



*The lady with the snake
body:*

*'Empress' Chi Hui's story in
vernacular literature and Ten
king's scrolls.*

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*La traversée des landes des trépassés : récits, rituels, images /
Journeys across the realm of the Dead : Narratives, rituals and
images, Paris, INALCO, 19-20 may 2016*

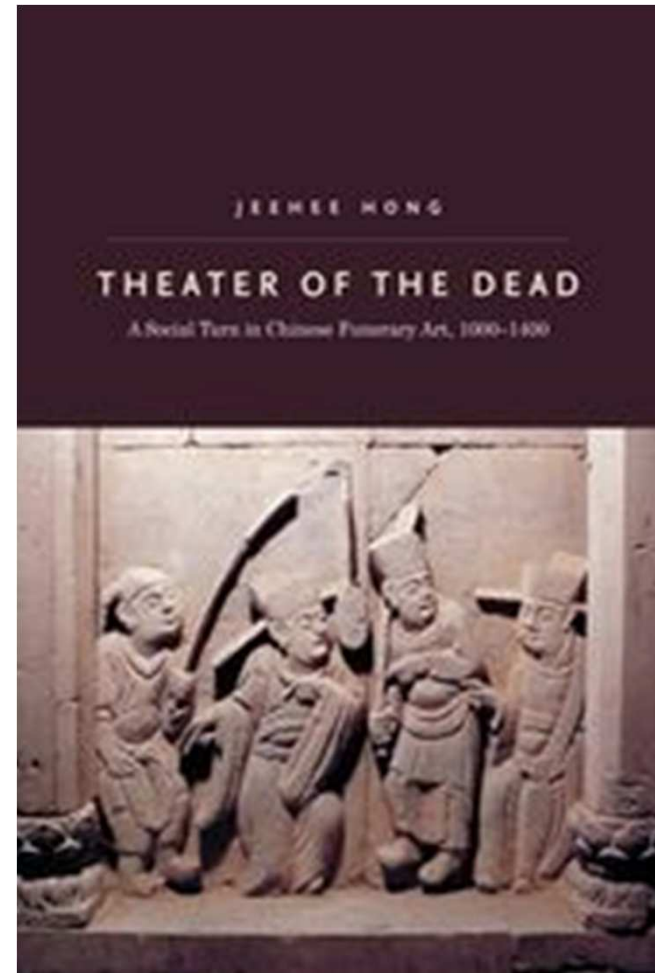
Prologue:

“Narrative’s incrustations” by way of inclusion of stories taken from drama in late imperial Ten king’s scrolls:

Another case of the “theater of the dead” as recently defined by Hong Jeehee for the Song-Yuan period?

See: Hong Jeehee, *Theater of the Dead: A Social Turn in Chinese Funerary Art, 1000-1400*,
University of Hawai'i press, 2016

“死者戲台”



Preliminary observation :

Late imperial Ten kings paintings of southern (only ?) China, especially ones used by taoist ritual masters, add two layers to the usual two levels of Kings and judges in the upper part and of tourmented dead and executioners on the lower.

Those new levels are occupied by:

- Salvaging divinities
- Scenes from well-known trips to the underworld taken from history and/or literature, usually seen through the prism of theater

Ten kings of Hell's painting used by southern China's fashi

- Those painting were often used by married Taoist « masters of ritual » *fashi* 法師 of Southwest or Southeast China. They often belonged to *fashi* orders such as Yuanhuang 元皇 (Hunan, Sichuan) or Lüshan 閩山 (Fujian, Jiangxi). The fact that those ritual specialists were performing active salvation from Hell's ritual (such as *po diyu* 破地獄 'Breaking Hell's(gate)' rituals) may explain the relatively 'optimistic' side of those paintings (where the tortures of Hell occupies a slightly lesser place than in earlier (Tang-Song to mid Qing) scrolls of the Ten Kings, and where salvaging divinities also appear, as well as stories alluding to salvation, both occupying an important place.

The preservation and access of the Ten Kings' scrolls sets

- Those paintings have existed in Late Imperial and Early modern China by hundreds of thousands, but they were also heavily destructed during Cultural revolution. Thousands of them have been preserved, however. They have often been collected by scholars of Chinese religion (Li Yuanguo 李遠國, Li Fengmao 李豐楙, Kenneth Brashier), or are kept in local museums. But many of the latter are not available to consultation. So we may only have a look at a rather small number of the extant paintings, mainly kept in private collections. So only a few preliminary observation may be made about ita at this stage. It is the scope of this paper, and one should not forget that further studies may contradict some of its preliminary conclusions.

« Four levels » Hell's Kings'
paintings



Collection Brashier (left)



and Li Yuanguo (right)

Heavenly
divinities that
will (may) help
the deceased

King of
the 6h
court

Slained
Yang
Qilang
accusing
Pan
Renmei
(Yang jia
jiang story
杨家将故事)

'regular' Hell
cursus: karma
mirror, various
tortures



Heavenly divinities that
will (may) help the
deceased

Hell king and his *panguan*
判官

Beheaded Jing river
dragon-King accusing
Tang Taizong 唐太宗

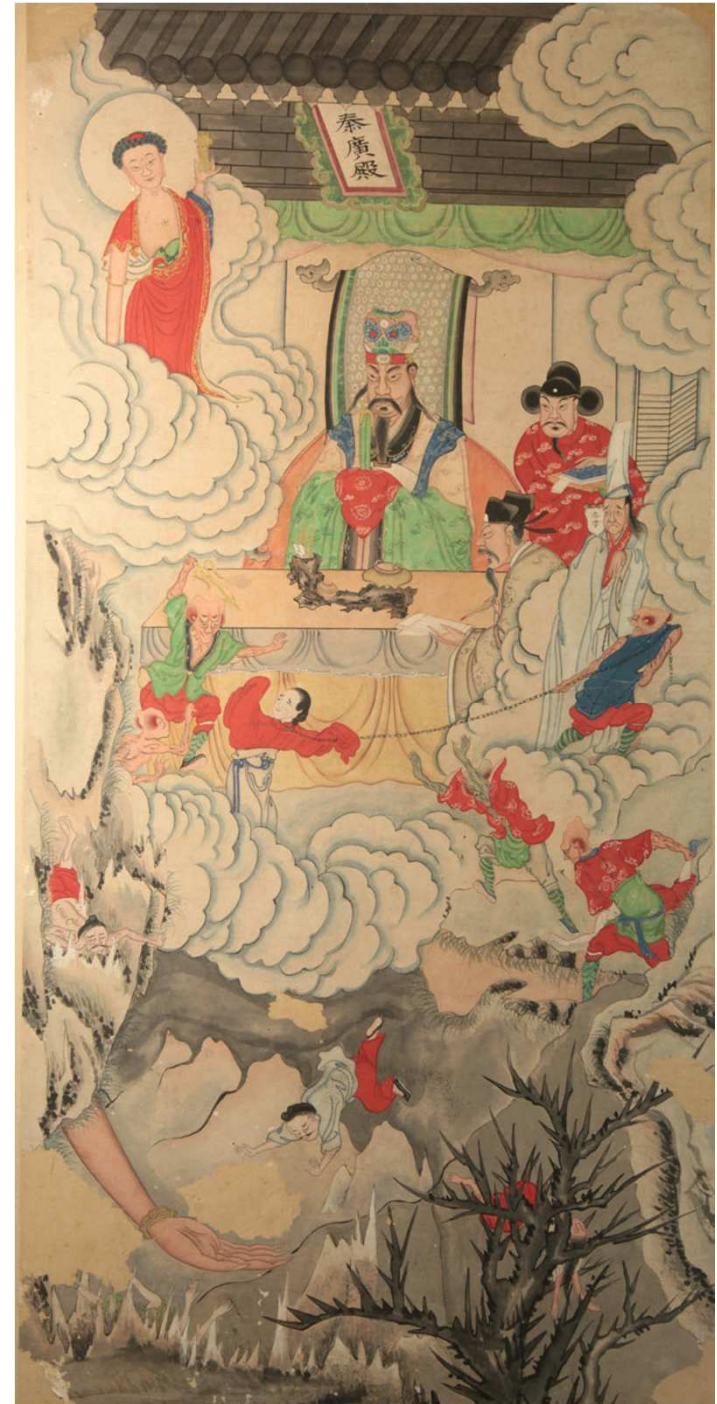
‘regular’ Hell cursus:
sword mountain

Li Yuanguo's 李遠國
collection



Buddhist deity saving a suffering soul from being pushed down a cliff to rugged rocks and sharp branches

(Ten kings' painting, from Sichuan – private collection, Changsha)



The infernal judge as an elite viewer of theater

Elite spectators of *xiqu* are very
often shown enjoying their show
during a banquet, seated behind
tables



Woodblock
illustration for *Jin
Ping Mei*, early
XVIIth century



The kings of Hell depicted in these religious scrolls look at scenes taken from famous narratives of Hell's journey in a very similar way.

Those scenes look very much like theatrical « stopped actions » (*liangxiang* 亮相) and even features characters dressed as actors

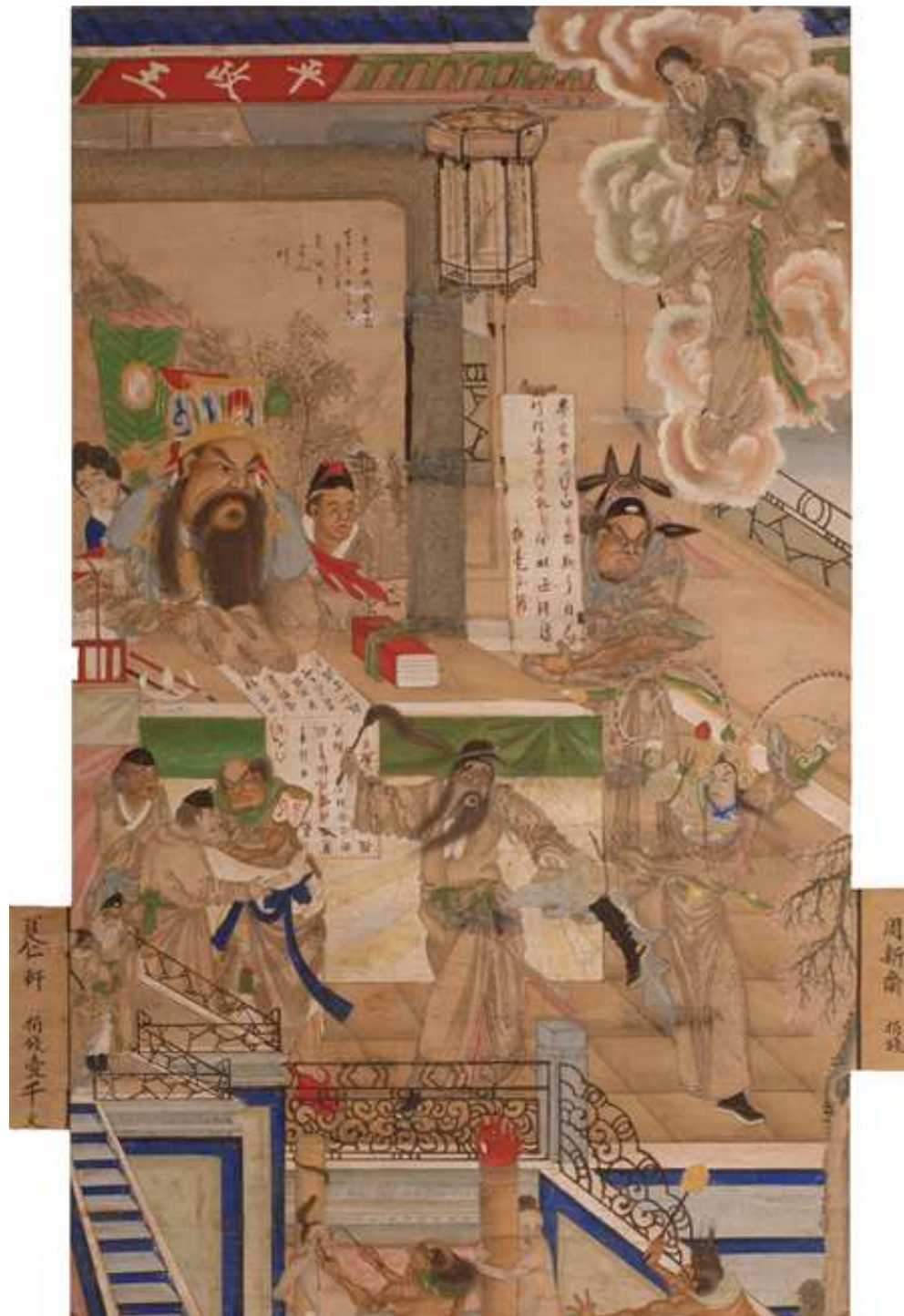
liangxiang 亮相







Li Yuanguo's
李遠國
collection



Li Yuanguo's
李遠國
collection







I. The « cardinal stories » of the Ten Kings’ ‘theater of the dead’.



I. The « cardinal stories » of the Ten Kings' 'theater of the dead'.

Various dramatic stories appear more or less regularly, but three of them are so prevalent that they could be called « cardinal stories »

Those three “cardinal stories” appearing everywhere in late imperial Ten kings paintings are:

- Mulian saving his mother
- the King Dragon of Jing river accusing Tang Taizong
- Chi Hui turned into a huge snake complaining to her husband Liang Wudi.

Common features:

they are all stories of salvation from Hell;

they are all linked to important salvation rituals (patronized by an important emperor in the case of Taizong and Wudi);

they all are part of Mulian Xi's drama of SouthWest China.

They are all stories of salvation from
hell:

- Mulian's trip to the netherworld will eventually release his mother from Hell (or from a reincarnation as a dog).
- Tang Taizong will be released from the realm of death and returned to life.
- Liang Wudi's wife will recover her human form and leave the snake's body she has been reincarnated into.

they are all linked to important salvation rituals:

- Mulian's story is at the heart of the Yulanpen 盂蘭盆 “ghosts’ festival”
- His trip to the Netherworld will oblige Tang Taizong to promise to perform a big scale *pudu* 普渡 ritual for the suffering souls (as told in the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記);
- The plaint of the empress-turned-into-snake will lead Liang Wudi into asking Baozhi to invent the “precious repentance ritual” that bears the emperor’s name (*Liang huang baochan* 梁皇寶懺), and is said to be also at the origin of the Shuilu ritual.

they all are part of Mulian Xi's drama of South West China:

- Mulian's story is, as nearly everywhere in China, the main tale of the Mulian xi 目連戲 performed during the ghost's festival of the seventh month (and in some other ritual occasions).
- The *gaoqiang* 高腔 operas' versions of the « Hua Mulian » 花目連 ('flowery' Mulian', i.e. extended Mulian) of Southwest China feature a *Liang zhuan* 梁傳 and a *Xiyou* 西遊 play that may be added to the main Mulian story during a festival. Two scenes taken from these plays, *Zhan long tai* 斬龍台 (The Scaffold for beheading the dragon) and *Xishi bianmang* (Lady Xi turned into a snake) tells the stories we're talking about today.

- But the three “cardinal stories” have rather different statutes in the way they are placed within the paintings : Mulian 目蓮 is placed among the suffering souls, inside the “punishment areas” of the netherworld, as he interacts there with his mother and other suffering souls: he is not part of the “theater of hell” played in front of the King’s tables of office.

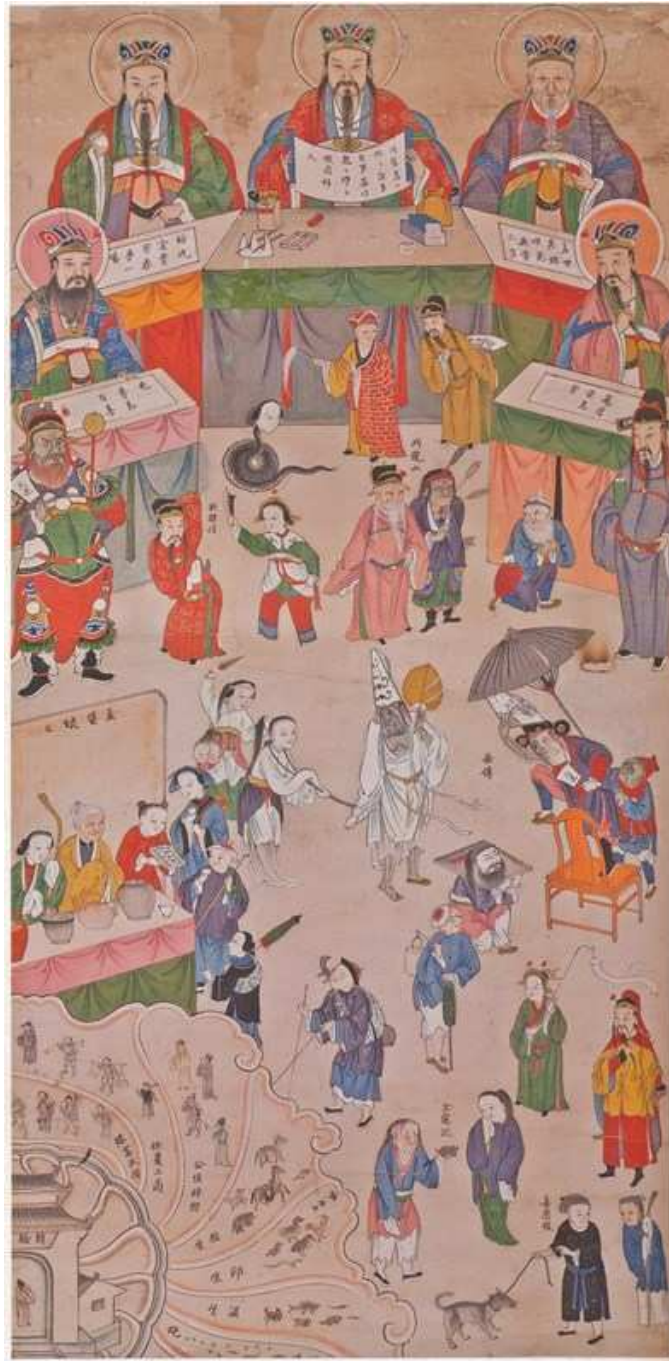


Sets of 'Ten Kings' scrolls, (Li Yuanguo's collection, Chengdu)



Set of 'Ten Kings' scrolls, Sichuan (private collection,
Changsha)

- The two other stories are performed in front of the judges, as the other famous hell's stories. But they are often given a prominent place, and there are hardly a set of the Ten kings' scrolls without them.
- One of the reason for their prominent place may be that they constitute a link between a famous emperor of China and the performance of an important salvation ritual.



Ten Kings'
Paintings from
Fujian or Taiwan

Li Fengmao's
collection

李豐楙
所藏





Upper part of the painting: *Xishi bian mang* 郗氏變蟒—
Zhan longtai 斬龍台 (Tang Taizong's story)

Lower part of the painting: various drama stories:

- 兩龍山（兩狼山）
- 斬韓信
- 岳傳
- 金龜記
- 善惡報
- 刁南樓
- 鳳儀停
- 活捉姦夫
- 武松殺嫂
- 十二貫（十五貫）
- 掃秦
- 等戲。。



The Two stories in the same scroll.
From Li Fengmao's collection

II. The Story of 'empress' Chi Hui: from history to vernacular narratives

Chi (Xi) Hui 郗徽 (468-99), wife of Xiao Yan 蕭衍, future emperor Wu 武 of Liang dynasty was actually never an empress.

She died before her husband conquered the throne.

But narrative tradition looks at her as an empress, and calls her 郗氏皇后 (*Xishi huanghou* in the more common today's pronunciation).

Her extreme jealousy, it is said, had her changed into a huge snake (sometimes a dragon) after her death.

It was to save her that Wu asked the holy monk Baozhi 寶志 to write and perform the penance text of Emperor Liang *Liang huang baochan* 梁皇寶懺. The 水陸齋 reportedly derives also from this act.

An earlier narrative (Tang?)

makes her transformation into a dragon definitive...

梁武郗皇后性妬忌。武帝初立，未及冊命，因忿怒。忽投殿庭井中。衆趨井救之。后已化為毒龍，煙焰衝天，人莫敢近。帝悲歎久之，因冊為龍天王，便於井上立祠。

« Empress Chi (Xi), wife of Liang Wudi, was extremely jealous. When Emperor Wu was enthroned, he did not immediately confer on her a title, and she was very upset. So she threw herself down the well situated in front of the main hall. Everybody rushed to save her, but the empress had already changed into a vicious dragon. Smoke was rising to the sky and nobody dared to come near. The Emperor sighed sadly for a very long time, and eventually gave her the title of Heavenly King Dragon, and built a shrine by the well. »

(太平廣記 418 卷 ; 出《兩京記》《东西京记》。唐韦述撰，5卷。)

SONG

Yang E's *Shuilu yimen* 水陸儀文 is the first text to link the *Shuilu* ritual to the request from Liang Wudi to Baozhi, but it is not his wife that he is willing to save then, but a monk appearing to him in a dream.

A first (?) detailed version of the legend appears in the *Liuchao shiji bianlei* 六朝事跡編類, *juan xia, lingyi men* 靈異門(靈異門第九), entitled *Xishi huashe* 郗氏化蛇. It is said to be reproduced from the “preface of the Liang Wu chan” (*Liangwu chan xu* 梁武懺序). It is not certain that the story appear at this stage as a preface of the Baochan text (see below).

The *Liuchao shiji bianlei* is a Song book written by Zhang Dunyi 張敦頤 (born 1097)

The same text, in the section on monasteries (寺院門第十一) says that the Luyuan monastery 鹿苑寺 in Nanjing has a “grotto of Xi shi” 郗氏窟, which likely alludes also to the snake incarnation story as well.

YUAN. The Yuan buddhist text *Shi shi ji gu lue* 釋氏稽古略 (T.2037) by monk 覺岸 includes an outline of the legend.

MING

During the Ming dynasty, a small “biography, tradition” (zhuan 傳) is added before the text of the *Cibei daochang chanfa* 慈悲道場懺法 (T. 1909), which retolds the legend of Chi Hui.

Vernacular novels :

« Liang Wudi leixiu gui jile » 梁武帝累修歸極樂 in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說-*Yushi mingyan*, 37 喻世明言·三十七卷 : Patrick Hanan's datation : « 'late' (from 1550's to 1620's), probably same author as S I, 19”

“Shi li luohan di shisan” 施笠羅漢第十三 in Biographies of the 24 Arhat who found the Way *Ershisi zun dedao luohan zhuan* 二十四尊得道羅漢傳, 1604

One of the three introductory tales *Ji meihua gui nao xige* 寄梅花鬼鬧西閣 *Xihu erji* 西湖二集 11 (very end of Ming dynasty)

“The coming from the West of emperor Wudi of the Liang”, *Liang wu di xilai yanyi* 梁武帝西來演義四十回, 1673

Performative genres

“Precious scroll of Emperor Liang” *Liang huang baojuan/ baozhuan* 梁皇寶卷寶/傳, 1876 at the latest (Manao jingfang, « reprint »)

Acts “The Jealousy of Lady Xi (Chi)” *Xishi cu* 郝氏醋 and “Xishi turned into a snake” *Xishi bian mang* 郝氏變蟒 in Gaoqiang Chuanju 川劇高腔 play *Qingyun gong* 慶雲宮.

Acts “Shooting at the heart of the flower” *Tanda huaxin* 彈打花心 and “Xishi turned into a snake” *Xishi bianmang* 郝氏變蟒, two of the three acts of the play *Liangzhuan* “the Story of the Liangs” 梁傳, in *Chenhe Gaoqiang Mulian quan zhuan* 辰河高腔目蓮全傳.

The vernacular narratives: typology

- Type 1: A group of stories stresses the themes of Jealousy and inner quarters cruelty:
Huaben (Gujin xiaoshuo and Xihu erji);
Liang Wudi xilai yanyi;
Chuanju play *Xishi cu* and *Xishi bianmang*;
Hunan Chenhe play *Liang zhuan: tanda huaxin* &
Xishi bianmang
- Type 2: Another one put the stress on sins against the clergy and breach of vegetarian vows:
24 Luohan zhuan and *Liang Huang baojuan*.

Example of type 1 (1): « The coming
from the West of emperor Wu of the
Liang »

Liang wu di xilai yanyi

梁武帝西來演義

1673

synopsys

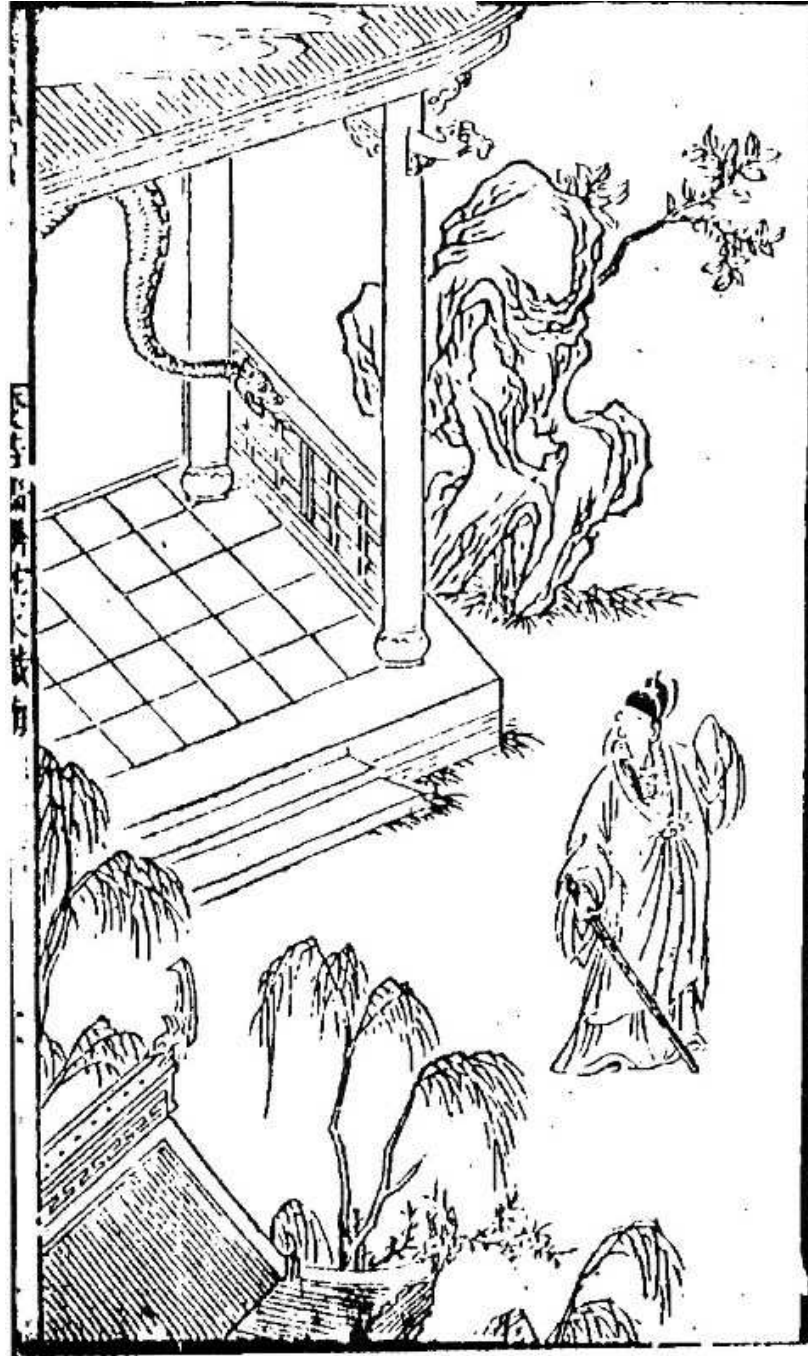
- Liang Wudi and his wife are incarnations of heavenly flowers. They are sincerely in love with each other, but, when confronted with the many beautiful women in the palace of her royal spouse, Chi Hui becomes extremely jealous and eventually tortures and kills concubine Miao by having her shot in the very parts of her body her royal husband fancied.

- She then tries to have the monks breaking their vows by sending them meat dumplings. A single holy monk, however, refuses to break his vows and buries the dumplings : where the dumplings have been buried, garlic sprouts will grow (it is because of this origin that garlic is nowadays a *hun* 葷 aliment).
- Empress Chi has a dream in which she is arrested and tortured by her victim, concubine Miao. An old man comes to help her and she awakes. However, she falls ill and soon dies. She is sent to hell. But the old man, who appears to be the Tudi god, intervenes again: as an heavenly flower, she has to be spared hell's tortures, he argues. The judges of the netherworld comply but decide, as a punishment, to reincarnate her as a huge boa-snake.

- The snake is then sent to a hill whose goddess is none other than concubine Miao, who's buried nearby. Miao begins to torture the wretched snake. The snake then appears to emperor Wudi, and beg him to help save it. The emperor eventually release it by having Baozhi compose and perform the *Liang huang baochan*.







Woodblock
illustrations
from the
original
17th
century
edition

Example of type 1 (2) : Acts *Xishi cu*
“ 希氏醋 ” and *Xishi bian mang* 希氏變
蟒 ” in Gaoqiang Chuanju 川劇高腔
play *Qingyun gong* 慶雲宮.

- The two *gaoqiang* plays from Hunan and Sichuan tell roughly the same story, centered around the jealousy of Chi Hui and her cruel murder of the unlucky concubine Miao. Chuanju *dan* Actor Zhou Mulian tells in his memories how he was taking care of showing a mixture of love and violence while impersonating the jealous empress.



Zhou Mulian 周慕莲
(1900-1961) playing
Empress Chi Hui



Example of type 2 (1) :

« Biographies of the 24 arhats who
found the way »

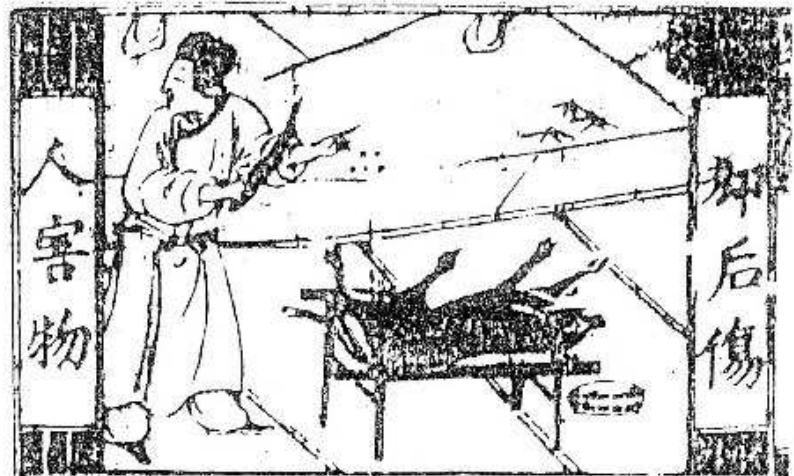
Ershisi zun dedao luohan zhuan

二十四尊得道羅漢傳, 1604

The story of Arhat number 13

- The story of « arhat 13 » in the collection is actually a short vernacular hagiography of Liang Wudi. The episode of the sinful empress and her salvation occupies about one fifth of the narrative. The sins are however different from the versions of the *huaben*, novels and plays: the murders of the concubines are just alluded to: the main sin of the empress is to have animals slaughtered for their meat and to treat disrespectfully the clergy and the holy scriptures.

却后傷



人害物

素肥其不足於口而惟蔬食帝曰朕非欲以
苦節難卿朕欲與卿共成伏果故不置梓童
千度外卿不能勉從朕亦莫之何矣听卿受
用有詩為証

貴為天子賦中邦 淡薄何宜享上方
一統不基辛苦出 受此享用亦何妨

却娘上得了梁皇旨意遂矯詔開軍恣意宰
殺以克飲食又嫉忌妃嬪希旨者則親之違
逆者則啣之六宮妃子受其荼毒不可勝紀
宜司見其在陽世害物傷人全無陰德遂墮

却后歸



旨開筆

規上朕兆求相對 精妙微玄不易言

遼磨北去梁皇亦不知愁留不以遼磨之談
吐為真詮惟以潔淨齋素為作用皇后却氏
不受約束每對梁皇曰陛下貴為天子享方
方貢賦豈袞祖宗遺澤樵風沐雨帶甲披戈
出方千辛苦也受如此勞苦方抚有如此不
基顧口體不能受用此享用雖富貴亦徒也
田舍翁胼手胝足尚欲飽暖其妻子士君子
淬精斫神尚欲榮顯其妻子豈中國人主素
養天下主帛天下顧輕裘不足於體而推布

梁武追



念却后

朝中臣妾多方解 莫得君王轉悶腸
一日帝君寢殿思念皇后忽聞殿外衆声喧
開帝出視之見一蟒蛇盤踞殿下張目向帝
乞食帝驚駭逃遁莫能得徐起謂蟒曰朕宮
殿深嚴非尔類所生之処今盤踞殿下意者
妖孽之為崇耶蟒即為人語以啓帝曰妾前
身即正宮却氏也以生在陽世嫉妬恠害損
物傷人冥司以是加罪故謫為蟒耳今無飲
食以實口無窟穴以安身且鱗甲内多虫蠶
咬肌肉痛苦如刺感 陛下生前眷愛之厚

却后染



病不起

其壽教一日身沾重病藥物莫瘳遂尔告崩
有詩為証

閨閣何宜造惡多 損人害物矣天和
天公不富椒房壽 旦夕奄亡染重病
却皇后性雖忌害其害伶俜畢巧深為梁皇
所鍾愛一旦病天帝深悼之登則忽亡不樂
霄則耿亡不寐一則傷房帷失愛一則傷内
助無人群臣多為劝慰妃嬪多為逢迎莫能
得九重悅豫有詩為証

國母崩摧動帝傷 纒迴机務悉荒涼

梁武為



后作懺

為娘上陳佈情款向伏懺釋帝然其言遂親
抒膺思撰撰諸經灌聖翰撰懺文編成十卷
名曰梁皇水懺為却皇后解釋生前所作種
過惡兼備邊教如法行持礼伏懺什數昼
夜有誥為証

以身為鱗復人唯

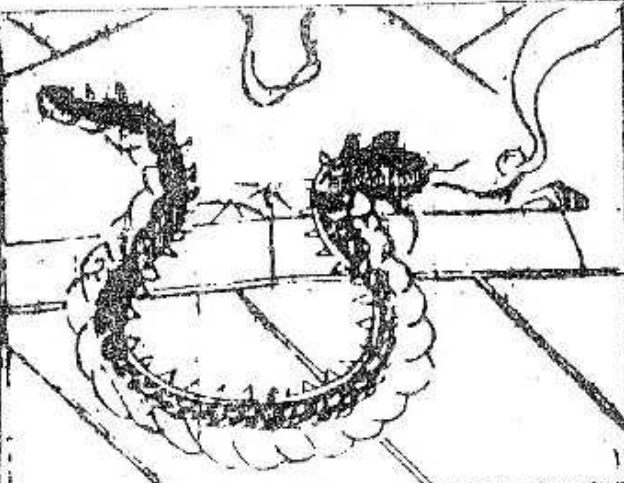
梁武蒐經作懺文

為念椒房情意重

荐起函滯出迴輪

却皇后得宝誌公建了梁皇水懺數昼夜前
愆及行解釋如來普渡除却鱗形復还人世
得轉原習帝一日在宮內飲宴忽聞異香馥

却后誦



降為鱗

故不避醜形陳佈情悃乞求功德為妾拯拔
有詩為証

造惡多端誦鱗身

躡盤殿下訴來因

口無飲食身死穴

鱗甲虫鑽痛不禁

帝聞后言悽愴不止蓋緣差却生前一念毒
害故墜落輪迴有如此朕前造寺寫經尚為
下民廣佈福田况敵体皇后不能拯救其墮
落何以為君遂召集沙門僧眾訪以拯拔輪
迴之故宝誌禪師对曰娘上罪惡過多非礼
伏懺悔不可帝曰用何作為誌公曰須陛下



却后轉

逐人身

郁良久不散帝問妃嬪者從何來妃嬪曰
 然莫知所自帝因仰視空中見一夫人儀容
 端麗遙拜謂帝曰妾即蟠之後身也感陛下
 懺悔功德得世尊拯救沉淪轉還人天世界
 今日呈露本身以為陛下作懺明驗也妾願
 五呂王續修因果早悟真宗獲入靈山之會
 世尊如來為朋侶則妾之仰賴又無期矣言
 訖而去有詩為証

異香馥郁出何方 仰見空中有艷妝
 妾本正宮却氏女 感君拯救上天堂

Example of type 2 (2):

“Precious scroll of Emperor Liang”

Liang huang baojuan / baozhuan 梁皇寶

卷寶 / 傳

synopsys

- Liang Wudi has a terrible nightmare, and asks Baozhi to explain it to him. Baozhi tells him that the nightmare was caused by the emperor debauchery; frightened, Liang converts to buddhism. Baozhi then reveals to him that his wife is the reincarnation of an earthworm killed by a monk. As a result, she hates the clergy.
- Wudi tells the story to his wife. Enraged, she decides to take revenge against Baozhi

- She has dog-meat dumplings sent to Baozhi and his monks. Baozhi hides the dumplings and buries them. But the stench of the decomposing meat invades heaven and hell, causing the anger of the gods. Chi Hui is sent to hell and changed into a huge snake.
- Guanyin gives the snake a holy pill that enables her to keep the capacity of speaking. She appears to her husband who has Baozhi perform the ceremony to release her from her snake body

- Later on the story, when Wudi, besieged, is about to die from hunger, Chi Hui comes to him and gives him the magic pill Guanyin had given her: as a result, she changes again into a snake!
- But the two spouses are saved again by Guanyin. Chi Hui becomes a goddess as the « Stellar lord of the Flying snake »

A more « Madam Liu-like » story

- In those stories, the jealousy theme becomes less important (and even disappears completely from the *baojuan*). The sin of Chi Hui looks very much alike the sin of Madam Liu, the mother of Mulian. Actually, the Mulian cycle sometimes states that she is a previous incarnation of Madam Liu. Actor Zhou Mulian, in his memories, disagrees with his master's master, Liu Sanfeng 刘三凤, who, instead of dressing as an empress to incarnate Chi Hui, « dressed as if he was playing Madam Liu »

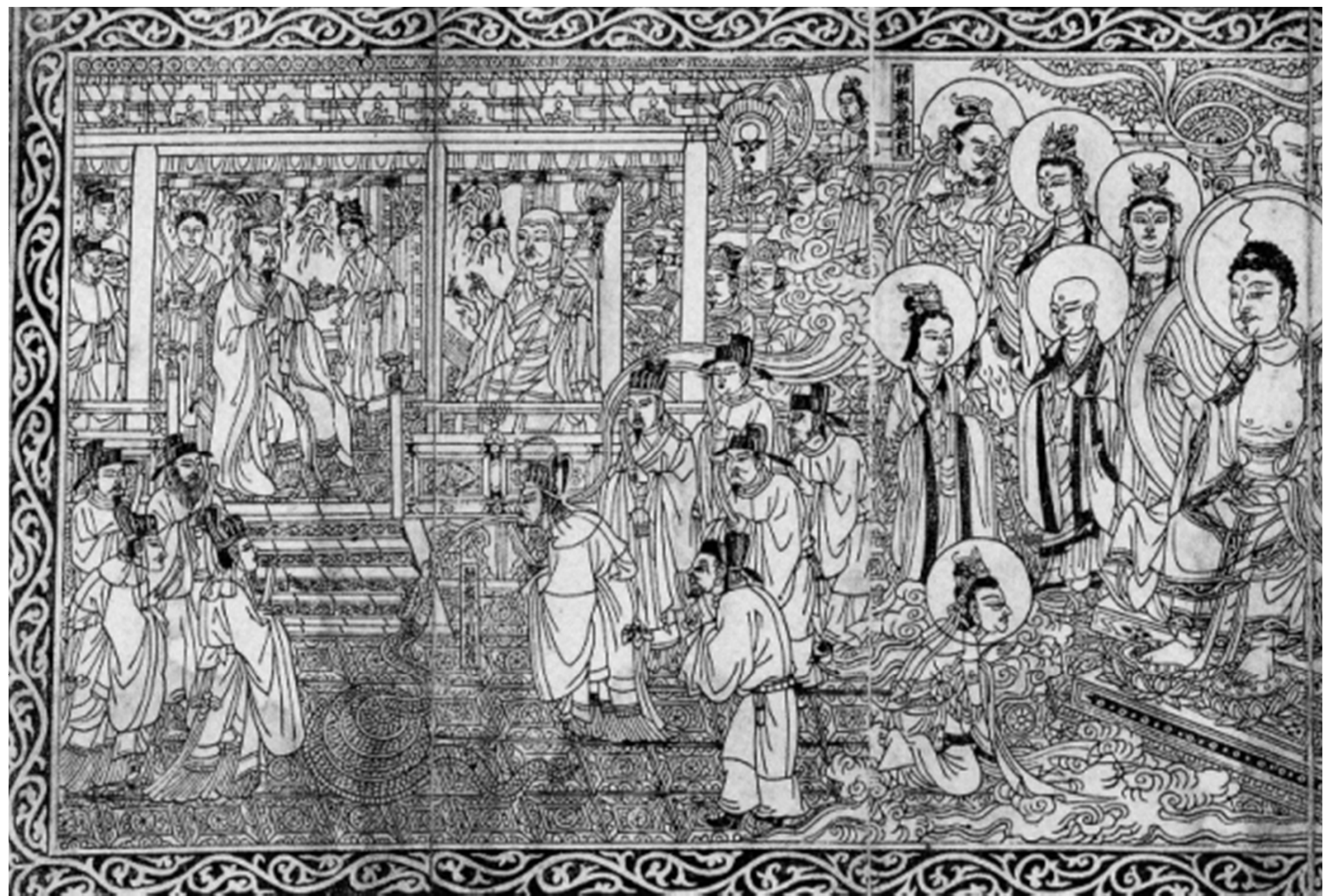
III. The pictorial tradition and the Chi Hui's story in ritual paintings

III. 1 A snake with or without a human head?

- The scene of the snake praying Baozhi and Wudi for salvation appears as early as the early 14th century in sutra frontispieces
- In those illustrations, the empress is not portrayed as a human-head snake, but as a snake. Her humane body is shown separately, on a cloud getting away from the snake



Frontispiece to *Merciful Repentance Ritual* (*Cibei daochang chanzuifa* 慈悲道場懺罪法) Xixia scripture dated 1302, Hangzhou



Frontispiece to *Cibei daochang Lianghuang baochan* 慈悲道場梁
皇寶懺, carved at the Shuimu Temple in Yunnan, 1545, Ming
dynasty.





Zongze's *Shuilu yuanqi* stele inscription, Ming dynasty. Beijing Shoudu
Bowuguan

This way of picturing empress Xi seems extremely rare in the *Fashi's* 'Ten kings' scrolls. Below is the only example I've met yet:

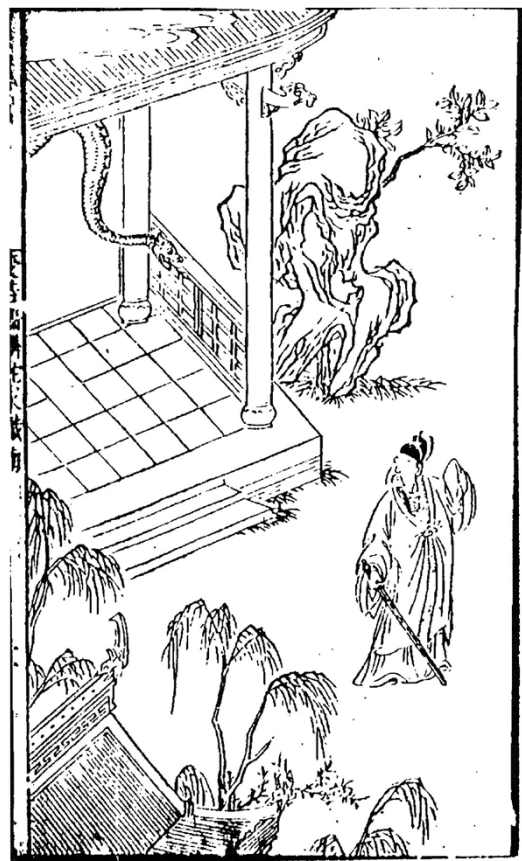
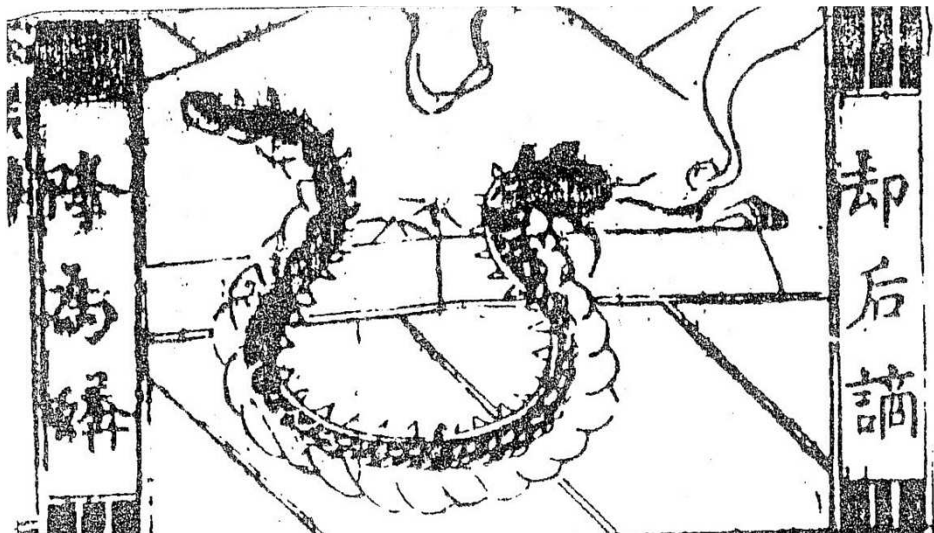
Set of 'Ten Kings' scroll, Sichuan;

Private collection, Changsha





- Similarly, in the in the Ming Qing illustrations for the vernacular novels, the snake is not drawn with a human head.





- In the late imperial Ten kings paintings, however, the unhappy empress is nearly always pictured as a snake with a human head.
- It may be of course a way to sum up more efficiently the story, but there may be also other reasons as well.

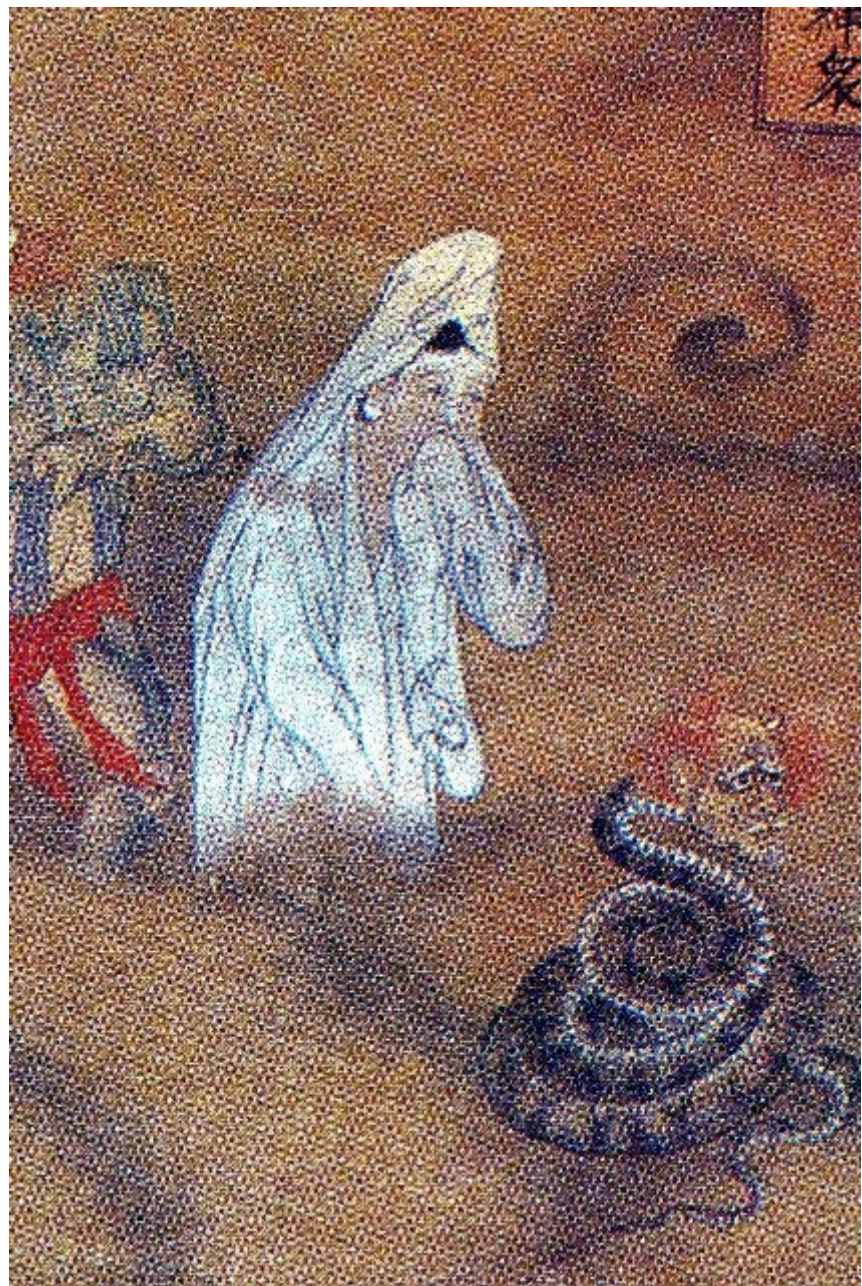
A kind of
Niu gui she shen 牛鬼蛇神?



- Could for example the portrayal of Chi Hui as an human-head snake draw inspiration from other hell-spirits such as those alluded in the old (Tang) expression *niugui sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神 (“Ox demons and snake spirits”) ?
- There are actual figures of Hell-related snakes’ spirits that may have provided a pictorial model for the depiction of the empress.

- In Ming *Shuilu* paintings, for example, one often meets a pair of evil stars, heralding death, called « Gate of funerals and visitor of mourning » (喪門弔客). The latter is depicted as a mourning figure, generally (but not always) a woman, but the other is a snake with a human (most often male) head.
- Those two figures are a sort of predecessors of the Wuchang 無常 spirits, who appear also in late Qing ritual paintings. Could the figure of the snake with the empress head be a voluntary or involuntary reminiscence of a hell-related snake spirit such as Sangmen?





In this perspective, it may be not
unrelevant to recall that, in the *baojuan*,
Chi Hui remains eventually a snake
spirit, being given at the end of the tale
the divine title of Tengshe xingjun
« Star lord Flying snake » 騰蛇星君

Similarly, at the end (act 34) of a Qing dynasty play about the legend of White Snake called *Leifeng ta chuanqi* “雷鋒塔傳奇” by Fang Chengta 方成培, White snake ascends eventually to heaven to become a goddess. She is greeted by an immortal sent to her :

« by decree of Her Majesty Empress Xi/Chi of the Great Liang 奉大梁郗后娘娘懿旨»,

as if Empress Xi/Chi has definitely become a snake-related deity...

A tale of two dragons?



- There is also a striking parallel with the other « cardinal story », the tale of the Jing river Dragon king:
- as Chi Hui is always pictured as a snake with a woman's head, the Dragon king is an exact symmetrical figure: a man's body with a (severed) dragon's head. As the two stories are kind of paired in the Ten kings' scrolls set, one may wonder if there is not a voluntary (?) effect of symmetry between those two « hell dragons » figures.







III. 2 : As there are two types of narratives for the Chi Hui's textual stories, there are two ways of depicting it in Ten King's scrolls:

- One is to draw it as a scene of piety and salvation
- One is to make it as a scene of punishment and ghostly revenge

Most scenes are of the first type:
the snake appears before Baozhi
and Wudi to beg them for
salvation.



Li Yuanguo's
李遠國
collection



Li Yuanguo's 李遠國 collection



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The scene of the snake's prayer is so widespread that it may be drawn in a very allusive way:



Li Yuanguo's 李遠國 collection







Li Yuanguo's
李遠國
collection

But other scenes, directly taken from the theater, stress the ghostly revenge dimension of the story, showing concubines Miao and Jin asking for justice...



Li Yuanguo's 李遠國 collection

Another example of this rarer type is not from a scroll, but from a group of clay statues in the Ten Kings hall of the Chenghuang temple 城隍 of Pengxi 蓬溪 (north of central Sichuan)

In the Ten Kings hall of the Chenghuang temple 城隍 of Pengxi 蓬溪 (north of central Sichuan), there used to be in the front of the Ten Kings clay statues depicting well-known Chuanju scenes. In front of the lord of the 9th court, of Dushi Wang, there was a scene taken from *Xishi bianmang*: one may see at the centre Baozhi, having thrown a bowlful of magic water at Chi Hui, which has changed her into a human head snake, who weeps bitterly. At one side, Liang Wudi in horror cover his face with his sleeve. The two slained concubines, Jin and Miao, are trying to attack the snake from the other side, but Baozhi, smiling, prevent them to do so, stretching his sleeve towards them.

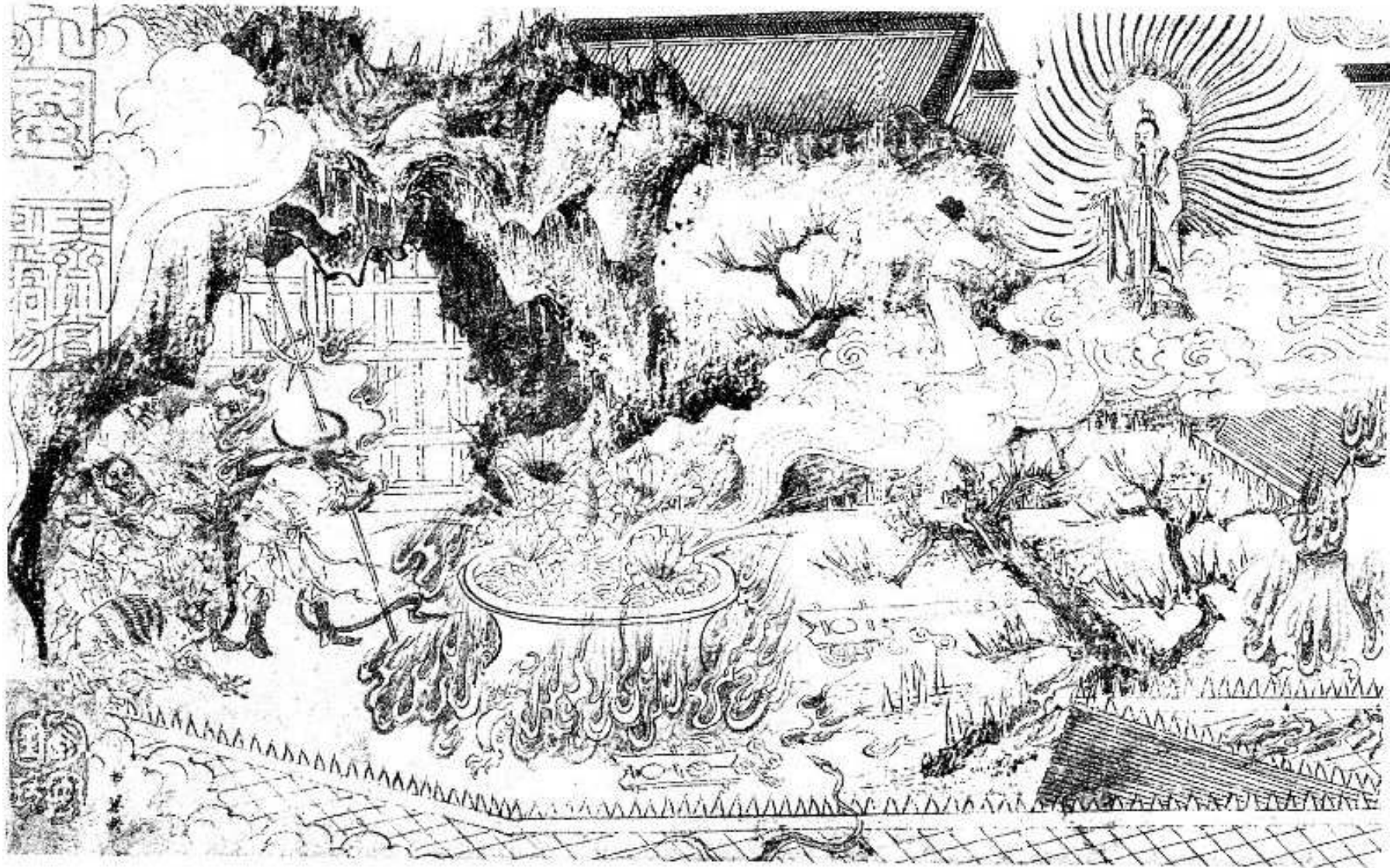
III. 3

How is the story of Chi Hui situated within the 'Ten kings' scrolls set?

- The story of the Dragon of the Jing river takes place very often (though not always) in Yama's court, the 5th one. It may be a hierarchical logic: the emperor of China faces the emperor of Hell.
- The story of Chi Hui may appear in many different courts (3, 5, 6, 9th...). It seems to appear in one or another court rather at random.

- But it does not mean that the surroundings of the Chi Hui's picture are meaningless.
- Actually, if we look at the Hell's scenes accompanying Chi Hui's story, one may remark that it is often linked with scenes alluding to the salute of the dead.

- For example it may be associated with a scene showing Guanyin or Jiuku tianzun pouring sweet dew in a hell's boiling cauldron with the purpose of turning it into a lotus pond, thus saving the unhappy tortured dead. One may mention that Chi Hui is shown spared in the same way both in the *Xilai yanyi* novel and the Gaoqiang plays.
- This scene is an old pictorial topos, appearing in Taoist painting as early as the Song dynasty, in a painting attributed to Liang Kai



Painting by Liang Kai showing Jiuku tianzun saving a suffering soul from Hell by making a lotus flower rise from the boiling cauldron



Li Yuanguo's 李遠
國collection

A similar scene
in a scroll of Li
Yuanguo's
collection, with
the *Xishi*
bianmang's
scene just in
between

Other salvation scenes accompanying Chi Hui's picture show the dead soul being pardoned for having copied or produced holy scriptures.

Here again, one may remark that Chi Hui's story, whose apparition to Wudi made him order Baozhi to compose the *Liang huang baochan*, is also a scene of salvation through the creation of a holy text.



Li Yuanguo's 李遠國 collection

Lastly, let's go back to the theater:

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- As the dragon king's story, or the Qin Hui/Yue Fei story, the *Liang zhuàn* play about Wudi and Chi Hui are parts of the « extended Mulian » (*Hua Mulian*) that may be played for the salute of the living and dead. But, unlike the other story, it is placed through a reincarnation device within the Mulian cycle: Chi Hui is the previous incarnation of Madam Liu, Mulian's mother; Wudi being a previous incarnation of his father Fu Xiang. After Playing « Xi shi bian mang », the paper or cloth snake called « Xishi banner » 郗氏幡 used to represent the snake used to be hung above the stage and remained there until the end of the whole Mulian cycle. Then it was burned, when Madame Liu's soul and the other suffering ghosts were also released.

Hence the importance and logical appearance of
the snake lady in ten king's scroll

- It is at the source of important salvation rituals, and the production of an important scripture
- It may be also used to turn the frightening appearance of a hell's snake-god into a salvation tale; it may be a way to conjure two « dragon-like » figures into Hell's pictures.
- It is also a « qian Mulian » a 'Mulian before Mulian' story associated with the performance of the essential Mulian play during the rites for the dead

谢谢!

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(Please see also bibliography below)

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