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A Description of *Jiangjing* (Telling Scriptures) Services in Jingjiang, China

Abstract

Jiangjing (telling scriptures) is a local style of oral prosimetric narrative performed in ritual contexts in the area of Jingjiang on the north bank of the Yangzi River in Jiangsu Province, China. The style is a local expression of a once popular form of oral narrative known as *baojuan* ("precious scrolls" or "precious volumes") that traditionally had associations with popular Buddhism and other beliefs. *Jiangjing* performances are recognized locally as having secular and sacred story repertoires, performed by semi-professional storytellers at nighttime and daytime services, respectively. The storyteller is accompanied by a chorus of village elders who chime in at appropriate points in the narration, a situation that raises interesting questions of performer/audience dynamics. This article includes a brief overview of *jiangjing*'s history, its process of performance, a description of a child-protection ritual held in concert with a storytelling session, and a translation of a sample text of *jiangjing*.

Keywords: prosimetric—*baojuan*—*jiangjing*—children's rituals—oral performance

JINGJIANG *JIANJING* 靖江講經 (Jingjiang “telling scriptures”) is a storytelling tradition performed in the rural areas of Jingjiang County 靖江, Jiangsu 江蘇 Province, China (CHE 1988, 165; DUAN, WU, MOU, 1991).¹ In a typical *jiangjing* performance, a storyteller sits at a table behind a small folding screen painted with images of deities (see figures 1 and 2), and narrates stories in a mixture of specialized speaking and singing registers. Typically he is surrounded by dozens of villagers, some of whom act as a chorus, periodically chiming in with refrains invoking the Amitabha Buddha. Stories told at night, though framed in a sacred context by religious activities and paraphernalia, are of a secular nature, while those told during the day (to audiences largely comprised of women) are often held in conjunction with life-cycle and community-protection rituals. The storytelling events are associated with a body of popular belief that includes elements of Buddhism, Daoism, LuoJiao 羅教, and the reverencing of local and clan spirits. Both the nighttime and daytime events are known as *zuohui* 座會, or “services.”

Although confined to a small geographical area, *jiangjing* is one of the few viable vestiges of a formerly widespread tradition of orally performed narratives and a related corpus of texts called *baojuan* 寶卷 (HU 1957; LI 1961; SAWADA 1975; CHE 1998; OVERMYER 1999).² The term has often been rendered as “precious scrolls,” though OVERMYER (1999, 3) prefers “precious volumes,” as none of the extant texts are in actual scroll form. According to David JOHNSON, few detailed accounts of live *baojuan* performances have been recorded (1995, 58).

The present paper is written to contribute to the understanding of *baojuan* performances in local contexts. It is based on (and limited to) a short fieldwork experience in March 1992, arranged by Professor Che Xilun 車錫倫 of Yangzhou Teacher’s College, and local researchers (including Wu Genyuan 吳根元), of the Jingjiang Cultural Bureau. Divided into three parts and an appendix, this paper describes various aspects of two different *jiangjing* services: one secular and one sacred. Part I offers a short history of

the tradition and suggests parallels with other contemporary regional styles of oral narrative. Part II briefly introduces the present context of *jiangjing* performances, and outlines the process and patterning of a nighttime storytelling service (BAUMAN 1977, 11; BAUMAN 1986, 3–4; FINE 1984, 57–68). The roles and levels of engagement of the storyteller, chorus, and audience in the performance event are outlined and discussed. Part III describes a child-protection ritual held in conjunction with a daytime *jiangjing* service. Parts II and III also include short discussions of issues of audience engagement and performance manipulation that supplement the more general ethnographic description. The appendix gives a translation of a section of a major *jiangjing* story collected and edited by local researchers in Jingjiang. One of the most popular *jiangjing* stories today, it concerns a local deity called Zhang Dasheng 張大聖 (Zhang the Great Spirit) and his quest for spiritual discipline. The selection is offered as an example of a current performance-related text in the *jiangjing* tradition.

PART I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND RELATED TRADITIONS

Jiangjing is part of a vast web of Chinese prosimetric narrative traditions that stretches back to at least the *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) of the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) (MAIR 1989; MAIR 1997, 367–78; JOHNSON 1995, 89–101; OVERMYER 1999, 4–5). The widespread *baojuan* (precious scrolls) tradition, of which *jiangjing* is a local expression, dates to sometime in the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271–1368). It flourished in many forms and in many locales over the succeeding centuries, and was still common in early twentieth-century China (ZHENG 1938; DUDBRIDGE 1978; OVERMYER 1976, 179–86; 1985, 219–22; NAQUIN 1985, 267; SHEK 1982, 311–18; JOHNSON 1995, 55–58; XUE 2000). According to CHE Xilun, the *baojuan* tradition seems to have entered the Jiangsu region from the north by the time of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644) and became widespread during the Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911) (1988, 166–67). CHE also estimates that about 2,000 volumes of *baojuan* from the Wu 吳 dialect areas of Jiangsu Province, dating mostly from the Qing and early twentieth century, exist in a number of collections in China (1990, 13–14). No records exist of the early phase of introduction of what is now called *jiangjing* into the Jingjiang area, though one unsupported local legend claims that the tradition was brought to the area from the north by the patriotic Song dynasty general Yue Fei 岳飛 on a brief visit in the early twelfth century (CHE 1988, 166–67).

More evidence supports the claim by local scholars that a shaping factor in the *jiangjing* tradition was the rise of the Luo-jiao (Lo-chiao) belief system. Luo-jiao was a popular syncretic sect (HARRELL and PERRY 1982) intimately associated with the *baojuan* tradition (OVERMYER 1985, 220–21; JOHNSON

1995, 56–57; OVERMYER 1999, 92–135).² The sect flourished in the late Ming and early Qing but was later repressed by the Manchu government (OVERMYER 1985, 227). CHE (1988, 167–68) suggests this repression may have contributed to the separation of the “sacred” *dacheng* 大乘 (large tradition) and “secular” *xiaocheng* 小乘 (small tradition) stories in the *jiangjing* repertoire.³ The sacred stories are also known as *shengjuan* 聖卷 (sacred scrolls), while the secular stories are also known as *xiaojuan* 小卷 (small scrolls), or *caojuan* 草卷 (grass scrolls) (CHE 1988, 184).

Since the end of the nineteenth century, other regional storytelling arts have influenced the *jiangjing* tradition. Che Xilun believes the primary influences since the turn of the century have come from regional styles of professional secular storytelling, most prominently Yangzhou *pinghua* 揚州評話 (BØRDAHL 1996 and 1999) and Suzhou *pinghua* 蘇州評話 (BLADER 1983). Both these styles feature a single storyteller seated at a table who performs without musical instruments, telling exciting tales of heroes and adventure. Other likely influences are the regional styles of chantefable (TSAO 1988; HODES 1991; BENDER 1998), which include Suzhou *tanci* 蘇州彈詞 and Yangzhou *xianci* 揚州弦詞 (also called Yangzhou *tanci* 揚州彈詞) (see Figure 8). These styles today often feature pairs of storytellers who specialize in telling lengthy love stories that incorporate prominent singing roles accompanied by stringed instruments. Taken together, the *pinghua* and *tanci* traditions of Suzhou and Yangzhou are known by the cognate, *pingtan* 評彈 (WU, et al. 1996, 1). Similarities with the *jiangjing* performances are most apparent in basic forms and uses of specialized registers of narration and dialogue, the enacting of character roles, the use of exciting paralinguistic sounds, and, to a limited degree, gestures and facial expressions (CHE 1988, 177). A number of the famous *pingtan* stories (from the chantefable side of the tradition) such as *Zhenzhu ta* 珍珠塔 (Pearl Pagoda) and *Yu qingting* 玉蜻蜓 (Jade Dragonfly) are also part of the secular repertoire in the *jiangjing* tradition.

Despite certain basic similarities, as a whole, a *jiangjing* performance is very different from performances in the *pingtan* traditions. Aside from major differences in dialect, execution, and aesthetics, the *pingtan* professional storytelling traditions are not framed in religious contexts. Today they are held in special “story houses” (*shuchang* 書場) or public auditoriums, and have a different audience-performer dynamic. Compared to the lively *pingtan* performers, the *jiangjing* storytellers basically sit and tell; they seldom stand and employ very few gestures. In this sense, certain aspects of *jiangjing* may be more like the *pingtan* arts of a hundred years ago, before being heavily influenced by Chinese opera, Western dramatic traditions, and film. Moreover, *pingtan* audiences participate as passive listeners; there is no equivalent to the dual

performer/audience role of the chorus as is found in the *jiangjing* tradition.

PART II. THE NIGHTTIME SERVICE

Community and Material Contexts

This section describes a nighttime “secular” *jiangjing* service that was held in a private home.¹ The large brick farmhouse was located in a small hamlet surrounded by dormant plots of rice and vegetables about fifteen minutes by minivan from downtown Jingjiang, the county capital. The performance was a “household meeting” (*jiahui* 家會) or “private performance” (*sihui* 私會). These household gatherings differ from “public meetings” (*gonghui* 公會), held at the village level, or “temple meetings” (*miaohui* 廟會) traditionally held at temples, often in conjunction with festivals (CHE 1988, 171). A performance meeting may also be identified by the name of the story being told. For instance, if *San Mao jing* 三茅經 (Scripture of San Mao) concerning the tribulations of a faithful, legendary devotee, or *Dasheng jing* 大聖經 (Scripture of the Great Spirit) about another legendary devotee who becomes a local god, are being told, the meetings are called *San Mao hui* 三茅會 and *Dasheng hui* 大聖會, respectively. Most services are held between the Spring Festival and spring planting, in February and March.

The nighttime service was held in a large hall in the middle of the two-story home of the Yin 尹 family. The meeting was meant to honor Grandmother Yin, who lived with her son’s family. She had just reached eighty years of age. To celebrate this happy event, a type of ritual specialist/storyteller called a *photou* 佛頭 (Buddha head) had been invited to perform. The *photou*, a man in his mid-forties named Lu Aihua 陸愛華, was accompanied by an assistant specialist (*keshi* 客師), and three apprentices. Mr. Lu was one of several dozen *photou* said to be active at the time of my visit. All were male, with the exception of one young woman. Would-be storytellers apprentice for two to three years after a ceremonial banquet in which the teacher-student relation is formally established. While a *photou* may receive an average payment of about 60 yuan 元 a night (plus ten or twenty yuan in tips), and an assistant specialist about 18 yuan, apprentices receive only three or four yuan at best for helping with the performances. (In 1992, some very rich families sometimes provided up to 800 yuan for a more elaborate two-day performance.) Teaching is done by observation of performances (CHE 1988, 170). In some cases written aides are used (and possibly tape-recorders), though such teaching aides are never displayed during performances. At times during lengthy night performances, the apprentices take over the performance while the *photou* rests in another room.

During the storytelling event, Mr. Lu was seated at two square tables set side by side. He sat facing the rear of the hall, his back to the door. The

FIGURE 1. Lu Aihua, a *fotou*, at a nighttime *jiangjing* service. Notice the drinking container in his hand, which he is about to sip as the chorus chimes in.



FIGURE 2. Lu Aihua performing *jiangjing*. Note the bell, “wooden-fish” rhythm block, and the folding screen pictures of various deities on the performance table. The chorus surrounds him, each member with his or her own mug of tea.

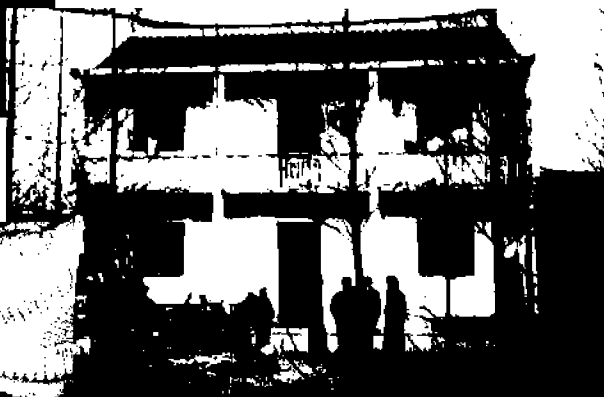


FIGURE 3. The home of the Yuan family, site of the daytime *jiangjing* service.



FIGURE 4. A guest assistant and chorus members preparing for the daytime *jiangjing* service. This table was later used for the story telling activities.

FIGURE 5. The altar in the Yuan home with pictures of the gods representing (left to right) bounty, success, and long life.



FIGURE 6. The guest assistant placing the "paper horses" on the altar.



FIGURE 7. Yuan Li "crossing the barriers" in the ritual aspect of the *jiangjing* meeting.



FIGURE 8. Yangzhou *tanci* performer Li Renzhen 季仁珍 in a small story house in Yangzhou performing the story *Luo jin shan* 落金扇 (Dropping the Gold Fan). Note the *pipa*-lute lying on the storytelling table. Although at this moment she is standing and gesturing, she sits during most of the performance.

directions in which the storytelling table or tables are placed vary with event and location. For secular tales the table (or tables) is often set to either the east or west side of the hall, the *photou*'s back to one wall, surrounded on three sides by the chorus. For stories linked to rituals, the *photou* commonly faces north, though sometimes he faces south, depending on the local custom (CHE 1988, 173).

The family altar, made of brick, was on the wall opposite from where Mr. Lu was sitting. Above the altar was a large painting of Daoist immortals and Buddhist deities made on white paper. On the altar itself was a row of thin white paper cones with painted faces and robes. These items, though in no way resembling any sort of animal, are known as “paper horses” (*zhima* 紙馬) and represent various gods and spirits—collectively termed *pusa* 菩薩 (bodhisattva) (XU 1989, 158–166) (see Figure 6). Of the 108 gods that appear in the *jiangjing* tradition, typically 29 will be represented by paper horses. These include the Sakyamuni Buddha 釋迦牟尼, Amitabha Buddha 阿彌陀佛, the Goddess of Mercy, Avalokitesvara (Guan Yin 觀音), Manjusri (Wenshu 文殊), the bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Puxian 普賢), San Mao 三茅 (Three Mao Brothers), San Guan 三官 (Three Primordial Rulers), Lei Zu 雷祖 (Thunder God), Door Gods (*menshen* 門神), God of Wealth (Cai shen 財神), Earth God (*tudi gong* 土地工), etc. At ceremonial times, paper horses are a common feature in the local homes. These and other ritual paraphernalia of paper are made before the beginning of a performance and ceremoniously burned afterwards.

The table at which the *photou* sat was equipped with a small folding screen, a censer, food trays, and a pair of red candles. The inner side of the screen, facing the *photou*, had pictures of Buddhist and Daoist deities. On the outer side, facing the altar, were poetic couplets proclaiming the presence of various gods. On the outer side, a single paper horse lay propped up in the center of the table. Its base was nestled between two square trays, one filled with unshelled peanuts, and the other with snack-like foods made of baked dough. The candles, which were about twenty inches in length and tapered from top to bottom, stood in a metal rack that was placed a few inches from the end of the trays towards the middle of the table.

In the space between the screen and the storyteller's body were the items used in the storytelling performance. Under the fingers of his right hand was a storyteller's “awakening block” (*xingmu* 醒木), used to punctuate actions in the story with sharp raps on the table. The block was about an inch by four inches in size. The *photou* held the block between his second and fourth fingers, with his middle finger on top. This is the standard way the block is held among the *pingtan* storytellers of Yangzhou and Suzhou, though the block may be much smaller (BENDER 1996, 29). Locally, the

block is called a “Buddha measuring stick” (*fochi* 佛尺) (CHE 1988, 179).

Near Mr. Lu’s right hand was a brass bell with three prongs on the end of the handle, typical of those used in many sorts of religious rituals throughout China. To his left was a *muyu* 木魚 (wooden fish)—a carved wooden percussion instrument commonly used in Buddhist ceremonies—and a wooden striker. These items are used during the invocation of the spirits and during high points in the action of the story. Directly in front of Mr. Lu was a tea mug, sitting on a folded white handkerchief. These items allow the storyteller to discretely sip water or tea during performances and wipe his brow if sweating. Unlike the *pingtan* tradition, the equipment did not include a folding fan, which is used to represent swords, letters, umbrellas, etc., and which doubles as an awakening block.

Due to the presence of our group, a larger than normal crowd (with, I was told, an unusual number of young people) was assembled inside, overflowing into the courtyard. Altogether, there were upwards of eighty people in attendance, though there was much coming and going. Only about forty people were actually viewing the performance at any given moment.

Pattern of Performance

Performances of both the secular and sacred types of *jiangjing* follow a general pattern. The meeting begins with a special prefatory, followed by an invitation to each god to attend, which is sung by a *fotou* or the assistant (*keshi*). At this time, the corresponding paper horses are placed on the altar (CHE 1988, 172–73). Then, the clan ancestral spirits of the host family are summoned. A typical invocation (there are many variations) to the gods begins: “Three sticks of incense / set on the altar table / together attend the service / to celebrate a birthday” (*san zhu xiang, she hui chang, tong fu hui, ci shou ting* 三柱香, 設會場, 同赴會, 賜壽庭).

Once audience members from all realms, including the human, are deemed present, the performance of *jiangjing* begins. In the sacred type, it may be performed in conjunction with various rituals, as is described in Part III.

On the night of our visit, Mr. Lu told a story about an official in the Song dynasty entitled *Hu Yanqing da lei tai* 呼延慶打擂臺 (Hu Yanqing Takes Up the Challenge). As is the norm at the beginning of a secular tale, the *fotou* raps the table four times with the awakening block to alert the gods and the human audience members that the story is about to begin. (This may be necessary due to the comparatively large audiences for the secular tales.)

Seated around the table were several dozen older men. Behind them were clusters of older women, and farther back were groups of people of various

ages, both standing and sitting, including children. Only the elderly men seated around the table and on benches directly surrounding it participated in the chorus, a unique feature of *jiangjing* performances discussed below. The other people in the audience exhibited varying degrees of attention, not unlike the situation in story houses for Yangzhou and Suzhou *pingtan* performances (although typically all audience members in such contexts have seats).

Mr. Lu began the story with a prelude in song, using one of several set tunes. Then began a process that lasted throughout the performance. This was the shifting (BENDER 1999, 182–83) between what FOLEY (1995, 28) has termed the “dedicated” (specialized) registers of sung and spoken narration, the dialogue of various characters, and the responses of the chorus.

As noted, except the singing roles of the chorus, the basic divisions of the speaking registers of performance were similar to those of Yangzhou and Suzhou professional storytelling. These divisions, which are identified by differing terminology depending on tradition, include the Mandarin-based dialect used for the voices of elite characters. That register is known as *zhongzhouyun* 中州韵 and is similar to that used in the speaking roles of elite characters in the regional operatic form known as *kunqu* 昆曲. Like the *pingtan* traditions, a special performance register is used in the narration and some singing and dialogue roles of *jiangjing*. More conservative than the contemporary Jingjiang vernacular, it employs many “old fashioned” words and expressions, as well as quasi-literary borrowings from classical Chinese. The *fotou* also employed many paralinguistic sounds, such as strange laughs and exclamations in the performance. However, unlike those frenetically lively *pingtan* performers, Mr. Lu employed almost no gestures. Characters were sometimes differentiated by shifting the head to one side when assuming a new speaking role as well as by using shifts in voice quality and language register, which sometimes included the use of other regional dialects.

At one point the host called for a break and our party and several other guests were invited upstairs. After the *fotou* had rested for nearly an hour, he began the story again. According to Professor Che, at the end of a performance (which in this case I did not witness) a special “tea serving” song is normally performed to send off the spirits.

Focus and Manipulation

In his study of story listeners, STURM (1999, 563) has provided evidence that the storytelling context is a trance-inducing structure in which audiences, under the guidance of the storyteller, focus in an altered state of consciousness on the flow of the story. This response may be described as the “story trance” or a special kind of arousal that develops in the course of listening to

stories. While the conscious mind may respond primarily to the story in creation, the performance as a whole is engaged subconsciously in a variety of more deeply somatic ways (SCHECHNER 1990, 38–39; CLYNES 1979, 388).

In *jiangjing* events a number of “means of communication” (BAUMAN 1977, 10) that may induce the “story trance” seem to combine in performance. These include the rhythmic tapping of the *muyu* (wooden fish) and the ringing of the brass bell during the invocation; the cadence of the storyteller’s voice; the cyclic chiming of the chorus; the occasional rap of the storyteller’s wooden block; and the presence of the ritual paraphernalia. This mix of aural and visual means provides a field of stimuli available for the creation of certain types of focused response. (Unlike the visual feasts of traditional Chinese drama, however, many of the optical stimuli in *jiangjing*—such as the candles and deity images—do not directly relate to the story.) Participants in the events I observed seemed to have individual responses to the event, though the nature of focus expressed itself in different ways and at different levels and intensities. The varying levels of attention may have been due to the distractions of people coming and going, the foreign guests, and other personal factors such as interest and the degree to which each person could “get into” the flow of the story.

Some Chinese storytellers seem to be highly conscious of these focusing dynamics. Professional *pingtan* storytellers in Suzhou have told me of their ability to gain and manipulate audience attention by a variety of strategies. These range from effectively walking onto stage, sitting properly, skillfully modulating the voice, and aptly using the awakening block and fans. Other strategies include using comments to “jump in and out” of the main story, inserting anecdotes, employing humor, showing virtuosity in singing and musicality, and enhancing the action with stylized gestures and unusual sounds. They also have strategies for re-gathering audience attention in the face of distractions or mistakes. Although I did not pursue the topic of manipulation with the *Jingjiang* storytellers, it was evident that they employed time tested means for bringing participants into the flow of the event and manipulating themselves, and thus the performance, for the desired effect on the audience. In many cases, the singing roles, or the speeches just before or after the singing, summarize and clarify developments in the story, foretell events to come, introduce new characters, and shift audience attention from scene to scene. Like the *pingtan* storytellers, the *jiangjing* performers also pose and answer rhetorical questions to direct the narration forward or explain how past events resulted in a present situation.

Positioning the Chorus

The chorus (*hehe* 和合, or *hefo* 和佛) seemed to hold a position somewhere

between that of the passive audience members (the majority present) and that of the storytellers. Shifting between roles as listeners and active participants, the chorus provided repetitive waves of audible input and feedback throughout the event. This response may have helped the audience to key into the performance and provided encouragement and brief moments of relief for the storyteller. Sometimes as the chorus sang, the *fotou* sipped a mouthful of tea (some *fotou* even light water pipes), gaining brief respite from the narration. Thus, in many ways, it was obvious that the chorus was involved in the co-creation of the story in a dynamic that, as SCHECHNER (1990, 41–42) has suggested, necessitates the participation and arousal of both performer and audience.

In practice, the chorus is cued by certain conventionalized shifts from speaking to singing on the part of the *fotou*. Concentration and familiarity with the nuances of the genre are necessary for the chorus to follow the storyteller's cues.⁵ The *fotou* sings one, two, or more lines, depending on the tune type and his rhetorical needs.

In the case of the pervasive “Even tune” (*Ping diao* 平調), the chorus is cued by a shift in the storyteller's voice at the end of the last line he sings. The chorus picks up the last word, chiming in and adding one of several variations on the phrase *na mo a mi tuo fo* 那摩阿彌陀佛 (which has the approximate meaning “adoration to the Amitabha Buddha”). For instance, in this line from *Dasheng jing*, the singing of the *fotou* shifts to that of the chorus on the word “earth” (literally, “female principle”):

A civil official holds a brush to pacify all under heaven;
a general drags a sword to rule heaven and [*fotou* and chorus] earth
[chorus] *na mo a mi tuo fo*.

<i>Wenguan zhi bi an tianxia;</i>	文官執筆安天下
<i>wujiang tuodao zhi qian</i> [<i>fotou</i> and chorus] <i>kun</i>	武將拖刀治乾坤
[chorus] <i>na mo fo a mi tuo fo</i>	那摩佛阿彌陀佛

In some instances, other refrains may also be used, some with Buddhist elements, some without. An example of the latter is this: “In spring, plum blossoms; in summer, lotus blossoms; in fall, crab apples; in winter ‘snow flowers’” (*chun meihua, xia hehua, qiu Haitang, dong xuehua* 春梅花, 夏荷花, 秋海棠, 冬雪花) (DUAN, WU, MOU, 1991, 79). (The “snow flowers” refer to “snow flakes” in English.) The repertoire of choral responses (which may be quite extensive) seems to constitute a body of knowledge auxiliary to the *jiangjing* stories.

The other major *jiangjing* tunes (which like the *Ping diao* have many variations) are *Gua jin suo diao* 挂金鎖調 (Wearing the Golden Lock Tune),

once a common *baojuan* tune that may have originated in the early fifteenth century (OVERMYER 1999, 293), and *Shizi diao* 十字調 (Ten-Character Tune) (CHE 1988, 177–79). The *Ping diao* is the most commonly used tune, having two major variations. It is often used with short passages of singing. The *Shizi diao* is used for some passages with ten, rather than the more common seven characters, per line. *Gua jin suo* is often sung in combination with the bell and *muyu* during exciting parts of the story (CHE 1988, 179).

The chorus participants were certainly local “referents” (FOLEY 1991, 36–37; 1995, 5–7) of the *jiangjing* tradition in that they embodied the sum of local knowledge about the tradition. Their presence and display of traditional knowledge was an important part of the effect of the performance on the community, though one can only guess in what variety of ways (MILLS 1991, 1–2). Further research into local meanings of the chorus and their repertoire of choral responses and other knowledge is certainly needed.

While it seemed that most audience members could follow the narration, there may have been varying levels of competence in understanding the performance as a whole. As in Suzhou and Yangzhou storytelling, the younger generations may have had difficulty comprehending the more conservative speech registers. Moreover, it seems in some instances that mainly the chorus and storyteller are involved, as the event the next day had far fewer onlookers.

PART III. THE DAYTIME SERVICE: STORYTELLING AND RITUAL

This section describes a “sacred” daytime service that includes storytelling sessions and a life-cycle ritual. As in the nighttime events, the daytime services begin with a prefatory in which both the ritual specialist and the assembled participants chant an opening scripture (CHE 1988, 172–73). Then follows the official invitation of the gods, chanted by the *foto* or a guest ritual assistant, who in the past was often a Daoist priest. The performer sits at the storytelling table ringing the bell and rapping on the *muyu*. The chorus chimes in when appropriate. After the invocation, a vegetarian meal may be served or the storytelling may begin immediately, which is then followed at some point by a life-cycle or community-protection ritual. A common ritual is *po xue hu* 破血湖 or “breaking the bloody lake,” sponsored by children to relieve their mother of the fate of drowning in impure blood after death. It is associated with the story of *Mulian jiu mu juan* 目連救母卷 (Mulian Saves His Mother Scripture), a popular tale in the *baojuan* repertoire (JOHNSON 1995, 55–56). Another is the *bai dou* 拜鬥 or “worshipping the Big Dipper,” a Daoist ritual held to ward off community disaster. The particular ritual may be followed by more storytelling. At last is the send-off of the assembled gods and clan spirits.

The next morning, our group visited a home in the nearby village of Jishizhen 季市鎮 to observe a daytime *jiangjing* service. The service included storytelling sessions before and after a *duguan* 渡關 or “crossing the barriers” ceremony held for a two-year-old girl, sponsored by her parents (CHE 1988, 174).

The term *guanzi* 關子 (literally “barriers”) refers to crises that may occur at various stages in one’s life. Times of especial danger have traditionally been birth, early childhood, childbirth (for women), transition to middle age, and old age. Indeed, many of the traditional rituals that surrounded the life-cycle events (birth, childhood, marriage, and childbirth), were performed in an attempt to gain control over these difficult crises, which, if not passed through, may result in accidents, disaster, or death.

Early childhood has long been a focus of extensive ritual behavior designed to protect the child from harm, beginning before birth and lasting into early adulthood. The French missionary Henri Doré, who lived for over twenty years in Jiangsu and Anhui 安徽 provinces, reported in the early twentieth century that rituals of “crossing the barriers” (*duguan*) performed for young children included frightful catalogues of the imagined barriers to be crossed (DORÉ 1966, 26–27). These difficult passages reflected the local view that stressed that children must be protected from harmful forces, many associated with malevolent ghosts and spirits.

Doré’s list of thirty barriers (only partially presented here, along with the original English translations) includes the following: the barrier of the demon of the four seasons (*siji guan sha* 四季關煞); the barrier of the four pillars (holding up the sky) (*sizhu guan* 四柱關); barrier of the demon Niu-wang, the Cow-king (*niu wang guan sha* 牛王關煞); the so-called “devil’s gate” (*guimen guan sha* 鬼門關煞); the barrier where life is exposed (*zhuang ming guan* 撞命關); the barrier of the golden hen falling into a well (*jin ji luo jing guan* 金鷄落井關); the barrier of the “private parts” (*xia qing guan* 卜情關); the barrier of the hundred days (*bai ri guan* 百日關); the barrier of the iron snake (*tie she guan* 鐵蛇關); the barrier of the bathing tub (*yupen guan* 浴盆關); the barrier of the heavenly dog (*tian gou guan* 天狗關); the barrier of the lock and key (*kai guan suo guan* 開關鎖關); the barrier where bowels are sundered (*duan chang guan* 斷腸關); the barrier of nocturnal weeping (*ye ti guan* 夜啼關); the barrier of burning broth (*tang huo guan* 湯火關); the barrier of deep-running waters (*shen shui guan* 深水關); and the barrier of water and fire (*shui huo guan* 水火關) (DORÉ 1966, 27).

These barriers appear monthly or yearly as the child matures, special barriers marking the hundredth and thousandth days of life and continuing up to age 15 or 16 (depending on how the years are calculated). The *duguan* ritual I observed seemed to be a revival and reinterpretation of the sort of ritual Doré wrote about 80 years before in the same general region.

Preparation and Invocation

The daytime *jiangjing* service was held in the home of the Yuan 袁 family, a brick farmhouse built in 1982 (see Figure 3) when the new economic “responsibility system” was being successfully implemented in the rural areas. The event began in the pattern noted by Che, with an invitation to the gods. Next was a storytelling performance, followed by the *duguan* ritual. Afterwards was another storytelling session. It ended with a ritual burning of gifts for the clan spirits and a final send-off of the invited supernatural beings.

We arrived from our hotel in town about 9:30 in the morning. The Yuan family had been busy from before dawn with preparations. A number of relatives and friends, many of whom were older people, were still busily engaged in making paper offerings and ritual paraphernalia, especially paper ingots of silver and gold and the “paper horses,” representing various spirits and deities. Although older women were in the majority, a number of older males who seemed to enjoy the activities were also involved. A young man named Han 漢 was busy preparing what was considered a “vegetarian” meal. It included fish, peanuts, tofu, fish-like tofu, preserved eggs, stir-fried vegetables, pig liver, rice noodles, broad beans, quail eggs, fungus, and fried shrimp chips, which were all washed down with spirits and beer among those who ate. On the right hand side of the altar, rice and biscuits were offered to the gods. On the left hand side was an offering for the clan ancestors, consisting of pork fat cooked in soy sauce. The pork meat, not served at the vegetarian meal, was reserved only for living relatives.

Several children were present during the service, though the only one required to join the ritual activities was the two-year old daughter of the family, Yuan Li 袁麗, for whom the *duguan* ritual was to be performed. During the choral chanting she stood beside her mother, though at one point she was given a large piece of sugarcane as a snack. Being only two years of age, she was not expected to understand the unfolding events, but it was necessary that she be guided through the proper actions by her parents. Protected by the ritual, she would grow up to serve in her roles in the complex web of community life (WATSON 1991, 347–65).

Some time after we arrived, the ritual assistant began the prefatory phase by ringing a bell and rapping on the *muyu* at the storytelling table. A number of the older women chanted at the appropriate times and made a series of bows before the altar. On the altar, beneath three huge pictures of local deities was a wooden bucket filled with soybeans. The multi-color paintings represented major Chinese folk values (see Figure 5). The paintings placed from left to right depict “a fisherman who receives benefits” *yuzhe deli* 漁者得利, meaning “bounty”; “purple wind from the east” *ziqu dong lai* 紫氣東來, meaning “success”; and the familiar god of longevity, *Shou xing*

壽星. A traditional scale (the type with stick and hanging pan) had earlier been set on the altar, along with a round mirror. A wick in a small container of oil had been lit when the *fotou* arrived. A piece of red paper with the girl's name on it was propped on the arm of the scale, with a woman's black head wrapping on top.

After several minutes of chanting, the ritual assistant went before the altar and lit a large bundle of incense. As he proceeded to invoke the deities and their beneficence, he placed the sticks one by one in a censer. When the chant was nearly completed, he removed the paper horses representing several major gods from under the censer and burned them along with a sheet of yellow paper that represented messages sent to the realm of the supernatural beings. He then knelt before the altar, on a special stuffed kneeling cushion. His invocation lasted another ten minutes or so. After the major deities had been invited, the clan's ancestral spirits of the host family were invited from the various realms and directions. Once audience members, including living humans, were deemed present, the ritual assistant suddenly stood up, signaling that it was time for a break. Most of the males lit cigarettes as the atmosphere relaxed. A vegetarian lunch was served to both the assembled spirits and the human crowd.

After the vegetarian meal, Mr. Qian Jisheng 錢既生, the featured *fotou*, began his story. Mr. Qian was the former teacher of Mr. Lu who had performed the night before. He had begun studying *jiangjing* at age seven, performing in public at age 11. He was 56 at the time of our visit. The performance was very similar to the one by Mr. Lu the night before, though Mr. Qian broke with custom and did not tell the expected religious tale. Instead, for reasons discussed below, he told a chapter from *Meng Lijun* 孟麗君, a well-known story in the Jiangnan region.

Enacting Duguan

The *duguan* ritual for the daughter of the Yuan family began after the first storytelling session. We were told that a fortune-teller had determined that the child should be particularly wary of drowning and fire. When I asked what sort of barriers she was to be protected against, I was given a list of several examples, all of which matched entries on Doré's list. These included the Four Pillars, the Devil's Gate, the One Hundred Days, and the Iron Snake. These and other barriers (most of which seem to have been on Doré's list) were later mentioned during the ritual chanting. The major chant for the ritual in Jingjiang is called *Duguan ke* 度關科 (Crossing the Barriers Directions) (CHE 1988, 174). The guest assistant for this part of the event was an older man named Song Shaoqin 宋少勤, who had helped out in earlier parts of the introductory ritual. His official title was *Duguan shi* 度關師

(Crossing the Barriers Master).

On a small table across the room from the storytelling setup, the guest specialist assembled the ritual items. These included a yellow paper printed with the eight trigrams of the *I ching* (*Yijing* 易經) on which the specialist wrote the family names. On the table was a small rack, which supported a number of the paper horses described above and represented various barriers. There was also an axe, a piece of white cloth with blue polka dots, a platter of cookies, some crunchy wheat snacks, a lock and a key, a bowl of water, a bowl of noodles, a pile of paper money (later given to the *fotou*), and a large silver locket. I was told that the cloth was to be made into clothes for the child, that the money called *baisuiqian* 百歲錢 (hundred years money) represented long life as did the noodles, and that the lock was to prevent the child from running away. The word for “axe” (*fu* 斧) sounds the same as “riches” (*fu* 福) in the local dialect. The implement was present to symbolically break open the various barriers. The bowl of water was associated with Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy and “patron saint” of children.

The guest specialist and the *fotou* then spent a number of minutes arranging uncooked grains of rice on the smooth tabletop by hand. The result was a model of the path through the barriers. The diagram consisted of designs representing water and other barriers, flanked by a sun and a moon. The brass bell was moved among the kernels to make the curved lines representing water or clouds.

Once the diagram and offerings were in place, a low bench was placed before the altar. The deities were addressed with pleas of protection for the young girl in the crossing of the various barriers. After the ritual specialist knelt and bowed, the child was guided to kneel on the large stuffed bag before the altar as the specialist chanted. Yuan Li’s mother took the child’s head in her hands and bowed her down several times, imploring her to ask for the gods’ protection. The parents also bowed.

Another guest assistant was called to participate in the chanting. More verses were recited and Yuan Li walked from one end of the bench to the other; a parent stood at each end to help her (see Figure 7). Her steps symbolized her passing through the dangerous barriers. I was told that the *duguan* ritual could only offer protection to the child; its enactment could not change fate. Yuan Li crossed over the bridge and was led around the altar five times. Afterwards, the large silver locket that would act as a charm (“locking” her to life) was placed around her neck. In recent years, this once common sort of charm, shaped like an old-fashioned Chinese lock, has reemerged in popularity. Other traditional charms include a carved peach pit or a string of coins (DORÉ 1966, 17, 24)—one for each year of a child’s life. Towards the end of the ceremony, the guest specialist recited the list of

barriers. Rice from the bowl was then scattered in the four cardinal directions to distract the hungry spirits so they would leave the child alone. The sacred water was sprinkled around with a leaf for the same purpose.

A cloth was then placed on the bridge. The key was wrapped up in it and then removed from the scene. The altar was then disassembled and all fell into chaos as the assembled crowd grabbed for the food on the table, many taking the bits home to feed their own children under the age of 18. A portion of the food would be put into the children's pockets for good luck. The leftover rice from the diagram would be fed to chickens or fish, as humans must not eat it.

Once the *duguan* ritual was completed, the guest specialist moved to the storytelling table and began reciting a story in the usual *jiangjing* style. Although our group had to leave at this juncture, there were still people preparing paper offerings that would be burnt for the clan spirits later in the day, before all of the assembled deities were sent back to their realms.

Consequences of an Unexpected Story

As mentioned above, after the vegetarian meal Mr. Qian quite unexpectedly and seemingly without preparation told a portion of a secular tale about the bold and brilliant Meng Lijun. The story is based on a lengthy prosimetric romance called *Zai sheng yuan* 再生緣 or "Love reincarnate" written by Chen Duansheng 陳端生, a woman living in the late eighteenth century. A popular tale of the Jiangnan region, it concerns the fanciful adventures of a young maiden in the Yuan dynasty who ran away from an unwanted arranged marriage dressed as a youthful male scholar, and eventually became prime minister (CHEN 1982). The particular scene performed was from the early part of the story in which two young gentlemen have an archery contest to decide who wins Meng Lijun's hand. The evil Liu Kuibi 劉奎璧 undermines the win of the noble Huangfu Shaohua 皇甫少華, causing Meng Lijun to flee in disguise, leaving her lovely maidservant, Su Yingxue 蘇映雪, to marry in her stead. Mr. Qian's portrayal of the rakish and scheming Liu Kuibi was especially striking.

But why was this secular story told instead of a sacred one? Because the *fotou* had learned during the required vegetarian lunch that one of the foreign audience members (myself) was researching the Meng Lijun story as performed in the Suzhou *tanci* chantefable tradition. In order to accommodate this guest, and possibly to display his own virtuosity as a storyteller, the secular story was substituted for the regular sacred one, certainly an exercise in local situation ethics.

In another sense, the act demonstrated the storyteller's awareness of a shared, though fluid, referentiality (FOLEY 1991 and 1995; RILEY 1997,

316–17), which he made available by performing a tale he knew was common to both locals and outsiders (or at least one of them). The *foto* thus created a situation that allowed an enhanced level of appreciation by those on all sides of the event (BAUMAN 1977, 11). It is likely that his standing in the community as an elder performer allowed him to break with the norm, and the performance of a story satisfying to outsiders may have given him even more esteem locally. This notion is supported by the fact that one of the sponsors told us that since it was being done for a guest, that it was acceptable to the sponsoring host, in what were clearly unusual circumstances. The local officials accompanying us may also have derived a certain satisfaction, feeling, rightfully or not, that the foreign guests appreciated this display of virtuosity made on their behalf. Though certainly an unusual situation, the presence of the outside observers served to unintentionally highlight the reflexive boundaries of participant expectations in *jiangjing* performance (BABCOCK 1977, 62). It also demonstrated the flexibility of the medium and the manipulative power of individual performers in relation to specific audiences (BAUMAN 1977, 44–45; MILLS 1991, 51–58; HONKO 1998, 337–38).

The foregoing was an overview of two representative performances of *jiangjing* services. Many questions raised in the discussion could be enhanced by further investigating such issues as the process of performance, lives and motivations of storytellers and audiences, reception dynamics between audience and performer, the use of traditional repertoire, relations with other storytelling performance styles, and the emergent nature of contemporary storytelling contexts (BAUMAN 1986). The appendix below gives a *jiangjing* text based on several performances that was edited by local researchers in Jingjiang.

NOTES

1. Jingjiang County is located on the north bank of the Yangzi River not far from the cities of Jiangyin 江陰 and Yangzhou 揚州. The major town, Jingjiang was founded in 1471 A.D. (JINGJIANG XIAN MINJIAN WENXUE JICHENG BANGONGSHI 1989, 3). The county is unique in that it is considered to be the only county north of the river in which Wu 吳 dialects (a large dialect family in southern Jiangsu Province and contiguous areas) form the basis of the local dialects (CIE 1988, 166). *Jiangjing* performances are presented in a conservative style of this so-called *lao'an hua* 老岸話 (old bank language), mixed with other specialized registers of performance. I have not attempted a linguistic description of any of these registers in this paper.

My trip to Jingjiang was made while on a grant to study Suzhou storytelling funded by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China (CSCC) and the U.S. Information Agency, and the Department of Education. It was arranged by comparative literature scholar Prof. Sun Jingyao 孫景堯 of Suzhou University, folklorist Professor Che Xilun 車錫倫 of Yangzhou Teacher's College, and representatives of the Jingjiang local government and the

Jingjiang County Folk Literature Office. Portions of this paper are based on two earlier conference papers: "The Difficult Passage: Ritual and Narrative in a Local Chinese Infant Protection Ceremony," presented at the 1997 American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Austin, Texas; and "Performer and Audience in 'Telling Scripture' Performances," 1997 Chinoperl Conference, Chicago Illinois. I would also like to thank Wei-fu Bender, Timothy Chan, John Rouzer, Pat Sieber, Mark Halperin, Li Yu (Yu Li), and Kuan Chang for their gracious comments on various dimensions of this paper.

2. In his paper on versions of the Mulian 目蓮 *baojuan* story, JOINSON (1995) describes a number of different kinds of texts and performances in the greater *baojuan* (*pao-chuan*) tradition. He concludes that "not only are there great differences between texts self-labeled *pao-chuan*, there are also many texts labeled or classified as something else that are almost indistinguishable from texts with the label" (1995, 57). He also notes that the term *xuanjuan* 宣卷 is also associated with the *baojuan* tradition. He suggests that this style of "proclaiming scrolls" was associated with domestic performances of *baojuan* (1995, 67–68). In fact, both *baojuan* and *xuanjuan* are used by Chinese researchers and locals as alternates to the term "*jiangjing*." In the *jiangjing* tradition, *xuanjuan* refers to non-secular stories, while secular stories (such as those about Emperor Qianlong and Meng Lijun discussed below), are known as "small scriptures" (*xiaojuan*) and are sometimes based on traditional vernacular fiction or other prosimetric traditions (YANGZHOU'SHII MINJIAN WENYIJIA XIEHUI 1991 and JINGJIANG XIAN MINJIAN WENXUE JICHENG BANGONGSHI 1991, iii). NAQUIN notes, moreover, that the term "*jing*" or "scriptures" was also a term applied to *baojuan* (1985, 256–57). ZHAO Jingshen in a major encyclopedic entry on *baojuan* (1983, 16) states that "*baojuan* are the performance books (*jiaoben* 脚本) for oral performances of *xuanjuan*." From these and other sources, it is obvious that the term "*jiangjing*" is one of several names for performances and/or texts in what may be considered a larger and more varied tradition of *baojuan*. See JOINSON (1990) for his discussion of scripted performance in Chinese society.

3. OVERMYER notes that at least in terms of the written texts, some *baojuan* volumes by the end of the nineteenth century were becoming "a form of didactic literature concerned as well with entertainment" (1985, 220).

4. Japanese folklorist Suzuki Takeshi 鈴木健之, of the Tokyo Arts College, and I were given special permission to observe and record several performances in March 1992. Local authorities told us that we were among only a handful of outsiders (including one Russian scholar) who had been allowed to witness the performances. Our first day was nearly cancelled due to a local "antisuperstition" campaign that was underway, aimed at customs promoted by fortune-tellers and others who were using "traditional" rituals to fleece the gullible. This campaign was waged under the shadow of the antibourgeois and anti-Western culture campaign that was half-heartedly promoted throughout the country in the wake of the Tian'anmen Square incident in the spring of 1989. Upon arrival it soon became apparent that the local officials were worried that since the campaign was still underway, we might not be able to view the storytelling performances. Unlike the urban-based storytelling traditions I had been studying in southern Jiangsu, the *jiangjing* were inextricably linked with local popular religion.

As it turned out, by mid-morning of our first day, the so-called Number Two document signaling the revival of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms was announced and we proceeded with the scheduled activities. Thus, it was clear that the *jiangjing* traditions were part and parcel of the revival of traditional performance and ritual that has occurred in the shift from Maoist iron rice bowl economics to the current market reforms and concurrent loosening controls over behavior. As SIU (1989) has observed, with the relaxing of government controls on society, by the mid-1980s many traditional ritual practices were quickly revived, reinvented,

and “recycled” on a wide scale throughout the country, with only occasional government interference.

5. The quasi-intuitive response of the chorus is certainly an area needing more exploration. The choral singing is in some ways similar to the antiphonal song dialogues, or *duige* 對歌 (see DUAN and GUO 1987 for many examples), common to many nationalities in south and west China, in the sense that a cue from the singing partners must be responded to immediately in a context where the “script” is to some extent unfolding as they perform. See REYNOLDS (1999, 164–66) for parallel thoughts on levels of audience participation in Arabic oral epic recital.

Appendix

EPISODE FROM GREAT SPIRIT PRECIOUS SCROLL

INTRODUCTION

Parts II and III above described the two general contexts for *jiangjing* performances and briefly discussed a few of the issues relating to audience and performer in the storytelling and ritual contexts. In this appendix, a portion of a popular *jiangjing* story is presented in English translation. Although it is not an exact transcription of a particular performance, it offers examples of those aspects of the stylistic divisions between narration, dialogue, and song that are still identifiable when live performances are reduced into a standard print medium.

In the late 1980s, the local researchers Wu Genyuan 吳根元 and Yao Fupei 姚富培 cooperated with local storytellers and colleagues in the Jingjiang Cultural Bureau to edit transcriptions of well-known *jiangjing* stories (which they refer to as *baojuan*). Using HONKO’s terminology (1998, 38), these works could be considered as “tradition-oriented,” as they are written texts based on a number of live performances that have been subject to some editing and reorganization to create a “complete” version. The texts include two of the best known and most widely performed story cycles, *San Mao jing* (Scripture of San Mao) and *Dasheng jing* (Scripture of the Great Spirit).¹ Both concern deities reincarnated as young men who are distracted from their Confucian bureaucrat-path studies by the allure of spiritual discipline (*xiuxing* 修行) and salvation. The following excerpt is from the latter work, here entitled “Great Spirit Precious Scroll” (*Dasheng baojuan* 大聖寶卷). The title of the chapter (given by the editors) that is translated below is “Releasing an Iron Pigeon Results in Three Monsters, Celestial Master Zhang has Methods but No Ability” (*Fang tie ge san guai chu shi, Zhang Tianshi you fa wu neng* 放鐵鸚三怪出世, 張天師有法無能).

The Jingjiang *jiangjing* structure is well-represented by the text, which is based on an oral version by Zhao Songchun 趙松群, supplemented by later performances of Zhu Mingchun 朱明春, and Lu Manxiang 陸滿祥. The recordings and transcriptions were made between 1987 and 1990 in Jingjiang. The frame story follows the reincarnation of the Third Prince 三太子, a somewhat truant son of the Jade Emperor 玉皇, as Zhang Changsheng 張長生, the much wanted son of a local landlord. As outlined below, the child matures into Zhang Dasheng 張大聖 (Zhang the Great Spirit), as he is still known in local folklore.

Like the *San Mao jing*, the text consists of a main story line that is enlivened by many smaller tales and other entertaining diversions. As in the *pingtan* storytelling traditions, the *jiangjing* performers draw on a stock of traditional and personal lore that in the hands of skilled storytellers can be woven at will into the fabric of the frame narrative, adding interesting content and length when needed. These elements are optional and their use highlights the flexible performance frame of these storytelling genres. Many of these segments involve lively, and often humorous, verbal confrontations between characters, intricate exchanges of

antiphonal poetry, and amusing anecdotes of minor characters barely related to the plot. Power plays and contests of skill between major characters form the kernel of several of the latter episodes. The descriptions of contests between bodhisattvas in female form—Guan Yin and Puxian—are quite surprising because the bodhisattvas are depicted as having “human” vanities. The high profile of these female deities may reflect COHEN’s observation that “while a strict extension of the administrative model onto the supernatural world would leave no room within cosmic organization for female deities, the situation is rather different with respect to the higher domain of the gods” (1988, 185). The fact that the traditional audiences for the story were made up largely of women may also be a factor.

There are many conventional storytelling phrases, common to the other styles of Chinese professional storytelling as well as many works of traditional vernacular fiction that simulate the context of storytelling sessions (HANAN 1981). These include scene shifters like, “Now leaving this alone, let’s speak again of the catfish demon of the North Sea” and rhetorical questions like, “Which fairy-demon was to die first?” that aid the teller in manipulating scene and action. In one singing role there is an example of an inserted comment by the storyteller speaking in his role as narrator: “I’m the go-between, you two get married.”

The editors divided the story of *Dasheng jing* into chapters, which I have summarized as follows:

1. The tale begins with a series of famines in the Jingjiang area. A wealthy landlord named Zhang Jushan 張舉山 loans part of his hoard of grain, silver, and cotton to the starving peasants, hoping to get a high return later.
2. When better times roll around, he sends out underlings to collect the debts. When they fail, he decides to go and try himself. At the first home he gets into an extended conversation with a formidable farm woman, Mrs. Huan 宦氏, who makes him realize that although he has great wealth she is actually richer because she has many filial children, while he has none. Zhang thus cancels her family debt. (When Landlord Zhang leaves, she calls in her husband, whom she has sent into hiding and the family celebrates.)
3. On the way home Zhang sees some children desecrating a grave, and they tell him it does not matter since it was abandoned with no one to look after it. Arriving home, Zhang grieves to his wife about having no children. Suddenly an old servant appears from the street and advises Zhang to do good deeds to gain merit from the gods. After several seasons of good deeds, Zhang still has no offspring. The servant suggests that he must not only do good deeds, but beseech the gods as well. After doing so, his pleas reach the ears of the gods. The Jade Emperor (with the help of Guan Yin) arrange for the celestial ruler’s naughty third son, who broke the leg on a sacred incense burner, to be reincarnated in the Zhang household. Soon after Zhang’s wife is pregnant.
4. The next episode gives detailed descriptions of how the household handles the birth of a child, the preparations for the one month of life ceremony, and the arrival of propitious gifts from various quarters. Some of these gifts come from a local scalawag whose antics in the marketplace are portrayed largely as an inserted tale. Also detailed is the child’s first walk on a bridge and near water—both to provide protection from harm in the future (similar in purpose to the *duguan* or “crossing the barriers” ritual described above in Part III). The final passages in song describe events in the child’s life up to age six.
5. The Zhang family engages a respected tutor to train the young talent in the Confucian classics. By age 14 he is proficient in composing essays and antiphonal couplets of classical poetry in preparation for the imperial examinations. A large portion of this chapter involves

the exchanges of couplets between master and prodigy. However, the star pupil eventually insults his mentor when he includes reference to a louse on the teacher's clothing in a reply to a couplet. In fear of the family paddle, young Zhang kneels before the teacher and berates himself, promising to study wholeheartedly for the examinations.

6. Guan Yin hears the earnest recitations of Zhang Changsheng's lessons, remembering that he is the reincarnation of the Jade Emperor's third son. She decides that it is time for him to begin to engage in spiritual discipline to seek salvation. This causes him to neglect his studies, much to his family's dismay. However, after meeting a hunter while on a walk in the garden, Zhang Changsheng takes up hunting with bow and arrow. One night he burns down a whole mountain in search of wild game.

7. The next day he encounters the Eight Immortals 八仙, enraging them by killing one of their fairy cranes. Guan Yin intervenes, telling the immortals of Zhang Changsheng's celestial pedigree. Later, a fairy bird is sent from heaven to urge Zhang to engage in spiritual discipline and stop killing things. However, he shoots the bird with a stone bow, knocking it unconscious. The Wenzhu Buddha, Puxian Buddha, and Guan Yin all want to rescue the bird. When Old Mother Puxian insists on going to save it, Guan Yin uses three stratagems to thwart her. The next day, however, Puxian descends to earth in the form of a monk and appears at the gate of the Zhang home. In order to prove she is a god, she allows the skilled archer Zhang Changsheng to shoot four arrows at her, which she diverts. Finally, though, she transforms back into a god, having failed to lead Zhang onto the road to salvation. Guan Yin arrives to try her hand.

8. Guan Yin transforms herself into a hunter and appears at the Zhang gate. She and Zhang Changsheng set out on a hunt. The disguised Guan Yin beats Zhang in an archery contest and the two go looking for fire to roast the birds they shot. Arriving at an old woman's home in the hills, Guan Yin's servant Dragon Maiden (Longnu 龍女) turns into a demon with a buffalo-head and a horse-face (*niutou mamian* 牛頭馬面), who arrives from the four doors of the underworld (STEVENS 1997, 183). This being (often depicted in folk religion as two beings, each with a horse or buffalo trait) is an escort for souls of the newly dead and, with threats of torture and suffering, claims to have come for Zhang's life. The frightened young man swears to give up killing, takes a painful tonsure, a devotee's name (Yu Yuan), and promises to devote himself to spiritual discipline on the path to salvation. He then returns home to encourage his parents in acts of merit for their salvation. They free their servants and spread wealth throughout the community. Zhang Changsheng then goes to the mountains to meditate under the Linglong Pagoda 玲瓏塔.

9. While Zhang Changsheng is meditating in the mountains, a female catfish demon 鮎魚 causes problems for the farmers. Another capable man named Zhang Liang 張良 is sent by the emperor to subdue the demon. Guan Yin sees to it, however, that he ultimately fails in the task. (This whole section is provided below in English translation.)

10. Guan Yin realizes that although Zhang Changsheng has received the approval of the Jade Emperor, he still needs the approval of the earthly emperor. She arranges for the emperor to send him to subdue the catfish demon and its evil spawn once and for all. In the end all the demons are quelled and Zhang Changsheng carries the Linglong Pagoda on his back to set up near Jingjiang. He becomes a local god who is worshiped regularly by the locals with ceremonies and paper. He is now known as Zhang Dasheng.

During the actual performance, the singing roles (indicated by "Ping" ["Even"], the name of one of several common performance tunes discussed above) would be followed by a

chorus of audience members chanting some variation of *na mo a mi tuo fo*, a recitation invoking the name of Amitabha Buddha. As noted, other refrains are also used. The choral responses were not included in this text or in the text of *San Mao jing*. I have, however, inserted one choral line after the first song to remind readers of the varying refrain (which can be added by imagination to the rest of the stanzas). The subject matter, as explained in the original preface, would place the story in the non-secular story category, even though its entertainment value is high.

BATTLING THE CATFISH DEMON

During the reign of Emperor Han Gaozu, the eighth day of the second lunar month was a Daoist holiday known as Xuwangbao. On that day, Zhang Liang released an iron pigeon for amusement. The iron pigeon and Zhang Liang arrived at the Country of Women. When some of the women saw a man among them, they made eyes at him and tried to lure him into marriage. Zhang Liang thought up a ruse, and said, "You needn't argue and fight over me. Whoever can make my breasts sink in and my navel stick out, will be the one I shall marry." Hearing that, some of the women wined and dined him day and night with fish and meat. He enjoyed each day, doing nothing else. Who would have known that his breasts would protrude more and more and his navel would shrink inward? The women realized that something was amiss, and knew they had fallen for Zhang Liang's trick. Thus they prepared to kill him. Each one of them wanted to eat a piece of his flesh. They also wanted a piece of his skin for a perfume pouch, to show they had a man. When Zhang Liang learned of this, he thought up another plan, "If you want to divide up my skin, fine. But my greatest pleasure in life is releasing pigeons. Is it possible that I might release one more before my death?" The women said, "Alright, release a pigeon for us to see." Zhang Liang waited for a day with a strong west wind and released the pigeon. But he grabbed hold of the rope on the pigeon's tail and was carried into the sky. At this moment, Weituo Buddha passed through from the higher heavens and saw that the pigeon with the rope was a demon. In one stroke of his monster-beating club, he smashed the rope into three parts. One part fell into the western reaches of Lake Taihu and was transformed into an iron rope demon. One piece fell at the north gate of Tongzhou and was transformed into a hard rock demon. One piece fell onto the Gaoyou bank of the North Sea and became a catfish demon.

(Ping tune)

*Three female demons, split into three places
Each on the eastern soil, studying the way of salvation;
Three female demons became fairy-demons
Creating a stir throughout the land.*

(Chorus: *Na mo a mi tuo fo*)

Which fairy-demon was the first to be born? It was the fairy-demon of the north gate of Tongzhou. She labored at her salvation for several years and became a stone goddess. Half of her was above the soil and half within the earth. When the teeth in their spike-tooth harrows fell apart or when their hoe-heads fell off, the local farmers used the stones to hammer them back on. As the farmers struck and hammered, the demon's hatred became deeper than the sea. Fairy-demons are creatures who live by drinking sweet dew and mist at night. Each day she drank and sipped away, so that none of the crops within fifty *li* in all directions had enough water to thrive, and the crops were dying. The farmers' complaints grew, as they had nothing to harvest. The cries of the people reached the nine heavens, disturbing the Jade Emperor. He sent Prince Neza down to capture the stone goddess. Prince Neza used an iron fork to stab the heart of the stone goddess.

(Ping tune)
*Thrown into the great East Sea,
 She lost her remaining life beneath Mt. Emei.*

A hole had been pierced in the body of the stone goddess, but she did not die. Who would have known that one column of water from Zhenjiang, aimed at Mt. Emei's golden mouth, would be pushed into a whirling maelstrom. It gathered into a great surge, crested into a frothy tidal wave. The frothy wave became greater and greater, and covered more and more area. The Eight Immortals were out looking about the Western Heavens for peaches of immortality when from above they saw a mass of surging yellow foam and said, "this thing is a great demon!"

(Ping tune)
*The Eight Immortals spoke out carelessly,
 calling the water monster a demon.*

The current in the maelstrom was strong and made the hard rock into a huge jade bracelet and washed it to the beach of Mt. Emei. The Night Warden of the Sea saw it while on patrol. He picked up the bracelet put it on his hand, then brought it to the palace. When the princess of the Dragon King saw the gleaming jade bracelet, she asked for and got it from the Night Warden of the Sea; then she put it on her own hand.

(Ping tune)
*The princess wore it for a full three months;
 Her face yellowed, her wrists thinned, and she lost her energy.*

One day, the princess got up to prepare herself for the day. In the mirror, she saw the reflections of two people. One was her own; one was that of a man's body with a woman's face. The princess was startled and the bracelet fell to the ground. It broke into two pieces, and out came a beautiful woman.

(Ping tune)
*Both knees fell to the ground,
 As the woman called her birth mother's name.*

The princess said, "Bold demon, you talk nonsense, spoiling my good name!" She followed this with the cry, "Catch the demon, catch the monster!"

That time, the Night Warden of the Sea was on duty outside the palace. Hearing the princess cry for help, he came into the palace at once to scold the demon. The water demon ran outside, and the Night Warden of the Sea ran inside; the two came face to face. The water demon's legs collapsed, and she bowed down, crying out.

(Ping tune)
*The Night Warden's beneficence is deep,
 Helping my jade bracelet transform into a human.*

The Night Warden of the Sea said, "You should not leave; we will go see the Dragon King." As the Dragon King pondered, things became clearer. He said that the demon should not be freed, as she would cause trouble. Then he said to the Night Warden of the Sea, "You are a single man, she is a lonely person.

(Ping tune)

I'm the go-between, you two get married.

The Night Warden of the Sea and the water demon got married. After only a year she was pregnant. At a full ten months, the ripe melon dropped, and she gave birth to twins. It was really a case of a dragon birthing a dragon, a phoenix birthing a phoenix; when a rat is born it knows how to chew a hole, and a demon gave birth to demons. When born, they sprawled across the ground, their whole bodies covered with hair. One was called Hu Li, the other was named Hu Gui.

(Ping tune)

*The descendants were two demons,
And there in the water palace, grew into adults.*

Now leaving this alone, let's again speak of the catfish demon of the North Sea. She raised her head for a look, and saw Emperor Chengzhong sitting in the golden palace. "Oh wonderful! Originally you and I together cultivated the Way, were fellow apprentices, but today you sit on the imperial throne, the sole ruler of the universe. I am now still buried in Gaoyou in the North Sea, without name or rank and have not been made a god. I have come to contest with you, to push down the Gaoyou Dam, and see if your rivers and mountains are stable." She then built a dragon palace under Gaoyou Dam. Every time she closed her eyes, the foundation of the dam would shake. Every time when she waved her tail, one could see the bottom of Lake Gaoyou.

(Ping tune)

*Gaoyou Dam fell and water stretched to the sky,
All the people cried out in grief.*

The local authorities urged the people to fix the dam, and they worked all summer. After several days the dam again overflowed, and there was mud everywhere. At first the hole was the size of a bowl, then the size of a basket, then the size of a drying tray. The leak became bigger and bigger, until *hong-long-long*, the water broke through, leaving a hole eight leagues wide.

(Ping tune)

*The second time the dam broke was terrible,
Gaoyou area changed into a great sea.
The revered king was so frightened he didn't know what to do.
He made a report, then sent it to the capital.*

When Emperor Chengzhong looked at the urgent report, he was quite startled. He ordered that the drum instantly be sounded to assemble the civil and military officials in the palace. He asked, "Who among you civil officials and military officers can go to Gaoyou, in the Guangling region, to catch the demon and dam the waters?"

(Ping tune)

*Three hundred civil officials, two hundred military men
All stood like they were made of clay or wood.*

A minister of the history bureau came forward holding a tablet before him, and bowed three times: "Long live the Emperor. In the Dragon Tiger Mountains of Jiangxi there is a

Daoist master named Zhang who is paid by the emperor. He deals solely with demons and monsters, if we don't use him now, when should we?" The emperor sent out a decree that Heavenly Master Zhang must come to the court.

(Ping tune)

*Summoned by the imperial decree,
The master hurried on his way
To the demon catching affair.
He went nonstop all the way to the capital.
He traveled all night to the capital.*

Master Zhang arrived at the palace and bowed before the Son of Heaven, Emperor Chengzhong: "My Emperor, live forever, forever, forever, this humble official is called to be scolded." The Son of Heaven, Emperor Chengzhong opened his golden mouth, exposing his silver teeth: "Zhang Aiqing, I summoned you for no other reason than this. Because a demon has stirred things up at Gaoyou Dam, the good fields have been flooded and the people are starving. I have summoned you to put things right." "Eternal One, you may relax and worry no more."

(Ping tune)

Speaking of "demon catching," that has been my family tradition for generations.

The emperor then asked, "Aiqing, when you go to Gaoyou to eradicate the demon, how many horses and soldiers will you need, and how many magic tokens?" "Your excellency, I myself have a demon-reflecting mirror, a demon-chopping sword, three ounces of magic sand, three Buddhist tokens, three drops of black-dog blood, and one purified brush. Aside from that, please assign me with 3,000 imperial troops to accompany and cheer for me!"

At that, Heavenly Master Zhang went to the platform to choose the troops. For horses, he chose Shandong red steeds, for soldiers, he chose Henan imperial troops. The oldest did not exceed thirty years of age, the youngest was not younger than eighteen.

(Ping tune)

*Old soldiers and weak generals he didn't need,
Each one was as strong as a dragon or tiger.*

Swords were allotted from the sword house, arrows from the arrow house, battle banners from the banner house, and spears from the spear house. There was a single dragon banner, two tiger banners, three one hundred foot banners, four hiding banners, five civil and military official banners, six universe banners, seven big dipper banners, eight exquisite banners, nine dragon subduing monster banners, and ten Great Hall Leading the Way to Victory banners. Unfurling the banners, the assembly set out.

(Ping tune)

*Blasts of horns and rockets reached the heavens as they went along,
Startling the Guan Yin of the South Sea.*

Sorrowful Guan Yin figured out it was Master Zhang under order of the emperor to capture the demon. She thought: On the basis of Master Zhang's skill, it will be as easy as blowing away ashes when it comes to subduing a little catfish demon. But my student Yu Yuan would lose the chance to show his abilities before Emperor Chengzhong if the catfish demon is tamed by Master Zhang. Goodness, I cannot allow Master Zhang to take away this opportunity.

Guan Yin arrived at Gaoyou in the North Sea and stood on the catfish demon's body, pressing her down several feet. The catfish demon said, "Sacred Mother, I have never offended you, why do you want to take my life?" Guan Yin asked, "Do you know that Master Zhang is on his way with troops to destroy you?" The catfish demon said, "This little demon didn't know that. I beg Sacred Mother for a way to live." Guan Yin said, "You may beg for life. Close your eyes tightly, and tuck in your head. I'll press you down 18 leagues beneath the blue sand, there Master Zhang's demon reflecting mirror won't reflect you, and his demon chopping sword won't chop you.

(Ping tune)
*Wait until my student Yu Yuan becomes a Buddha,
 I will take you to the Lotus Throne in the South Sea.*

To again speak of Heavenly Master Zhang and his 3,000 mounted troops. They arrived in force at Gaoyou and made camp and tightly surrounded the area. He ordered the local officials to set up an altar and he walked out onto the stage, laying out his plan and preparing several magic charms. He used the magic sand and dog's blood to put on the demon's head, and put charms on the demon-chopping sword for three days, but didn't even see a glimpse of the demon! Heavenly Master Zhang said, "This is strange, where did the demon go?" He then shined the demon-reflecting mirror in all directions. To the east he saw the Mulberry Country; to the west he revealed the Kunlun Mountains. Looking upwards he saw the Nine Heavens' fairies, looking down he saw the blue depths of the water and flowing sands. He didn't even see as much as a single hair of the demon. Heavenly Master said, "This demon's power is weak, just seeing my charmed water and sword, she already changed into nothing. Thus, the officials of the water control bureau directed the people to repair the dam.

(Ping tune)
*Men repaired the dam with baskets of earth until they groaned,
 Women carried food while weeping;
 Gaoyou Dam was made as strong as an iron barrel.
 Master Zhang took his troops back to the capital,
 The capital was alive with the sound of drums,
 the people chanted songs of the great peace,
 everyone said Heavenly Master Zhang's power was great,
 and even the Son of Heaven laughed aloud.*

The catfish demon lay asleep in the deep blue sands for a year, and the people lived peacefully without incident. The next year, when the planting season had just passed, the rainy season arrived. The big rain poured down and the small rain did not stop drizzling up until the time of the Dragonboat Festival. By that time the lake was full, the waves on the sea were huge. The catfish demon was revived by the water. From below the blue sands it turned over like a pigeon, and immediately the sea was churning. The water of the lake was surging, slowly overflowing the Gaoyou Dam. The water flooded all over Sizhou City.

(Ping tune)
*The salt city of Xinghua was not to be spared disaster,
 The people ran away in tears,
 The local officials drew up an urgent appeal,
 marked with a chicken feather and a burnt corner;
 then sent a messenger by horse
 Journeying all night to the imperial court.²*

Emperor Chengzhong took one look at the urgent “chicken feather” letter, and his dragon heart became angry. Mulling it over, he thought, “You arrogant Heavenly Master, trying to deceive the emperor, you cheat officials and steal weapons.”

(Ping tune)

The little demon was not put down

Still wasting the emperor's resources until now;

By imperial decree, Heavenly Master Zhang was brought to the court.

(Ping tune)

He was put into chains,

And kept in the imperial prison

As a criminal.

NOTES

1. These works were both published as “inner-circulating” texts. Many folklore texts have been published in this way, intended for scholarly audiences, though in some cases no other publication outlet was available. The following translation is based on part of one of these texts presented to me during my visit.

2. According to Dr. Tim Chan (personal communication), the “chicken feather letter” (*jimao shu* 鷄毛書) from the nervous local officials is a humorous play on the official term “feather letter” (*yushu* 羽書). Besides attaching a feather to a document, burning one corner also indicates urgency. Wei-fu Bender (personal communication) suggested that the feather means help is needed as fast as flight, and the burnt corner warns the situation is out of control, like a fire.

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