

## Narrative of Salvation: The Evolution of the Story of the Wife of Emperor Wu of Liang in the *Baojuan* Texts of the Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries\*

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### Abstract

The story of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty 梁武帝 (r. 502-549) rescuing his wife Lady Xi 郗氏 from an unfortunate rebirth as a snake was a common subject in popular literature related to Buddhist beliefs in late imperial China. Its history can be dated back to the twelfth century, when it quickly spread throughout the country. It is interpreted as a foundation of monastic Buddhist rites for the salvation of the dead, and it has also appeared as a narrative used in ritual storytelling and drama in several areas of China. Although Lady Xi's story played a major role in the dissemination of Buddhist ideas and rituals among the common folk, its history and cultural impact still remain understudied.

The present paper explores the development of Lady Xi's story in the particular literary form of *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls) with the focus on performance traditions of southern Jiangsu. It compares three different

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recensions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* that represent two distinct periods in the development of the *baojuan* genre (the so-called “sectarian” scriptures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the “folk” narrative texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), as well as two regional traditions (Northern China and Wu dialect-speaking areas of Jiangsu). The evolution of this subject shows how elements of historical narrative were incorporated into Buddhist ritual storytelling. The article also demonstrates the connections between differences in the contents of the recensions with their functions in ritualized performances based on information from contemporary recitations of this *baojuan* in southern Jiangsu.

**Keywords:** Emperor Wu of Liang, *baojuan* 寶卷, precious scrolls, telling scriptures, Buddhist ritual, funerary services, female salvation

## 1. Introduction

The story of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (梁武帝; personal name Xiao Yan 蕭衍, 464-549, r. 502-549) rescuing his wife Lady Xi 郗氏<sup>1</sup> from an unfortunate rebirth as a snake was a common subject in popular literature related to Buddhist beliefs in late imperial China. Not only is it interpreted as a foundation of monastic Buddhist rites, which were commonly used for the salvation of the dead, but it also appears as a narrative still used in ritualized storytelling and drama in several areas of China.

The present paper explores the development of Lady Xi’s story in the particular literary form of *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls), with a focus on the performance traditions of southern Jiangsu (a part of the so-called historical Jiangnan region). It compares three different recensions of the

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1 Regarding the name of Lady Xi, although she was awarded the title of empress only posthumously, she was called Empress in *baojuan*. Thus, this article uses both appellations of Lady Xi and Empress Xi.

*Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* that represent two distinct periods in the development of the *baojuan* genre and also two regional traditions: Northern China and the Wu dialect-speaking areas of Jiangsu. This comparison demonstrates the continuity as well as changes in the traditional subject matter of Buddhist-oriented ritualized storytelling.

Although Lady Xi's story played an important role in the dissemination of Buddhist ideas and rituals among lay believers in China—unlike other, similar stories of Mulian 目連, Tang Emperor Taizong's 太宗 journey to the underworld, or Princess Miaoshan 妙善, its history and cultural impact have still not attracted adequate attention from Chinese or foreign scholars,<sup>2</sup> which should be regarded as part of the general tendency to neglect popular aspects of the development of Chinese Buddhism. Through its detailed examination of the contents and form of three selected *baojuan* texts, this article aims to contribute to the general outline of the use of this subject in Chinese ritualized literature.

## 2. On the origins of the Empress Xi's story of salvation

The story of the salvation of Empress Xi, which is the core subject of several versions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*, was already well known in Chinese Buddhist literature by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In Chinese Buddhism, Emperor Wu of Liang is credited with the creation of an

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2 For example, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu Chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan*, revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Liu Zhen 劉禎, *Zhongguo minjian Mulian wenhua* 中國民間目連文化 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1997); Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017).

3 For example, see Shi Jue'an 釋覺岸, *Shi shi ji gu lue* 釋氏稽古略; Shi Huanlun 釋幻輪, *Shi shi ji gu lue xuji* 釋氏稽古略續集, reprint (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling guji keyishe, 1992), p. 200.

especially effective ritual of salvation, embodied in the *Merciful Penitence of the Ritual Area* 慈悲道場懺法 (*Cibei daochang chanfa*, otherwise known as the *Precious Penitence of the Liang Emperor* 梁皇寶懺 [*Liang huang bao chan*]; hereafter abbreviated as the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor*)—a text still often recited in the Buddhist monastic context in the present day.<sup>4</sup> The story of Lady Xi's salvation is recounted in the preface to the *Merciful Penitence of the Ritual Area* included in the Japanese edition of Tripitaka, based on the Korean edition of the mid-thirteenth century (which in turn originated from the Song dynasty text).<sup>5</sup> As this text has survived only in later copies, there is still debate about whether its contents can be dated back to the Liang dynasty. Based on research by Japanese scholars, Western scholars generally assume that the scriptural contents can be traced back to the texts available around the sixth century, though its present organization into ten fascicles probably dates back to the tenth–twelfth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Leaving aside discussions on the date of this text, we note simply that the *Merciful Penitence*

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4 See David W. Chappell, “The Precious Scroll of the Liang Emperor: Buddhist and Daoist Repentance to Save the Dead,” in Wm. M. Bodiford, ed., *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 40-43. On its place in Buddhist repentance on the whole, see Kuo Li-ying, *Confession et contrition dans le bouddhisme chinois du V<sup>e</sup> au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), p. 13; Daniel B. Stevenson, “Buddhist Ritual in the Song,” in John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song, Liao, Jin, Yuan (960-1368 AD)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 367-407; Shi Jianru 釋堅如, *Liang huang bao chan yanjiu* 《梁皇寶懺》研究 (Taipei: Renwen fojiao, 2017).

5 See Dazangjing kanxinghui 大藏經刊行會, ed., *Dazangjing* 大藏經, vol. 45 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1983), no. 1909, p. 0922; also see the original, Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932). For the complete English translation, see Buddhist Text Translation Society, ed., *Repentance Ritual of the Emperor of Liang: A Complete Translation of Repentance Dharma of Kindness and Compassion in the Bodhimanda* (Ukiah, CA: Dharma Realm Buddhist University, 2016).

6 See David W. Chappell, “The Precious Scroll of the Liang Emperor: Buddhist and Daoist Repentance to Save the Dead,” p. 42, n. 3.

*of the Ritual Area* was a prominent Buddhist ritual text in China and other East and Central Asian countries by the ninth–twelfth centuries, as attested by various historical materials.<sup>7</sup> Its association with the name of Emperor Wu was probably the result of his well-known inclination towards Buddhism, presented both in historical sources and in later lore.<sup>8</sup>

Here we are more concerned with the dating of the story of salvation of Emperor Wu’s wife: it probably postdates the ritual manual itself, as its earliest credible records date back to approximately the eleventh–twelfth centuries; it should therefore be considered an apocryphal Buddhist legend.<sup>9</sup> Xi Hui 郗徽 (468-499), the main character of the story, was indeed a historical person and a wife of Xiao Yan, who later became Emperor Wu of Liang.<sup>10</sup> However, she was awarded the title of Meritorious Empress 德皇后 (De huanghou) only posthumously, as she had died before her husband had won the throne.<sup>11</sup> Legends about Lady Xi apparently appeared not long after her death. For example, the *History of the Southern Dynasties* 南史 (*Nan shi*), compiled by Li Dashi 李大師 (570-628) and Li Yanshou 李延壽 (?-?) at the beginning of the seventh century, says that Lady Xi, who was extremely jealous during

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7 Besides occasional citations in Japanese sources of c. ninth century, Uighur and Tangut translations of the Song period have also been discovered, see Yang Zhigao 楊志高, *Cibei daochang chanfa Xixia yiwen de fuyuan yu yanjiu* 《慈悲道場懺法》西夏譯文的復原與研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017), pp. 25-27.

8 Emperor Wu is known for his patronage of Buddhism and participation in numerous Buddhist rites. For example, see Shi Jue’an, *Shi shi ji gu lüe*, pp. 200-202, 221-222; Chen Jinhua, “Pañcavārsika Assemblies in Liang Wudi’s Buddhist Palace Chapel,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66.1(2006): 43-103.

9 See David W. Chappell, “The Precious Scroll of the Liang Emperor: Buddhist and Daoist Repentance to Save the Dead,” p. 42, n. 3.

10 The alternative old reading of her family name is Chi, so she also is called Chi Hui in English literature.

11 The present work is not concerned with the details of Lady Xi’s biography. The interested reader can turn to the following historical sources: Yao Silian 姚思廉, ed., *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), *juan* 7, pp. 157-158; Li Dashi 李大師 and Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), *juan* 12, pp. 338-339.

her lifetime, after her death turned into a dragon, which terrified the inhabitants of the inner palace.<sup>12</sup> Another similar legend can be found in the *Broad Records of the Taiping Reign* 太平廣記 (*Taiping guangji*), which states it cited the *Records of Two Capitals* 兩京記 (*Liang jing ji*) by Wei Shu 韋述 (?-757). According to this passage, the Emperor Wu's consort Xi was jealous and jumped down a well in despair. She subsequently turned into an evil dragon, which was awarded the title of Heavenly Dragon-King, and an altar for her was built on the well.<sup>13</sup> Such stories obviously formed a foundation of the legends surrounding the compilation of the Buddhist ritual manual, though we cannot find the direct association between the dragon incarnation of Xi Hui and the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* in the historical or fictional accounts compiled in the seventh and eighth centuries. This association apparently happened later, but it certainly was well established during the Northern Song (960-1127), when the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* was widely spread throughout the empire and even abroad.

One of the earliest credibly dated records of the story of Lady Xi's turning into a python appears in the Song-dynasty collection of the *Categorized Stories of Six Dynasties* 六朝事跡編類 (*Liu chao shiji bianlei*) by Zhang Dunyi 張敦頤 (*jinshi* degree obtained 1138).<sup>14</sup> In this source, the story is said to be derived from the preface of the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor*, which certainly had already existed and was widely circulated by that time. This can be proved by the Tangut translation of the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* that includes a translation of the original Chinese preface. This Tangut translation, discovered in Western China at the beginning of the

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12 Li Dashi and Li Yanshou, *Nan shi*, *juan* 12, p. 339. This is the foundation of the usual interpretation of Lady Xi as a symbol of jealousy (one of the female vices in traditional Chinese thought) in later vernacular literature. For example, see Zhou Qingyuan 周清原, *Xihu er ji* 西湖二集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2017), pp. 101-102.

13 Li Fang 李昉, ed., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), *juan* 418, p. 3406.

14 Zhang Dunyi 張敦頤, *Liuchao shiji bianlei* 六朝事跡編類 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), p. 126.

twentieth century, survives in multiple damaged printed copies in Saint Petersburg, London, and several Chinese collections.<sup>15</sup> Although the Tangut preface of this translation says that it was translated by Emperor Huizong 惠宗 (r. 1068-1086) of Western Xia and his mother Empress Liang 梁, in the copy preserved at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg, there is an indication that it was reprinted during the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Western Xia 仁宗 (r. 1139-1193).<sup>16</sup> The visual representations of this story also date back to the same period, as Lady Xi, transformed into a python, is depicted on the colophon illustrations in the Tangut printed copies of the translation of the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor*.<sup>17</sup> In the later period, this story was reworked in numerous pieces of Chinese vernacular literature, including *baojuan* and *huaben* 話本 novels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>18</sup> Pictorial representations of the same period were also well known (see figure 1).

### 3. Ming-dynasty version of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*

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- 15 See Yang Zhigao, *Cibei daochang chanfa Xixia yiwen de fuyuan yu yanjiu*, pp. 32-33, 72.
- 16 See K. B. Keping and A. P. Terent'ev-Katanskii, "Apokrif o Lianskom U-di v tangutskom perevode," ("Apocrypha on the Liang Wudi in Tangut Translation"), in *Pismennye pamiatniki Vostoka (Written monuments of the Orient)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 186-190.
- 17 For example, see K. F. Samosyuk, *Buddiiskaia zhivopis' iz Hara-hoto 12-14 vv.* (Buddhist painting from Khara-Khoto of the 12th-14th Centuries) (Saint Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh, 2006), p. 88. On the later visual representations, see Vincent Durand-Dastès, "The Lady with the Snake Body: 'Empress' Chi Hui's Story in Vernacular Literature and Ten Kings' Scrolls," paper presented at La traversée des landes des trépassés: récits, rituels, INALCO, (May 19-20, 2016).
- 18 For example, see Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說, Heng He 恒鶴, ed., (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), pp. 356-368; *Ershisi zun dedao luohan zhuan* 二十四尊得道羅漢傳, *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成, vol. 56 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990; hereafter abbreviated as GXJ), pp. 144-172 (reprint of 1605 ed.); Zhou Qingyuan, *Xihu er ji*, pp. 101-102; Tianhuazang zhuren 天花藏主人, *Liang Wudi xilai yanyi* 梁武帝西來演義, GXJ, vol. 8, parts 1-2 (reprint of the 1673 ed.). For the modern punctuated edition, see Han Xiduo 韓錫鐸, et al., eds., *Liang Wudi yanyi* 梁武帝演義 (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1987).

*Baojuan* is a type of Chinese prosimetric literature used for ritualized storytelling, mostly with religious subject matter. This form appeared around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in the initial period of development (till around the beginning of the sixteenth century), it can be characterized as Buddhist proselytizing literature. In the second (middle) period of their development (the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries), *baojuan* mainly served as sacred books of sects (popular syncretic religions) and circulated primarily in Northern China. Since the nineteenth century, *baojuan* mostly lost their connections with the special sectarian organizations, but continued to develop as a part of folk ritual devoted to various deities.<sup>19</sup> In their third period of development (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), *baojuan* recitations became popular in the Jiangnan region. Southern traditions of *baojuan* recitation, locally known under the names of “scroll recitation” 宣卷 (*xuanjuan*) or “telling scriptures” 講經 (*jiangjing*), have survived to the present, though only in rural and suburban areas.

The story of Lady Xi’s salvation is a subject continuously used in the *baojuan* texts of the middle and late periods, but through its Buddhist associations it can be connected with the original Buddhist nature of the *baojuan* form. The earliest available *baojuan* recension of this story dates back to c. sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is represented by the undated woodblock edition with the complete title of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor, Pronounced by the Buddha* 佛說梁皇寶卷 (*Fo shuo Liang huang baojuan*; hereafter *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*) that was originally collected by the

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19 For an introduction to *baojuan*, see Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū* 增補寶卷の研究 (Tokyo: Dōkyō kankōkai, 1975); Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Li Shiyu 李世瑜, *Baojuan lunji* 寶卷論集 (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2007); Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu* 中國寶卷研究 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009). On the periodization of *baojuan* history, see Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 3-5.



famous Chinese scholar of Buddhism, Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (1917-2005).<sup>20</sup>

This is a damaged edition whose original cover and frontispiece page are missing.<sup>21</sup> Apparently only a part of the frontispiece that was decorated with printed illustrations has survived (see figure 2). It would have presented major scenes of the Lady Xi story, as the part reproduced in “Rare Chinese *Baojuan*” series shows the labels attached to these illustrations, such as “Lady Xi is reborn as a python” 稀[鄰]氏托化為蟒. The style of this woodblock edition as well as the particularities of the contents of its text testify that the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* should be dated to the late sixteenth–early seventeenth centuries at the latest. It must have been of northern origin (areas around Beijing), as indicated by the specific lexical units, such as *rijia* 日家 (day). Another testimony to its lengthy circulation in the north is its mention in the book *Detailed Refutation of Heresies* 破邪詳辯 (*Po xie xiang bian*, written between 1834 and 1843) by Huang Yupian 黃育樞, an official in modern Hebei province, who fought sectarian teachings.<sup>22</sup> The details of the story quoted by Huang Yupian correspond to the contents of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* (extant copy).<sup>23</sup> A catalogue of the *baojuan* texts produced by Professor Che Xilun says that the same text, for which he gives the title the *Precious Penitence of the Liang Emperor, Pronounced by the Buddha*, also survives as an incomplete damaged edition of the Qing dynasty in the Tianjin

20 For the reprint, see Ma Xisha 馬西沙, ed., *Zhonghua zhenben baojuan* 中華珍本寶卷, series 2, vol. 18, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013; hereafter abbreviated as ZZB), pp. 4-67. Che Xilun has rendered the title of this text as the *Precious Penitence of the Liang Emperor, Pronounced by the Buddha* 佛說梁皇寶懺 (*Fo shuo Liang huang baochan*), which I could not find in the original text, see Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目 (Beijing: Yanshan shuju, 2000), pp. 54-55.

21 Fortunately, most of the main text survived, though many pages are damaged.

22 Huang Yupian 黃育樞, *Kōchū Haja shōben* 破邪詳辯校注, Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, ed. and annotated (Tokyo: Dōkyō kankōkai, 1972), p. 99.

23 For example, Emperor Wu sends his minister, Prajñā (Bore), and general, Wisdom (Zhihui), to look for the monk Baozhi 寶志 in the Cave of Yellow Flowers 黃花洞, see ZZB, vol. 18, p. 17.

City Library (not seen).<sup>24</sup>

In the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*, the story of Lady Xi's salvation is, as one would expect, associated with the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor*. The prosaic introduction of this text says: "I have heard that among scriptures of Tripitaka there is the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* [...]," followed by a short summary of the achievements of Emperor Wu as an idealized monarch supporting Buddhism.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the text claims connections with the Buddhist ideas and practices, though in fact this *baojuan* has a distinctly non-orthodox Buddhist background: it propagates the Teaching of Non-Interference 無為教 (Wuweijiao), which in this case is composed of the mixture of Chan and Pure Land symbols with very specific cults and prophecies.<sup>26</sup> For example, Emperor Wu is portrayed as the reincarnation of the Ancient Buddha (Amitābha?), who descended to earth to save people.<sup>27</sup> Besides this, in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* the traditional Buddhist story is expanded with the use of the prehistory of monk Baozhi 寶志 (Master Zhi 志公). The story of the crimes and punishment of Empress Xi appears only in section ten of the text, while the first nine sections are taken up by the description of the encounter between Emperor Wu and Baozhi, which represents the transmission of the "true teaching" of Non-Interference. Several sections describe the magical contest between Baozhi and monk Changgua 長瓜, who is also represented as an adept of Chan Buddhism. Changgua was engaged in meditation for five

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24 Only the first nine sections 分 (*fen*) of the text survived, see Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, pp. 54-55.

25 ZZB, vol. 18, p. 12. The contents of this *baojuan* are of course completely different from the ritual manual of *Precious Penitence of the Liang Emperor*, and therefore, I disagree with Chappell's designation of the latter as "The Precious Scroll of the Liang Emperor."

26 Huang Yupian also criticized it as a heretical distortion of Buddhist ideas, see Huang Yupian, *Kōchū Haja shōben*, p. 99.

27 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 13-14. Such interpretation of other Buddhist figures also can be found in other *baojuan* of the early period, see Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 64-65.

hundred years, but was still not able to transcend the world of forms and escape reincarnation. The culmination of the story is the reincarnation of Empress Xi as a snake, which is presented as the reason for the compilation of the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* by Baozhi and his disciples (sections 20-22).

Still, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* is noteworthy for its elaboration of the core story of Lady Xi, as it gives more details about the empress's crimes. The first of such is her attempt to feed the Buddhist monks led by Baozhi steamed buns with meat filling. Second is her attempt to slander Baozhi: Lady Xi stole his shoes, and then showed them to the Emperor and accused the monk of entering the imperial inner palace. Third, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* also explains the conflict between the empress and Baozhi by the karmic burden from the previous incarnations of both. In this previous incarnation, the empress was an earthworm 蚯蚓 (*qiuyin*) unintentionally killed by a monk, a previous incarnation of Baozhi. Although she had been returned to life by the magic powers of the monk, she was still trying to kill Baozhi in the present rebirth.<sup>28</sup> This prehistory of the empress was attested by Baozhi to Emperor Wu with evidence in the form of the white stripe around the waist of the empress, where she, as a worm, had originally been cut in two.

The origins of these details in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* remain unknown, though similar episodes appear in fiction of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, a reference to a former insect reincarnation appears in the story “Emperor Wu of Liang’s Successive Self-Perfection and Transformation into the Buddha” 梁武帝累修成佛 (*Liang Wudi lei xiu cheng fo*) from the collection *Ancient and Modern Stories* 古今小說 (*Gujin xiaoshuo*) by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646), written down around the same time as the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*, though in this novel the story is

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28 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 52-53.

applied to Emperor Wu and not his empress.<sup>29</sup> To my knowledge, the story of “treating the monks to meat buns” 肉饅齋僧 (*rou man zhai seng*) was first written down in the dramatic script of the *Newly Compiled Drama Exhorting Goodness of Mulian Rescuing His Mother* 新編目連救母勸善戲文 (*Xinbian Mulian jiu mu quan shan xiwen*) by Zheng Zhizhen 鄭之珍 (1518-1595), first printed in 1583.<sup>30</sup> However, in Zheng Zhizhen’s drama, this sin is ascribed to Lady Liu 劉氏—Mulian’s mother, not to Empress Xi. The stories of Mulian’s mother and Empress Xi, however, were closely connected at that time. Not only did the Mulian story also represent the salvation of the female soul and thus have similar cultural and ritual significance in popular literature, the drama produced by Zheng, which is the earliest available written version of the nationally famous Mulian drama,<sup>31</sup> also refers to the story of Empress Xi’s sins and salvation as a parallel to the story of Mulian’s mother.<sup>32</sup> One can suppose that the episode with the meat buns was applied to Empress Xi as an influence of the extremely popular Mulian story, though we still do not have enough evidence to assert this for a fact. Nevertheless, this episode was quite elaborated in the later fictional accounts of Empress Xi.<sup>33</sup>

These additional details of Empress Xi’s story in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* apparently belong to a category of common lore formed around Emperor Wu and his wife. Significantly, they also occur in later versions of the *baojuan* texts discussed here and were most likely not invented by the author

29 Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, Heng He, ed., pp. 356-357.

30 Zheng Zhizhen 鄭之珍, *Xinbian Mulian jiu mu quan shan xiwen* 新編目連救母勸善戲文, in Gu Tinglong 顧廷龍, ed., *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1774 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), pp. 413-414 (reprint of 1583 edition).

31 On Zheng’s drama, see Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

32 One cannot find much detail about the sins of Empress Xi in Zheng’s drama, however.

33 For example, see Tianhuazang zhuren, *Liang Wudi xilai yanji*, pp. 550-561. Some details here differ from the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*.

or editor of this particular *baojuan*. Although some similarities between the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* and the novels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries exist, there is also an important difference: while the novels emphasize the empress's jealousy towards the emperor's concubines, the *baojuan* version does not.

As for the details concerning Baozhi's deeds, it is not surprising that such a large part of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* text is devoted to this monk, taking into account his popularity in the mainstream Buddhist tradition, where he was often represented as a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Guanyin.<sup>34</sup> Although Baozhi in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* is called Bodhisattva, strangely we cannot find his identification with Guanyin.<sup>35</sup> This text says that Baozhi was sent to the earthly world by Buddha Dipamkara 燃燈佛 (Randeng Fo), the Buddha of the Past, who acts as a subordinate of the Eternal Venerable Mother, as is typical of Chinese sectarian teachings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>36</sup> It is the Eternal Mother who welcomes the soul of Lady Xi to heaven in this text,<sup>37</sup> which probably underlines the importance given to the female gender also characteristic of Chinese sects. Thus, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* represents the re-interpretation of Baozhi's image and the Lady Xi's story in general in the context of specific sectarian teachings centered on beliefs regarding the Eternal Mother.

The special passage on the myth of the Eternal Mother appears in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* as an aria, "Near the toilet stand" 傍粧臺

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34 For more on Baozhi, see Chün-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 198-211.

35 Guanyin does not appear in this text, unlike in later versions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*.

36 For example see, Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 138, 156, 162. Hereafter abbreviated as the "Eternal Mother."

37 ZZB, vol. 18, p. 66.

(*bang zhuangtai*), at the beginning of section nine.<sup>38</sup> Humankind is depicted as children of the Eternal Mother who have lost their “true nature” 真性 (*zhen xing*) and have been banished to the earthly world, where they suffer from various passions and are entangled in the cycle of constant reincarnations. The elect believers of the true teaching can be saved and return to the paradise-like realm of the Eternal Mother (depicted in Buddhist terms) with the help of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (such as Baozhi), who are constantly sent to preach on earth. Many special terms that appear in this aria, such as “Numinous Mountain” 靈山 (*ling shan*), “Golden Pool” 金池 (*jin chi*), “shadowless tree” 無影樹 (*wuying shu*), “Dark Pass” 玄關 (*xuan guan*), and “Assembly of Lotus Flowers” 龍華會 (*longhua hui*), are typical of Chinese sectarian teachings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> Another passage is devoted to the “inner elixir” 內丹 (*nei dan*) practice, which was often used by these sectarian teachings.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Baozhi appears in the text as an adept and prophet of such a teaching.

It was typical of *baojuan* of the second period of development to use popular Buddhist stories and figures reinterpreted in light of new sectarian teachings.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, it is hard to determine which sectarian group the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* belongs to. The myth of the Eternal Mother as the progenitor and savior of humankind and the practice of inner alchemy were shared by many sectarian groups at the end of the Ming dynasty.<sup>42</sup> We

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38 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 35-36.

39 Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 146-154; Pu Wenqi 濮文起, *Xinbian Zhongguo minjian zongjiao cidian* 新編中國民間宗教辭典 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2015), pp. 297, 317-318, 590, 643-644.

40 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 63-64.

41 The most prominent example is the Mulian story which was often used in sectarian *baojuan*, see Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 66-67, 72-117; Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 124-125, 128-130.

42 For example, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late*

can still, however, doubt the identification offered by Che Xilun, who labeled this text “the penitence book of the Wuwei teaching.”<sup>43</sup> First, it is not a penitence book, but a text of the narrative type. Second, Wuwei teaching in general was not characterized by a belief in the Eternal Mother.<sup>44</sup> This belief was typical of later teachings which formed in the second half of the sixteenth century. However, they also actively employed the term Non-Interference 無為 (*wuwei*), which apparently was inherited from the teaching founded by Luo Qing 羅清 (Luo Menghong 羅孟鴻, c. 1442-1527).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the use of this term in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* does not necessarily mean that there is a connection with the Luo Qing’s Non-Interference teaching. Huang Yupian did not associate it with Non-Interference teaching, after all, though he was very familiar with the latter. Therefore, in my view the religious affiliation of the given text remains undetermined.

Still, the ideas expressed in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* as well as several special features of its form help us to propose a tentative date for this text. It cannot be dated earlier than the second half of the sixteenth century, because it extensively uses ten-character verses and preaches the developed form of the Eternal Mother myth. According to the research of Daniel L. Overmyer, the myth of the Eternal Mother is first recorded in *baojuan* at the

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*Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 135-137; Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韓秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi* 中國民間宗教史, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 370-413, 492-518.

43 Usually translated as the “Teaching of Non-interference” or “Non-activism.”

44 Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 92-135; Barend J. ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: Hawai’i University Press, 2014).

45 For example, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 136-137; *Puming rulai wuwei liao yi baojuan* 普明如來無為了意寶卷, in E. S. Stulova, ed., trans., and annotated, *Baotsziuan’o Pu-mine* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979) (reprint of 1599 edition).

beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Ten-character verses also appeared in *baojuan* texts around this time.<sup>47</sup>

Another special feature of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* in comparison with other vernacular accounts of Empress Xi's story in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is its orientation toward oral performance. This function of this particular *baojuan* is clearly pronounced in the introductory verses of this text, which instruct the audience to listen attentively, as this *baojuan* can lead them to rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha.<sup>48</sup> It is obvious that recitation of this *baojuan* was regarded as a type of oral sermon aimed at the salvation of believers.

The special performance mode of this text is reflected in its structure, in which prose passages are alternated with poetic passages of several forms on a regular basis. The text is divided into twenty-two sections 分 (*fen*), and each of these starts with an aria sung to a certain tune, continues in vernacular prose, and closes with two lines of seven-character verse, long ten-character verses (with an irregular number of lines), a hymn 讚 (*zan*) with alternating four- and five-character lines (especially true of early period *baojuan* and other Buddhist texts), and four lines of five-character verse. The narration mainly takes place in prose, while the following poetic pieces reiterate the previous events or predict future developments. The main text is framed by the special introductory and concluding parts, including the “hymn of burning incense” 舉香讚 (*juxiangzan*) and “*gāthā* on opening scripture” 開經偈 (*kaijingji*).<sup>49</sup> The structure of concluding verses on the “transfer of merit” 迴向 (*huixiang*)

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46 Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 136-139. Che Xilun dates its appearance to around the middle of the sixteenth century, see Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, p. 142, n. 2.

47 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 158-159.

48 ZZB, vol. 18, p. 11. The Pure Land derived from the cult of Amitabha is equated here with the blissful land of the Eternal Mother, also called the Lotus Pond in this *baojuan*.

49 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 6, 13.



can be traced back to the earliest period of *baojuan* development, though the exact wording of this element is different from the texts of the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> This structure is in general typical of *baojuan* of the second period of development, which is also characterized by the extensive use of arias.<sup>51</sup> The constant repetition in the text was appropriate in the context of oral indoctrination. In addition, the arias included in this text also provide it with some entertaining qualities.

There is no precise information on which occasions the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* ought to be recited; however, there are several hints in the text that suggest the ritual use of this text. For example, the introductory verse of this *baojuan* says:

*Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* starts with the initial [karmic] links,  
The audience should concentrate their minds and listen to the text  
attentively.  
As you join voices in chanting the name of Buddha,  
Nine generations of your ancestors will be transferred to the Celestial  
palace!  
梁皇寶卷啟初因，大眾堅心用意聽。  
齊聲稱念佛名號，先亡九祖轉天宮。<sup>52</sup>

In this way, the text promises the salvation of the souls of one's ancestors. The mention of the chanting of the Buddha's name in unison refers to the so-called practice of "He Fo" 和佛, which is a characteristic feature of *baojuan* performances and can be traced back to the initial period of development of this literary form.<sup>53</sup> The introduction of this text also contains a long ten-character

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50 For example, see Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 71-77.

51 Ibid., pp. 151-156, 162-179.

52 ZZB, vol. 18, p. 13.

53 It is mentioned in the text of the fourteenth century, see Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, p. 67.

verse describing the terrors of hell and the ways to avoid punishment there.<sup>54</sup> The evidence in other early *baojuan* texts—as well as modern ethnographic materials on the use of later versions of *baojuan* texts devoted to the Emperor Wu story (see section 3)—suggests that this Ming-dynasty version was also chanted during funerary or memorial services in order to provide salvation for the souls of deceased persons. The place of recitation is called the “ritual arena” 道場 (*daochang*), and this term can be traced back not only to the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor*, but also to the earliest *baojuan* texts that we have (from the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries).<sup>55</sup> Che Xilun has suggested that the ritual function of salvation of the dead was a prominent feature of these earliest *baojuan* texts and their antecedents,<sup>56</sup> and it further developed in the “sectarian” period. The meaning of salvation in the afterlife was a natural fit in *baojuan* with the subject of Empress Xi’s story.

Thus, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1* constitutes a late-Ming period adaptation of the popular Empress Xi’s story that was designed for ritualized storytelling. It was a folk sectarian equivalent of the elaborate monastic Buddhist ritual of penitence and salvation.

#### 4. The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*: Southern tradition

The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* is represented in a number of editions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (I have collected seven of them; see Appendix). Among them, the earliest has the title “The Complete Collection of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*” 梁皇寶卷全集 (*Liang huang baojuan quan ji*) and was printed in 1876 by Manao sūtra publishers in Hangzhou (see figure 3).<sup>57</sup> Still, this edition is labeled as a reprint,

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54 ZZB, vol. 18, pp. 6-11.

55 ZZB, vol. 18, p. 67.

56 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 66-80.

57 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*, p. 145. I am mainly using the reprint found in Pu

which suggests that the original text was written much earlier. As there are multiple reprints of this recension by several publishers of *baojuan* without any significant revisions of the text, it can be characterized as a standard edition. The area of its dissemination was comparatively vast. It was included in the repertoire of “morality book” stores in Hangzhou and Guangzhou (see figures 4 and 5),<sup>58</sup> and was also transmitted through the religious networks of Chinese emigrants in Southeast Asia.<sup>59</sup> The text was also suitable for networks of morality books: the didactic orientation of this text was emphasized in the additional moralizing passages included as appendices in these editions, starting with the 1876 printing.<sup>60</sup>

The treatment of the core story of Empress Xi’s salvation in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* is similar to the Ming-dynasty recension. For example, the 1876 version continues to include such episodes as the previous rebirth of Empress Xi as an intelligent earthworm and her failed attempt to feed Buddhist monks the meat-stuffed buns. However, there are also many differences between the Ming-dynasty recension and the 1876 text in terms of both content and form.

In the first aspect, there is no mention of the Eternal Mother or any specific sectarian teaching. The ideas preached in the *Baojuan of the Liang*

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Wenqi 濮文起, ed., *Minjian baojuan* 民間寶卷, in *Zhongguo zongjiao lishi wenxian jicheng* 中國宗教歷史文獻集成. vols. 101-120 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2005; hereafter abbreviated as MB), vol. 2, pp. 311-333, but in consultation with the original 1876 edition at Fudan University Library.

58 On the printing of *baojuan* in that period, see Che Xilun, “Qingmo Minguo jian Changzhou diqu kanyin de baojuan” 清末民國間常州地區刊印的寶卷, *Folklore Studies* 民俗研究 (2011.4): 128-140.

59 For example, see the 1967 reprint published by Baowen yinwenju at the Bodleian Library, Bangkok, Sinica 4849 (originally collected by Piet van de Loon).

60 One of them, called “Ten Skeletons,” was translated by Wilt L. Idema from the 1899 printing of this *baojuan*, see Wilt L. Idema, ed. and trans., *The Resurrected Skeleton: From Zhuangzi to Lu Xun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 293-296.

*Emperor-2* appear to be more mainstream Buddhist. Bodhisattva Guanyin also prominently appears in this text, which is not true in the Ming-dynasty recension. She plays a crucial role in the process of the salvation of Lady Xi as well as that of Emperor Wu. It is no wonder beliefs pertaining to Guanyin were incorporated in this version of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*, taking into account the popularity of the stories of this deity in *baojuan* literature, especially the later performative traditions of southern Jiangsu.<sup>61</sup>

Still, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* cannot be characterized as preaching completely orthodox values. The special emphasis on vegetarianism as a necessary part of religious practice in this text appears very conspicuous within the context of the religious culture of late imperial China. Strict vegetarianism was characteristic of sectarian teachings in that period, while it was not obligatory for mainstream Buddhist believers in China.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Baozhi in this text is proclaimed to be a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Maitreya 彌勒 (Ch. Mile), which is not common in mainstream Buddhist traditions. At the same time, Maitreya was one of the major deities in sectarian teachings, where he was usually interpreted as a messenger of the Eternal Mother. The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* can be classified in the category of narrative *baojuan* of the nineteenth century that lost direct connection with sectarian teachings,<sup>63</sup> though one can see some influences from sectarian ideas and practices in this text. This aspect of its content allowed it to be circulated through stores selling morality books, which originally had a predominantly

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61 See Chün-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, p. 536; Rostislav Berezkin, "On the Performance and Ritual Aspects of the *Xiangshan Baojuan*: A Case Study of the Religious Assemblies in the Changshu Area," *Chinese Studies* 漢學研究 33.3(2015.9): 307-344.

62 See Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*, pp. 93-95; Hubert Seiwert and Ma Xisha, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 165-185.

63 For example, see Sawada Mizuho, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, pp. 34-38; Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 120-126.

sectarian background. In this regard, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* also can be compared with the *baojuan* texts about Mulian—in this case, the later versions of the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

Another difference is that the central narrative element—Lady Xi’s salvation—in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* is much more expanded in comparison with the Ming-dynasty recension. The storyline centers on the figure of Emperor Wu, which is less obvious in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*. It starts with the Emperor’s nightmare, which made him turn to Baozhi for advice, and ends with the post-mortem salvation of the whole imperial family (not only Lady Xi’s). As a result, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* constitutes a more coherent pseudo-historical narrative suitable for preaching purposes.

Several additional historical figures related to Emperor Wu appear in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, including Crown Prince Zhaoming 昭明 (Xiao Tong 蕭統, 501-531) and General Hou Jing 侯景 (?-552), who put an end to the Liang dynasty. Zhaoming at first is portrayed as a young Confucian intellectual, who together with Lady Xi tries to persuade the emperor to abandon his Buddhist activities: fasting and sūtra-chanting. In this endeavor, he visits the Donglin 東林 monastery to talk with Master Zhi. However, he is eventually converted to Buddhism himself. This episode has a historical foundation, as Zhaoming also was known for his patronage of Buddhism.<sup>65</sup> However, the short-lived Prince Zhaoming mainly became famous for his support of the compilation of the anthology of classical literature *Wen xuan* 文選 and was apparently included in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* as a cultural symbol of Confucian orthodoxy. Zhaoming also appears in the prosaic fictional accounts of Emperor Wu’s story of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though the details in these are different from the *Baojuan of the*

64 See Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 145-151.

65 For example, see Shi Jue’an, *Shi shi ji gu lue*, p. 212.

*Liang Emperor-2*.<sup>66</sup>

As for the episode with Hou Jing, it explains the whole history of the rise and fall of the Liang dynasty with the use of the Buddhist ideas of reincarnation. According to the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, Emperor Wu in his previous rebirth was a virtuous and intelligent woodcutter, who killed an ancient monkey that was engaged in self-perfection, however.<sup>67</sup> In order to take revenge, this monkey was reincarnated as the general Hou Jing (other homonym characters can be used to transcribe his name, meaning “the monkey spirit”), who revolted against Emperor Wu and besieged him in Taicheng 臺城, where he was starved to death. The origins of this legend are hard to detect, but one can find similar “karmic” explanations of Hou Jing’s treason in fiction of the seventeenth century.<sup>68</sup> Still, the details in the *baojuan* and fiction are different, which makes it hard to assert any direct influence from the novels in this episode. Besides, one needs to note that this story of Emperor Wu and Hou Jing also appeared in other *baojuan* texts and dramas of approximately the same period (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), which makes the influence of the novels even less certain.<sup>69</sup>

On the whole, historical events are interpreted in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* from the perspective of a pervasive law of moral retribution, with reference to major Buddhist ideas. Emperor Wu of Liang would be a very appropriate example for the demonstration of the karmic law in operation, as he was himself a devout believer of Buddhism. In the eyes of folk believers, karma served as an ideal explanation of his violent death. In addition, Emperor Wu also received deliverance in the Pure Land in the *Baojuan of the Liang*

66 Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, pp. 365-366; *Ershisi zun dedao luohan zhuan*, pp. 146-148.

67 MB, vol. 2, p. 314.

68 See Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, pp. 367-368; *Ershisi zun dedao luohan zhuan*, pp. 168-172; Tianhuazang zhuren, *Liang Wudi xilai yanji*, p. 749.

69 See Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 138-140.

*Emperor-2*—an episode that further enhances the ritual function of this text in the popular religious milieu.

In the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, the story of Hou Jing is combined with other pseudo-historical and anachronistic details. For example, Emperor Wu (Xiao Yan) is said to be the son of Xiao He 蕭何 (d. 193 BCE), the minister of the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 (Gaozu Emperor).<sup>70</sup> Although Xiao Yan indeed claimed ancestry from Xiao He, the relationship between these two figures was not as direct as described in this *baojuan*. Thus, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* should be regarded as a folk interpretation of national history with the use of popularized religious ideas, which is very characteristic of the *baojuan* genre in the late period of its development.<sup>71</sup>

On the basis of the comparisons made above, it is possible to suppose that the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* represents a southern elaboration of the Ming-dynasty *baojuan* text, which would correspond to the general theory offered by Chinese scholars concerning the initial development of the *baojuan* form in the northern region and its transmission to the Jiangnan areas in the later period.<sup>72</sup> In this case, the content of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* can be regarded as one of a few subjects of *baojuan* transmitted to Jiangnan from the north. At the same time, one should consider the obvious influence of written fiction and oral lore on the formation of this recension, which has many differences from the Ming-dynasty version.

As for the form of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, the text is not organized into small sections with a rigid structure, as in the *baojuan* texts of

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70 MB, vol. 2, p. 313.

71 For example, see Rostislav Berezkin, “Transformation of Historical Material in Religious Storytelling: The Story of Huang Chao in *Baojuan of Mulian Rescuing His Mother in Three Rebirths*,” *Late Imperial China* 34.2(2013.12): 83-133.

72 Lu Yongfeng 陸永峰 and Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Wu fangyan baojuan yanjiu* 吳方言寶卷研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), pp. 98-105.

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but is divided into just two fascicles (*juan*), characteristic of late-period *baojuan* in general. This makes the flow of narration smoother and more natural, which corresponds to the aforementioned narrative focus of this text. The narration still uses both prose and verse, and in this way, continues the general form of earlier *baojuan*, but the form of the verses in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* is different. It uses only seven-character verses, and one cannot find ten-character verses or arias in this text. In this regard it is also typical of *baojuan* of the late period, though the majority of the latter still occasionally used arias, mostly the particular tune “Crying during Five Watches” 哭五更 (*ku wu geng*), with local variations.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, these characteristics did not impede the use of this text in folk ritualized performances. Seven-character meter is the most common in the *baojuan* texts used in the modern performances of “scroll recitation” in the areas around Suzhou city, but they are sung with various melodies originating in folk musical culture.<sup>74</sup> The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* also preserves traditional introductory and concluding verses, inherited from *baojuan* of the earlier periods. If we compare this with the Ming-dynasty recension, however, the introductory and concluding parts of this text are much simpler, which follows the general trend of the development of *baojuan* form as well.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, as in the case of the Ming-dynasty recension, the introductory and concluding portions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* clearly attest

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73 Li Shiyu, *Baojuan lun ji*, pp. 23-24.

74 See Rostislav Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (*jiangjing*) in the Zhangjiagang Area and the History of Chinese Storytelling,” *Asia Major* third series 24.1(2011.6): 1-42; Rostislav Berezkin, “On the Survival of the Traditional Ritualized Performance Art in Modern China: A Case of Telling Scriptures by Yu Dingjun in Shanghu Town Area of Changshu City in Jiangsu Province,” *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore* 民俗曲藝 181(2013.9): 103-156.

75 Rostislav Berezkin, *Many Faces of Mulian: Precious Scrolls of Late Imperial China*, pp. 128-131.



that it was intended for oral performances. The prose introduction of this text says: “Those who are now listening to this scroll should reverently listen to it with sincere thoughts. They cannot talk and laugh and should refrain from any loud noise.”<sup>76</sup> Such instructions are typical of the *baojuan* texts of this period.<sup>77</sup> Besides this, there is also a note prescribing the practice of “chiming in with the Buddha’s name” in the introductory and concluding verses of this *baojuan*.<sup>78</sup>

The concluding verses also give some information on the recitation of *baojuan* and its supposed effects:

We have completed the recitation of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*,  
Its effect will surpass the recitation of the whole *Lotus Sutra*.

The merits of sincere scroll recitation are great,

It averts disasters and collects fortune and constant health and peace.

梁皇寶卷宣圓成，勝誦蓮花一部經。

虔誠宣卷功德大，消災集福永康寧。<sup>79</sup>

In my opinion, these verses are very representative of the religious outlook of the people who compiled and edited this text. On the one hand, they invoked Buddhist notions and scriptures, such as the famous *Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Law* 妙法蓮華經 (*Miaofa lianhua jing*), one of the central texts in Chinese Buddhism.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, they stressed the practical aspect of Buddhist piety, being supposed to bring welfare to the believers not only in the next incarnation, but also in this present rebirth. While in Sinological literature this practical interpretation of Buddhist teaching is associated with the Chinese

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76 MB, vol. 2, p. 311.

77 For example, see *Xinke huaming baojuan* 新刻花名寶卷 (Shanghai: Wenyi shuju, 1922), p. 1a.

78 MB, vol. 2, pp. 311, 330.

79 MB, vol. 2, pp. 331.

80 The character *hua* 花 (flower) instead of the standard *hua* 華 (blossom) is used in the title of this *baojuan*.

forms of Buddhism, it can be found in the old Buddhist traditions of South Asian countries as well.<sup>81</sup> In this sense, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* can be characterized as a work of “popular Buddhism.”

On the whole, the ritual elements in the text of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* create the impression that they are more centered on praying for well-being in the present life than improving the post-mortem destiny of deceased relatives. In regards to this aspect, it seems to be different from the Ming-dynasty recension of *baojuan*, and this supposition also is supported by the evidence of the modern performances of the 1876 recension that we have.

The text of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* is still used for recitation in the contemporary period. Recently, it was discovered among the materials of folk storytellers (also known as ritual masters) in Changzhou. The local scholar Bao Liben 包立本 found there the original 1876 edition of this text.<sup>82</sup> As I have not conducted fieldwork in the Changzhou area, so I do not have much information about the current use of this text. According to Bao Liben, this text is used for didactic purposes, and it is included in the program of complex ritual assemblies held on various occasions, accompanied by life-cycle rituals. However, *baojuan* are not recited during funerary services in the Changzhou area, unlike the modern tradition of “telling scriptures” in Changshu 常熟 (see below). On the whole, this function of the nineteenth-century text corresponds to specifics in its contents and ritual entourage, though one needs to take into account that the situation in the past may have been different. Interestingly, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* is no longer

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81 For example, see Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*, revised ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); N. G. Krasnodembskaia, *Traditsionnoe mirovozzrenie singalov (obryady i verovaniia)* (Traditional world outlook of Singhalese [rituals and beliefs]) (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), pp. 102-125.

82 Anonymous, “Xijian guji *Liang huang baojuan jingli 130 yu nian xili jingxian Wujin*” 稀見古籍《梁皇寶卷》歷經 130 餘年洗禮驚現武進, 2010.10.4, <http://huadong.artron.net/20101004/n126760.html>, original post from Wujinwang 武進網, (accessed December 4, 2019).

used in the scroll recitation traditions of the areas around Wuxi 無錫 (once a county under the jurisdiction of Changzhou), where such performances still flourish today; this further testifies for it being a local variation.

The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* can be called a mainstream recension of old *baojuan* subjects that were adapted for the Jiangnan tradition of scroll recitation performances, which is also related to the publishing of didactic literature in the city centers. Its content fits the general moralizing and indoctrinating context of folk performances, which have usually been interpreted as folk variants of Buddhist services by the organizers and participants.

### 5. The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* from Changshu

One of the few places in Jiangsu where the late recensions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* still can be found in performance is Changshu (now a city under the jurisdiction of Suzhou 蘇州). This is a place famous for the wide range of *baojuan* texts recited on various occasions.<sup>83</sup> The manuscript of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* by Cai Lin 蔡林, dated to 1872 (hereafter *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*), was preserved in the Changshu City Library.<sup>84</sup> Apparently it was collected from one of the local storytellers, known locally as the “masters of telling scriptures” 講經先生 (*jiangjing xiansheng*), though its exact provenance is unknown. While we do not have enough evidence to be certain, we can assume that this text was compiled or edited in Changshu or a place nearby; the details of its form and contents, as well as linguistic characteristics, are very close to the printed recension of 1876.

83 See Yu Dingjun 余鼎君, “Jiangsu Changshu de jiangjing xuanjuan” 江蘇常熟的講經宣卷, *Mazu yu minjian xinyang yanjiu tongxun* 媽祖與民間信仰研究通訊 2(2012): 49-114.

84 Here I am referring to the edited version of this text published in Wu Wei 吳偉, ed., *Zhongguo Changshu baojuan* 中國常熟寶卷, vol. 2 (Suzhou: Gu wu xuan, 2015; hereafter abbreviated as ZCBJ) pp. 1133-1149.

It is important to note that the 1872 manuscript presumably predates the earliest woodblock printed text that we have now. This further supports my hypothesis that the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* had been widespread among *baojuan* performers in southern Jiangsu before 1876. The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* probably represents one of the folk versions that made the foundation of the woodblock recension, which reveals the complex connections between printed and manuscript forms of *baojuan* texts in that area. While many printed *baojuan* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be traced back to folk manuscripts; the printed versions, as we have seen, were also circulated and reached rural performers.<sup>85</sup>

Regarding the treatment of the main narrative, although the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* is similar to the woodblock recension of 1876, it has many additional passages that are different from the standard printed version. Some personal and geographical names differ: for example, the 1872 manuscript says that Master Baozhi resided in Tongtai 同泰 monastery, while the printed recension calls it Donglin 東林 monastery, and so on. While the 1872 manuscript has more details compared with the printed recension, some episodes are omitted from this manuscript. For example, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* lacks any mention of the Wu Emperor's nightmare, which appears at the beginning of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*. The narration in the 1872 manuscript starts directly with the encounter of the Emperor and Master Zhi.<sup>86</sup>

However, many more details are contained in the story of the sins of Lady Xi in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*. While it preserves the core episode of treating the monks to the meat-filled buns, the list of sins is further

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85 See Rostislav Berezkin, "Printing and Circulating 'Precious Scrolls' in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai and its Vicinity: Towards an Assessment of Multifunctionality of the Genre," in Philip Clart and Gregory A. Scott, eds., *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China 1800-2012* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 139-185.

86 ZCBJ, vol. 2, p. 1133.

expanded. For example, Lady Xi was accused of murdering Prince Zhaoming, his mother Empress Li 李氏, and Lady Miao 苗氏, the favorite consort of Emperor Wu, the last of which was particularly cruel. It was owing to the accusation by this lady at the court of the afterlife that the soul of Lady Xi was summoned to the Underworld for judgment.<sup>87</sup> I have not seen these details in other *baojuan* versions of this story, but they belong to the pseudo-historical fantasies that one finds in abundance in Chinese popular and folk literature. For example, the episode describing the murder of the pseudo-historical concubine Miao can be traced back to the seventeenth-century novel “Romance of the Western Origins of Emperor Wu of Liang” 梁武帝西來演義 (*Liang Wudi xilai yanyi*),<sup>88</sup> though other murders apparently belong to a further elaboration of this story within folk imagination. They develop the theme of “jealousy” that was central in the fictional images of Lady Xi since the early period, though the topic of expiation of sins and salvation remains crucial in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*.

Besides this motif, there is an obvious anachronistic detail concerning the transition between the Han and Liang dynasties. The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* says that the Liang was succeeded by the Han, as Gaozu of the Han became the emperor after Emperor Wu of Liang had been starved to death in Taicheng.<sup>89</sup> One may assume that the reference here is to Liu Bang, since in another place the text says that Gaozu of the Han killed the huge snake that was the reincarnation of Lady Xi,<sup>90</sup> apparently referring to the famous episode in the biography of Liu Bang by Sima Qian.<sup>91</sup>

This mistake in the succession of dynasties in a text of the late nineteenth

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87 ZCBI, vol. 2, pp. 1142-1143.

88 Tianhuazang zhuren, *Liang Wudi xilai yanyi*, pp. 500-506.

89 ZCBI, vol. 2, p. 1149.

90 ZCBI, vol. 2, p. 1148.

91 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), *juan* 8, p. 347 (reprinted in 2007).

century appears very strange, as in this period, basic historical knowledge certainly was widespread throughout China. Besides, as we have seen, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2* clearly states that the Han was followed by the Liang (though omitting all other dynasties in between, which is both very imprecise and odd from a historical point of view). Nevertheless, such obvious anachronistic details should not surprise the reader of the old recension from Changshu, as they are common in other *baojuan* texts that have been collected from modern performers in that area.<sup>92</sup> In any case, this detail betrays the very low cultural level of the author (or editor) of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*. We can assume that this person just wrote down a folk legend without any critical reference to national history. Thus, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* can be treated as an expanded folk version of this *baojuan*, used in local recitation practice.

There is no clear reference in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* to its use in funerary rituals, which is a common practice in Changshu today. However, there are hints of the ritual function of this text's recitation. For example, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* says that Master Zhi specially compiled the *Penitence of the Liang Emperor* for the salvation of female souls. Master Zhi says to the emperor and monks:

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92 These were noted by the editors of the collection of *baojuan* texts from present-day Zhangjiagang 張家港, which were mostly formed on the lands of former Changshu county in 1986. For example, see Liang Yibo 梁一波, et al., ed., *Zhongguo Heyang baojuan ji* 中國河陽寶卷集, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2007), p. 240. On the interpretation and distortion of historical facts in *baojuan* from Changshu, see Rostislav Berezkin, "An Analysis of 'Telling Scriptures' (*Jiangjing*) during Temple Festivals in Gangkou (Zhangjiagang), with Special Attention to the Status of the Performers," *CHINOPEARL Papers* 30(2011): 25-76; Rostislav Berezkin, "On the Connections of the Cults of Historical Persons and Baojuan Storytelling: With *Baojuan of the Small King of Thousand Sages* of the Changshu Area of Jiangsu Province as an Example," *Journal of Humanities College of Liberal Arts National Chung Hsing University* 興大人文學報 50(2013.3): 265-294.

This miraculous text in forty-eight fascicles [...] makes the *Great Penitence of the Liang Emperor* in ten volumes, compiled on the request of the emperor and disseminated throughout the country; it is obligatory for all of you to transmit and recite it, it saves women from their sins of the ‘ten great unforgivable evils.’ If a filial son invites twenty-four monks and establishes an altar to perform this ritual, it is possible to rescue the soul of the deceased, so that she will escape punishment [in the underworld] and get new rebirth.”<sup>93</sup>

It is not said in this text that the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* can be substitute for or complement this ritual of penitence, but we still find here the topic of the salvation of deceased women, which is prominently featured in modern “telling scriptures” in Changshu.

The concluding verses of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* do not refer to the post-mortem salvation, however; similar to the verses in the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, they state:

We have recited the *Scroll of the Liang Emperor* for the host’s [family],  
 It will guarantee him peace during all four seasons of a year.  
 The scripture has ended and the scroll has ended,  
 The deities are rejoicing and the buddhas are rejoicing.  
 As the deities and buddhas are rejoicing, they add to your happiness,  
 They avert disasters, bring happiness and guarantee your peace!  
 齋主宣得梁皇卷，一年四季保平安。  
 經也完來卷也完，神也歡來佛也歡。  
 神歡佛喜添吉慶，收災降福保平安。<sup>94</sup>

This concluding verse clearly refers to the ritual assembly in a domestic setting, at which it was recited, though the exact occasion for recitation is not indicated. The name of the sponsor of the assembly, literally a “host of the vegetarian feast” (referring to its original Buddhist connotations), is still used

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93 ZCBI, vol. 2, p. 1148.

94 ZCBI, vol. 2, p. 1149.

in modern “telling scriptures” of Changshu. Many lexical units here are also common for *baojuan* texts still recited in the Changshu area, and can be regarded as standard in *baojuan* of the third (late) period of development. Therefore, the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3* cannot be directly linked to funerary rituals, as we lack historical evidence; but it is worthwhile to note that the joyous and festive atmosphere alluded to in this verse does not necessarily contradict a funerary performance, as was already noted in connection with another version of this *baojuan* (*Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*).

The *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* remains a necessary element of “telling scriptures” assemblies that are held for the salvation of deceased women in Changshu. There are presently several recensions of this *baojuan* in Changshu, which can be traced back to the version represented in the edition of 1876. However, they have different names and vary in some details; for example, the one commonly used today is called the *Baojuan of the Penitence Rites of the Liang King* 梁王法懺寶卷 (*Liang wang fachan baojuan*; I am using the manuscript by Yu Baojun 余寶鈞, dated 1998). This text—with several details significantly differing from the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*, including the function of an enhanced ritual salvation—is usually recited during women’s funerals along with the *Baojuan of Mulian*, a local version of *Baojuan of Mulian Rescuing His Mother during Three Rebirths* 目蓮三世救母寶卷 (*Mulian san shi jiu mu baojuan*, c. the second half of the nineteenth century). When the deceased person is male, the masters of “telling scriptures” usually recite the *Baojuan of Explicating and Clarifying [Origins] of Hell* 銷釋明證地獄寶卷 (*Xiaoshi mingzheng diyu baojuan*, abbreviated as the *Baojuan of Hell*), which is an old sectarian text of the late sixteenth century.<sup>95</sup> According to the hereditary master of telling scriptures, Yu Dingjun 余鼎君 (b. 1942), in some areas around Changshu, such as the town of Guli 古里, the

95 See Rostislav Berezkin, “Precious Scroll of the Ten Kings in the Suzhou Area of China: with Changshu Funerary Storytelling as an Example,” *Archiv Orientalni* 84(2016): 381-411.



*Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* can also be recited during funerals of men.<sup>96</sup> Thus, this *baojuan* appears in a variety of contexts in present-day recitation practices.

The story of Emperor Wu's rescue of his wife was also included in the section about the second hall of the underworld (governed by King Chujiang 楚江王) in the *Baojuan of Ten Kings* 十王寶卷 (*Shi wang baojuan*), which is also one of the central texts performed during folk funerary services in Changshu.<sup>97</sup> This text contains stories about each of the Ten Courts of the underworld, which the soul is supposed to travel through after death.<sup>98</sup> The synopsis of Lady Xi's story in the second section of this text is most likely derived from the folk recension of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*. The reference to Lady Xi's story here attests the popularity of this subject in local *baojuan* storytelling.

If we compare the manuscript of the 1872 version with other *baojuan* texts used in folk funerary rituals in Changshu, namely the *Baojuan of Ten Kings* and the *Baojuan of Mulian*, we find that they have episodes concerning the enumeration and description of all compartments of the underworld in common, including the judging of souls by the Ten Courts. In the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-3*, Lady Xi travels through hells and observes the punishments of sinners in every compartment.<sup>99</sup> Each court of the underworld

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96 ZCBI, vol. 2, p. 1133.

97 For the published version with the title *Baojuan of the Kings of the Underworld* 冥王寶卷 (*Mingwang baojuan*) based on the manuscript of Qian Zaiqing 錢載卿 (1911-1999) from Xipu 奚浦 village, Luyuan 鹿苑 town, present-day Zhangjiagang city, dated as *yihai* year 乙亥 (c. 1935), see Liang Yibo, et al., ed., *Zhongguo Heyang baojuan ji*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210.

98 On the origins of this belief, see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).

99 ZCBI, vol. 2, pp. 1143-1146. The episode of this tour of the underworld can also be traced back to a seventeenth century novel, see Tianhuazang zhuren, *Liang Wudi xilai yanyi*, pp. 710-726.

is presented in prose as well as in verse, and thus following the conventions of other local *baojuan* with the theme of hell. The prolonged journey through the hells enacted by the storytellers during every funerary service makes a common topos in these texts that may further strengthen the hypothetical link between the 1872 manuscript with the funerary performances. Besides their didactic message, these descriptions of hell certainly address the imagination of audiences, in which illiterate women and children were usually prevalent.

Modern evidence about “telling scriptures” in Changshu, where the later local recension of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* is still used for funerary services, reveals the possible traditional function of the earlier recensions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*. While the traditional narrative subject that can be traced back to indigenous Buddhist sources was further elaborated in local folk variants, this *baojuan* preserves its ritual function in the contemporary period.

## 6. Conclusions

By comparing three versions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* from different time periods, I have outlined the evolution of this Buddhist subject in the *baojuan* form. While many details of the story remained the same during its transmission across time and space, notably its connection with the establishment of the Buddhist rites of afterlife salvation, new elements were acquired in various versions of this story, which had to do with the changing religious and cultural characteristics of the *baojuan* texts. The early recension of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries included the propagation of specific religious ideas of salvation, associated with a religious movement centered on the cult of the Eternal Mother. In the later recensions represented in printed editions and manuscripts of the late nineteenth century, both from southern Jiangsu, one can find more pseudo-biographical details of Emperor Wu and his wife Lady Xi. Although the episode of the empress’s salvation remains central

in all three variants of *baojuan*, the figure of the Emperor is also very important, as underlined by the titles of all the texts. Emperor Wu is also an object of salvation in all *baojuan* that I have collected. In addition, the popularly interpreted religious ideas in these texts served as the explanation of historical events, such as the fall of the short-lived Liang dynasty.

One can see the significant increase of “historical” elements (or more precisely “pseudo-historical”) in *baojuan* of the late period of their development, as most of them are found in the manuscript recension dated 1872. While many pseudo-historical details in the late recensions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* can be traced back to historical fiction of the Ming and Qing dynasties, one needs to note that the *baojuan* texts had important differences from these novel-type narratives. First, the *baojuan* texts preserved an emphasis on the theme of sins and salvation, which was also related to the ritual function of these texts. Second, the special features of *baojuan* form are suitable for their function as storytelling scripts. The changes in the formal characteristics of these texts in the period from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries till the end of the nineteenth century can be explained by the changing characteristics of performance in these texts and their integration into the popular ritual and musical culture of different locations.

All three versions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* had a clearly pronounced ritual function, which could also vary in different contexts. While the major purpose of this text was the provision of post-mortem salvation, and in this function it could substitute for monastic Buddhist rites in the folk milieu, the ritual elements of the 1876 printed version also demonstrate that the purpose of this text could be broadened, with moralizing and auspicious meanings addressed to the audience of the living. The ritual function of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor* has survived in the modern period in the ritualized storytelling of “telling scriptures” in Changshu, Jiangsu, where a special recension of this text serves as an integral element of funerary ritual for deceased women.

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**Appendix: Editions of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*  
consulted in this study**

1. Hangzhou, Manao Sutra Store 瑪瑙經房, 1876 woodblock edition (Fudan University Library).
2. Hangzhou, Huikong Sutra Store 慧空經房, Zhaoqing Monastery 昭慶寺, 1888 woodblock edition (Fudan University Library).
3. Guangzhou, Wenzaizi 文在茲, 1898 woodblock edition (private collection).
4. Guangzhou, Shoujingtang 守經堂 (reprint of 1899 edition), original woodblocks stored in Chaoyuan Cave 朝元洞, Luofu Mountains 羅浮山 (Harvard-Yenching Library).
5. Guangzhou, Hongduge 鴻都閣 (reprint of 1899 edition), original woodblocks stored in Chaoyuan Cave, Luofu Mountains (private collection).
6. Ningbo, Xuelintang 學林堂, 1933 lithographic edition (Harvard-Yenching Library).
7. Bangkok, Baowen yinwuju 寶文印務局, 1967 edition (Bodleian Library, Oxford).



Figure 1: Emperor Wu of Liang creates the *Precious Penitence* to save Lady Xi. From the picture on the origins of the Shuilu rite, painted on the order of Empress Li 慈聖太后 (Cisheng taihou), 1609.

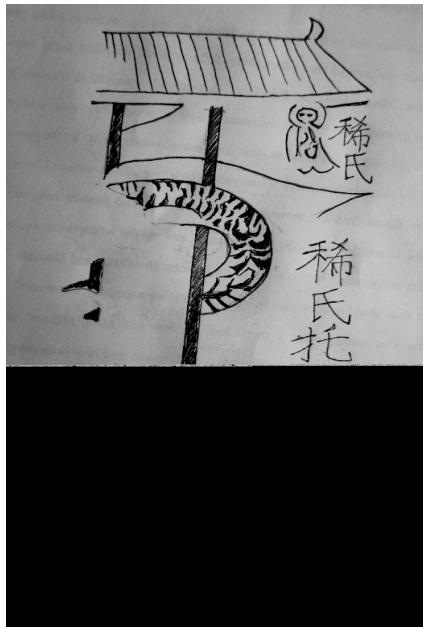


Figure 2: Frontispiece picture of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-1*, c. late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, drawn by the author.

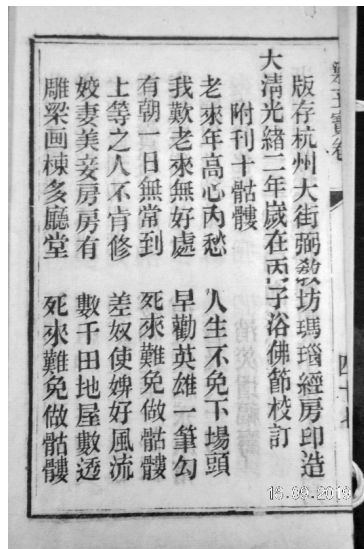


Figure 3: Last page of the woodblock edition of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor-2*, 1876. Private collection.



Figure 4: Lady Xi. Frontispiece picture of the 1899 Guangzhou edition of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*. Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library.



Figure 5: Emperor Wu of Liang. Frontispiece picture of the 1899 Guangzhou edition of the *Baojuan of the Liang Emperor*. Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library.

# 救度的故事

## ——梁武帝皇后的故事在十六至十九世紀 寶卷文獻中流傳演變

白若思\*

### 摘要

梁武帝的皇后郗氏死後轉世為蟒蛇被武帝救度成為中國佛教相關的俗文學流行題材。它起源於十二世紀左右，並迅速在全國範圍內流傳。該故事做為佛教超度亡魂儀式《慈悲道場懺法》的基礎，同時成為中國幾個地區講唱文學與戲曲的題材。雖然該故事在傳播佛教教義與儀式起重要作用，其歷史與文化影響仍缺乏深入研究。本文章探討郗氏故事在寶卷體裁的發展演變過程，以比較三種代表性《梁皇寶卷》版本為基礎。其中一種版本代表明末清初的民間教派寶卷，其他兩種為清末吳方言地區民間敘述性的寶卷：1876年的木刻本與1872年的抄本。該故事演變顯示歷史敘述成分逐漸被吸收到寶卷文本；本文也解釋不同版本特點以及其儀式演唱功能（包括現代一種文本在民間喪葬儀式的用途），以當代江蘇南部寶卷講唱資料為主。

**關鍵詞：**梁武帝、寶卷、講經、佛教儀式、喪葬儀式、女性救度

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