

6 Special Episodes: Women's Land and Underworld

Two episodes from *Xiyang ji* have received far more attention than others in scholarly research. These are the chapters surrounding the Women's Land (Nü'er guo 女兒國) and the Underworld (Fengdu guiguo 鄭都鬼國).

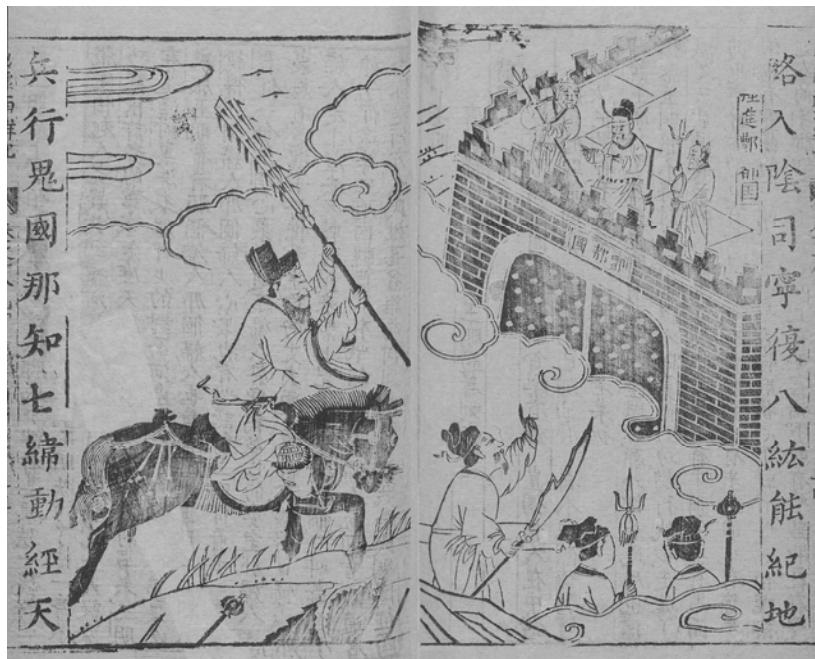


Fig. 12 *Xiyangji*, Chapter 87 (18.14b-15a, 2304f):
“The Treasure Fleet Accidentally Enters the Underworld.”

6.1 Studies on Women in *Xiyangji* and other Novels

Women in *Xiyangji* appear in foreign countries and as beings with supernatural powers. Most notable are the female warrior (nǚjiang 女將) characters and the episode set in the Nü'er guo 女兒國 (“Women’s Land”, chapters 46-50), which bears striking similarities to a parallel segment in *Xiyouji* 西遊記.

The idea of territories solely inhabited by women has a long tradition in Chinese texts and may also be found in the travelogues of European seafarers. For an overview of Chinese sources up to the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, see:

Pelliot, Paul. “Femeles (Island of Women)”. In: *Notes on Marco Polo: ouvrage posthum, publié sous les auspices de l’Académie des Inscriptions e Belles-Lettres e avec le Concours du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique*, by Paul Pelliot. Paris: Imprimerie National, 1959–1973, vol. 2, 671-725. [Available online at the Digital Silk Road Project: [dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/ III-2-F-c-104/](http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/III-2-F-c-104/).]

- 6.1.1 Chen Zhifan 陳芷凡 [Chen Chih-fan]. “Haiyang zuowei yi zhong ‘shiye’: Taiwan Zheng He chuanshu zhong de wenhua tazhe yu xiangxiang” 海洋作為一種「視野」—台灣鄭和傳說中的文化他者與想像. *Taiwan wenxue yanjiu xuebao* 台灣文學研究學報 11 (2010), 221-256.

Taking her cue from the legend that Zheng He visited Taiwan on his voyages, Chen Zhifan analyses legends and stories surrounding the treasure fleet, especially the role of the ocean (*Haiyang* 海洋) as a field for representing the “other”. The latter part of the article deals with the gender discourse present in the “Women’s Land” of *Xiyangji*.

- 6.1.2 Götzinger, Katrin. “Zwischen Ideal und Fantasie: Das Frauenbild im *Sanbao taijian Xiyangji tongsu yanyi*”. In: *Studien zum Roman “Sanbao taijian Xiyangji tongsu yanyi”* 《三寶太監西洋記通俗演義》之研究, vol. 2, ed. by Shi Ping and Roderich Ptak [Maritime Asia, 24. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013], 51-71.

Götzinger mainly looks at women in foreign countries by juxtaposing Ming images of women (for example the *zhennü* 貞女 ideal) to different scenes and narrative elements in *Xiyang ji*. This involves, among others, female warriors, temptresses and jealous women. The author also presents references to foreign women in the brief sections on Timor Island and Mayidong 麻逸凍.

- 6.1.3 Mao Zhiyong 毛志勇. “Nü’er guo de liang ge xitong: jianlun Wu Cheng’en yu Li Ruzhen de Nüxing shenmei guan” 女兒國的兩個系統：兼論吳承恩與李汝珍的女性審美觀. *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 2000.1, 180-187.

The article examines how *Nü’er guo* is described in *Da Tang Sanzang qujing shihua* 大唐三藏取經詩話, *Xiyou ji zaju* 嬉遊記雜劇, *Xiyou ji*, *Xiyang ji*, *Shengping baofa* 生平寶筏 and *Jinghua yuan*. A difference is made between countries completely without men (*Nü’er guo* in *Xiyang ji*, chapters 46-50) and countries where political power rests in female hands (*Luo-hu guo* 羅斛國 in *Xiyang ji*, chapters 33-34). Mao explores the origins of “Women’s lands”, questions the absoluteness of female authority therein and analyses different concepts of female perfection.

- 6.1.4 Weiß, Katrin. “Lishan laomu im *Xiyang ji*”. In: *Studien zum Roman “Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi”* 《三寶太監西洋記通俗演義》之研究, vol. 2, ed. by Shi Ping and Roderich Ptak [Maritime Asia, 24. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013], 107-121.

This article examines the Java segment of *Xiyang ji*, where Zheng He and his men are drawn into heavy conflicts involving several female figures with supernatural powers: Wang Shengu 王神姑, Huomu 火母 and Lishan laomu 驪山老母. The article analyses the role and story of Lishan laomu, her presentation in earlier texts, certain common features she seems to share with Nüwa 女媧 and possible influences of her description in *Xiyang ji* on later works such as the *Fan Libua quanzhuan* 樊梨花全傳.

- 6.1.5 Wang Qing 王青. “Nü’er guo de shishi, chuanshuo yu wenxue xugou” 女兒國的史實、傳說與文學虛構. *Nanjing shida xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 南京師大學報(社會科學版) 2008.3, 120-125.

Wang Qing explores different kinds of Nü’er guo, i. e. countries ruled by women. The focus is on localities with a solely female population. Attention is given to the fact that the women of these places usually try to force men who happen to be passing by into marriage, for example in *Xiyou ji* and *Xiyangji*.

- 6.1.6 Wu, Qing-yun. “Transformations of Female Rule: Feminist Utopias in Chinese and English Literature”. PhD Thesis. State College: Pennsylvania State University, 1991. [Online at ProQuest. (Access: September 2015). 287 pp.]

In her thesis, Wu explores the structural theme of female rule in utopian writing in a range of Anglo-American and Chinese works. Chapter 2 of her book compares the *Xiyangji* to Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1596) as a pair of “prefeminist utopias”. Further chapters comparing pairs of “feminist utopias” include the Chinese novels *Zaisheng yuan* 再生緣 (Destiny of the Next Life) by Chen Duansheng 陳端生 (1796), *Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣 (The Flowers in the Mirror) by Li Ruzhen 李汝珍 (1828) and *Yuanfang you ge Nü’er guo* 遠方有個女兒國 (The Remote Country of Women) by Bai Hua 白樺 (1988).

- 6.1.7 Wu, Qingyun. *Female Rule in Chinese and English Literary Utopias*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995. [225 pp.]

This book is a revised version of Wu’s PhD thesis (see 6.1.6). Unlike the thesis it does not include Chinese characters in the text and its glossary is tremendously brief.

This book has been reviewed in: *Pacific Affairs* 71.1 (1998), 96-97; *Utopian Studies* 7.2 (1996), 356-358.

- 6.1.8 Zhang Zhuping 張祝平. “*Xiyou ji* zhi Xi Liang Nüguo yu haishang Nüguo”《西遊記》之西梁女國與海上女國. *Huaihai gongxueyuan xuebao* (Shehui kexue ban) 淮海工學院學報 (社會科學版) 4.4 (2006), 23-26.

Zhang Zhuping discusses the “Western Liang Women’s Land” of *Xiyou ji* in great detail, citing records related to overseas territories ruled by women as “historical” precursors. Reference is made to the description of Siam (Xianluo 邏羅) in *Yingya shenglan*, *Xingcha shenglan* and *Xiyang fanguo zhi*.



Fig. 13 *Xiyangji*, Chapter 50 (10.51b-52a, 1319f):
“The Women’s Land Exhausts its Powers and Surrenders.”

6.2 The Underworld Journey

These articles all deal with chapters 86-93 of *Xiyang ji*, the underworld journey of Wang Ming 王明, an important member of Zheng He's crew, who often takes on the role of scout for the fleet. Upon arrival in the underworld he is then given a tour of Fengdu guiguo 鬼都鬼國 by Panguan 判官, his dead wife's new husband. He is followed into the underworld by the crew, and Jin Bifeng performs a ritual for those who had died during the journey or in the course of the military encounters.

- 6.2.1 Dahl, Christiane. *Chinesische Unterweltvorstellungen: Die Jenseitsreise des Wang Ming im Roman „Die Reise in die Westmeere unter dem Eunuchen Sanbao“* (1597). Dortmund: Projekt Verlag, 1998. [142 pp.]

The focus of this study is the literary journey to the Chinese underworld. In this case the analysis highlights the role of Wang Ming in Fengdu Guiguo 鬼都鬼國, the “empire” of king Yama. The first part of Dahl's book outlines different concepts of the Chinese underworld essential for the second part, which investigates Wang Ming's journey and highlights its unique structural features. Furthermore, Dahl also explores the problem of translating concepts like “hell” and “underworld”. The appendix contains a German translation of the relevant chapters (87-88).

- 6.2.2 Duyvendak, J. J. L. “A Chinese *Divina Commedia*”. *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952), 255-316.

Duyvendak's article on the Underworld Journey in *Xiyang ji*, the “most complete account in Chinese of a journey to the other world”, shows how the basic idea of “Hell” in this novel remains Buddhist, while also integrating Confucian ideals into its system. At the same time, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it also incorporated ideas related to Iranian folklore and Islamic beliefs. Exploring the origins of certain motifs, characters, and tortures, Duyvendak relies on extensive comparisons to Middle Eastern and European descriptions of the Underworld, especially the *Divine Comedy* and the *Mi'rāj* (The Ascension of Muhammad).

- 6.2.3 Maeno Naoaki 前野直彬. “Meikai yūkō” 冥界遊行. (1) *Chūgoku bungaku hō* 中国文學報 14 and 15 (1961), 38-57 and 33-48. (2) In: *Chūgoku shōsetsu shiko* 中国小說史考, by Maeno Naoaki [Tokyo: Akiyama shuten 1975], 112-149. (3) Chinese Translation “Mingjie youxing” 冥界遊行, by Maeda Kazue 前田一惠. In: *Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo yanjiu zhuanji* 中國古典小說研究專集, ed. by Jingyi wenli xueyuan 靜宜文理學院 and Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo yanjiu zhongxin 中國古典小說研究中心 [Taibei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1982], 1-45.

Taking his cue from Duyvendak's claim that the *Xiyang ji* description of the underworld shows Islamic influences, Maeno Naoaki sets out to trace the origins of said description back to Chinese concepts of hell. He mainly focuses on sources from the Six Dynasties, with special attention given to accounts in the *Soushenji* 搜神記 (4th cent.) and the story about Zhao Tai 趙泰 from the *Youminglu* 幽明錄 / 幽冥錄 (5th cent.).

- 6.2.4 Ru, Yi-ling. “The Role of the Guide in Catabatic Journeys: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Lo Mou-teng's *The Voyage to the Western Sea of the Chief Eunuch San-pao*”. *Tamkang Review* 20.1 (1989), 67-75.

In this article, Yi-ling Ru explores the role of Panguan 判官, Wang Ming's guide through the Underworld and compares his function as a Divine messenger and spiritual leader to those of Sibyl in the *Aeneid* and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*. She argues that this guide is an archetypal figure connected to the collective unconsciousness.

- 6.2.5 Ru, Yi-ling. “The Parallel Structure in Underworld Journeys”. *Tamkang Review* 31.2 (1990), 167-177.

This article compares the underworld journeys in *Xiyangji* and Virgil's *Aeneid* against Lévi-Strauss' theory of myth patterns. For Ru the experience of death and rebirth embodies the psychological remolding of the heroes, enabling them to gain self-knowledge and become more human.

- 6.2.6 Shao Yingtao 邵穎濤. “Ming Qing xunyou mingjie ticai xiaoshuo zhi wenxue yuanyuan yu guannian yanbian” 明清巡遊冥界題材小說之文學淵源與觀念演變. *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 107 (2013), 19-30.

Shao Yingtao shows that there is rich material for Underworld Tours in all kinds of texts from the Ming and Qing dynasties. One of these episodes is Tang Taizong's tour of the Underworld, most famous in *Xiyou ji*, but also mentioned in *Xiyangji* chapter 21. The article tracks the origins and developments of this motif and the changing notions this reflects. Interestingly, this article does not discuss Wang Ming's journey in *Xiyangji*.

- 6.2.7 Su Zhongxiang 蘇仲湘. “Sha dao Yanluo dian de Mingdai xiaoshuo *Xiyangji*” 殺到閻羅殿的明代小說《西洋記》. *Liaowang zhouskan* 瞭望周刊 22 (1992), 38-39.

This article comments on the differences between Zheng He's encounter with Yama (Yanluo 閻羅), the king of the Underworld, in *Xiyangji* and Sun Wukong creating havoc in the Underworld in *Xiyou ji*.

- 6.2.8 Wang Xinxi 王新禧. “Bi'an kaihua: Zhongguo mingjie zhushen” 彼岸開花—中國冥界諸神. *Fei (Qihuan shijie)* 飛（奇幻世界）11 (2007), 58-65.

This is a brief non-scientific overview of the gods and facilities of the Underworld as they appear in *Xiyangji* and other sources.

- 6.2.9 Zheng Hongcui 鄭紅翠. “Youming gushi yu Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo datuanyuan jieju fangshi” 遊冥故事與中國古代小說大團圓結局方式. *Xueshu jiaoliu* 學術交流 232.7 (2013), 164-168.

Zheng Hongcui looks into the function of happy endings in classical Chinese literature and links these to the “Tour through the Underworld” topos. The article explores stories of rebirth and resurrection in sources like *Mingxiangji* 冥詳記 (5th cent.) and *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 (8th cent.). The author also traced karmic retribution in texts like *Xiyangji* to show how the passage through the underworld became a means of bringing about happy endings in novels.