e., perhaps there has to be a religious cult in place for literature to spread it. Literature, popular or otherwise, cannot create a cult. In the case of Han Xiangzi, it seems that his story came into being independent of cult activity. Its earliest sources are poems and anecdotal literature--both forms of elite literature. Thus, Han Xiangzi was a product of elite imagination and literary speculation. The theme was picked up by Daoist members of the elite such as Du Guangting, and eventually "trickled down" into progressively more popular forms of literature. The success of this "trickle down" process may have been due to the cultural relevance of its themes (deliverance, anti-Confucian sentiment, etc.), but lacking a cultic basis and a geographical centre it did not spawn a religious movement. Literature as carrier of myth for cults may only be effective where these cults have a solid basis in at least one area of China and are spread by means other than just narrative literature (such as by merchants through their network of guild halls⁵⁶ or by the state⁵⁷). Thus, we must not overestimate the

⁵⁶ See Paul Katz's research on Wen Yuanshuai 溫元帥 in *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), chapter 4.

⁵⁷ See James Watson's study of the spread of the cult of Tianhou 天后 in South China: "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China: Diversity and Integration*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 292-324.

effectiveness of literature in and by itself. It may well need an autonomous religious tradition to build on in order to have a formative effect.

(2) There may also be an intrinsic reason within the Han Xiangzi myth why it did not spawn a general cult. If hope for assistance and deliverance is a reason for worshipping immortals such as Lü Dongbin, Han Xiangzi may not be a likely provider of that. As throughout his story Han Xiangzi almost exclusively saves his relatives, deliverance (*dutuo*) here is very much a family affair. However, one important factor in the genesis of many popular deities is their separation from their family context. It is this separation that makes them eligible to be worshipped by all and sundry, as they owe no primary loyalty to a particular family.⁵⁸ By focussing on the cultural ideal of the immortal

⁵⁸ Philip Chesley Baity, *Religion in a Chinese Town* (Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service, 1975), ch. VI; C. Stevan Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 193-206. Baity (pp. 240-244) makes an intriguing argument that immortals are fundamentally different from gods in that they have never died and don't need sacrifices from humans to sustain themselves. Hence there is no reciprocity between them and humans, and therefore also no or little worship. If this were the case, we would get a quite different take in the question why the Han Xiangzi literature has not spawned a corresponding cult. However, Baity's argument is flawed. For example, how are we then to explain the widespread cult of Lü Dongbin? I would argue that there does exist a relationship of reciprocity between an immortal and his worshippers, one that follows the master-disciple model. In many stories, the immortal offers deliverance only to the person who has proved him or herself worthy. The relationship entered into between a worshipper and an immortal is a contractual one just like that between a worshipper and a deity, but the nature of the contract is different. It is a contract for instruction which establishes a mutually binding relationship, as between a teacher and his student. Once this relationship exists, the worshipper can also expect this-worldly benefits from his immortal, just like a human teacher is socially and morally responsible for more than just the instruction of his

delivering all his relatives to Heaven, the Han Xiangzi narrative may tie him too closely to family interests to qualify him for popular godhood. This barrier is not insurmountable in individual cases as the example of Mingbi and Kang Tianxin show, but may have limited the mass appeal of Han Xiangzi as an object of religious devotion.⁵⁹

These two observations merge into a single conclusion: In the relationship between a deity's cult and its narrative development in literature, primacy may have to be given to the cult. Literature can serve to standardize a deity's story and help spread it,

students.

During the presentation of this paper at the conference at Chung Hsing University, Prof. Wang Ch'iu-kuei made an observation similar to that of Philip Baity by pointing out that a "cult" of immortals strictly speaking does not exist in Taiwanese popular religion and that immortals are ritually clearly distinguished from popular deities. Hence the absence of a "cult" to Han Xiangzi would not be a phenomenon that needed explanation. However, here too I would point to the functional similarities between local deities and Daoist immortals. Their cults certainly differ in important respects, as Stephan Feuchtwang has shown for the separate cults of "Ang Gong" and "Xian Gong" (= Lü Dongbin) in the northern Taiwanese town of "Mountainstreet", but the worshippers of the latter do not regard him as in any way radically different from a popular god. See Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001). Hence the fact of the relative lack of a cult following for Han Xiangzi (as compared to the widespread success of Lü Dongbin) still represents a useful angle from which to explore the relationship of narrative tradition and religious cult.

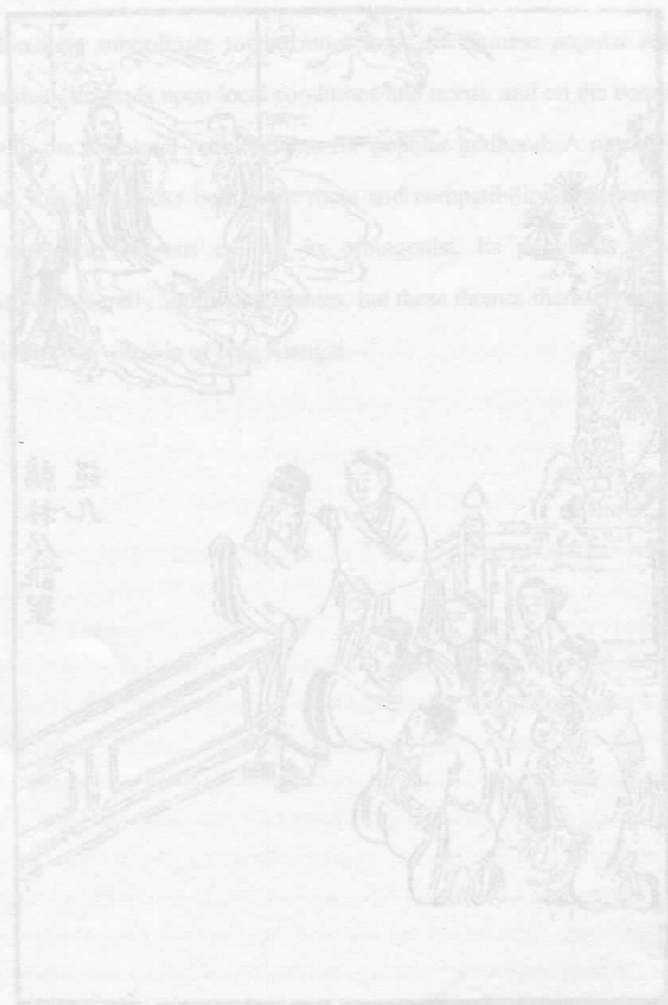
⁵⁹ However, viewed from another angle, the strong familial element in the Han Xiangzi myth apparently has caused his cult to become closely connected with that of Han Yu in the Chaozhou area. This occurred in spite of the religious incompatibility of the two figures. After all, Han Xiangzi embodies a religious/ideological critique of the public persona of Han Yu as an upright Confucian scholar and official, which is what he is worshipped for in the Chaozhou tradition. It is a testament to the strength of kinship bonds that such a subversive figure was able to claim a place at Han Yu's side in popular worship.

but it is ultimately subordinate to the inner logic of Chinese popular religion. The success of a deity depends upon local conditions and needs, and on the compatibility of the deity with the structural requirements for popular godhood. A narrative tradition such as Han Xiangzi's lacks both local roots and compatibility, and hence could not trigger or spread a religious cult of its protagonist. Its popularity is due to its dramatization of culturally significant themes, but these themes themselves may militate against a widespread worship of Han Xiangzi.



The Han and Lin families together realize the sacred and transcend the world.

The Story of Han Xiangzi, p. 443.



與
公
子
同
遊

The Story of Han Jiang, p. 44.