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ABSTRACT

Since the seventeenth century, Jin Shengtan (1608-1661) has been famous among East Asian readers for his densely annotated editions of two works of vernacular literature, the ribald adventure novel *Water Margin* and the song-drama *Romance of the Western Chamber*. He is, for this reason, widely regarded as one of the great early proponents of vernacular literature. Jin's praise for the aesthetic appeal of such literary subjects as rebelling against official powers, giving in to sexual desire, and even indulging in the freshly cooked flesh of one's enemy has long posed an interpretive conundrum, as Jin also insisted that these unorthodox works were composed by—and could transform readers into—paragons of orthodox morality. He grouped these two vernacular texts alongside four beloved historical, poetic, and philosophical works to propose a morally transformative program of literary commentary under the collective title *Six Works of Genius*.

Taking an overlooked archival detail as its starting point, the present study dissolves Jin Shengtan's supposed self-contradiction and restores his long-obscured contributions to literary hermeneutics and moral philosophy. I show that Jin Shengtan articulated his conception of Genius in opposition to the very critics with whom literary historians have associated him, in particular Li Zhi (1527-1602), who advocated for individual expression as a moral good unto itself. At the same time, Jin departed from the rationale of Neo-Confucian moralists, whose literary hermeneutics was premised on a concept of transpersonal moral principle (*li*). Instead, Jin Shengtan, whom the literati of Suzhou also knew as a Buddhist lay-teacher, drew on Mahāyāna Buddhist discourse to forge an original approach to literary hermeneutics founded on a particular mode of attention to form. Jin's commentaries cultivate an appreciation of literary forms as phenomena born not of individual nature, nor of moral principle, but of causes and

conditions (*yinyuan*) rendering them empty of intrinsic nature. By urging his readers to imagine themselves into the somatic and affective force of writing as a medium of karma, Jin invited readers to embody Genius, not as individual talent, but as One Mind (*yixin*) or *dharmakāya* (*fashen*): all of reality perceiving itself as at once provisionally existent and ultimately empty of self-nature. In this way, Jin sought to eliminate the basis for selfish conduct and inspire a more compassionate collective.

INTRODUCTION

In 1662, just one year after Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608–1661) was executed for participating in a protest, the Suzhou literatus Xu Zeng 徐增 (1612–?) humbly attested to the challenge of preparing a preface for his deceased teacher's classical prose anthology. Xu honors Jin Shengtan's memory with a portrait of a charismatic, intellectually imposing figure with a penchant for drinking. He describes Jin as a widely read, wildly original thinker whose unrestrained personality and capacity to adapt his discourse and demeanor to his company render it difficult to claim to know him. Moreover, Jin never had other people compose prefaces for his works:

> In all cases, Shengtan[1] wrote his own prefaces and did not allow anyone else to contribute so much as a word. If Shengtan's work is transmitted, it will not be due to whether it contains a preface, but because Shengtan's commentaries adopt a singular method. *Water Margin* has a preface, *The Tale of Yingying* has a preface, *Genius Works of Examination-Essay Writing* has a preface, and *Genius Works of Tang-Dynasty Poetry* has a preface: *these* are the prefaces for *Must-Read Works for Geniuses of the Realm*. Why should I provide some useless addition? Having no alternative, I have accordingly related the aim of his commentaries.
>
> 聖歎書皆自為序，人固不得參一語也；且聖歎之書傳，亦不在序之有無也，且聖歎評書從無二法。今《水滸》有序，《雙文記》有序，《制義才子書》有序，《唐才子書》有序：此皆《天下才子必讀書》之序也，又何必余為贅疣哉？無已，為述其評書之意如此。[2]

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[1] In the preface to a collection of his discourses (transcribed by his son) on Tang-dynasty heptasyllabic verse, Jin Shengtan identifies Shengtan as his dharma name (*faming* 法名). This usage explains the apparent familiarity in Xu's reference to him by his name. See Jin Shengtan, *Guanhua Tang xuanpi Tang caizi shi jia ji qiyan lüshi* 貫華堂選批唐才子詩甲集七言律, *juan* 1, in *Jin Shengtan quanji* 金聖歎全集, ed. Lu Lin 陸林 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2008), 1:94. This edition follows the original 1661 (17th Year of Shunzhi) *Guanhua tang* 貫華堂 edition compiled and published shortly after Jin Shengtan's death, correcting it against the 1661 (1st Year of Kangxi) *Xianwen tang* 賢文堂 edition. Also see *Jin Shengtan quanji* 金聖歎全集, ed. Cao Fangren 曹方人 and Zhou Xishan 周錫山 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1985), 4:34. This earlier edition does not specify its source texts but contains an additional, unsigned preface before Jin Shengtan's composed by someone who knew him. Lu Lin's 2008 edition of Jin's collected works is more recent and comprehensive, but the earlier edition is more readily found on scholarly bookshelves. For ease of reference, I will cite both, abbreviating them as *JSTQJ* (2008) and *JSTQJ* (1985), respectively.

[2] Xu Zeng 徐增, "*Tianxia caizi bidu shu* xu" 《天下才子必讀書》序, in *JSTQJ* (2008), 6:143. This preface is also recorded in Xu Zeng's collected works, *Jiugao tang quanji* 九誥堂全集. Lu Lin's edition compares Xu's preface as recorded in *Jiugao tang quanji* against the original 1662 (2nd Year of Kangxi) edition of *Tianxia*

Looking back now on the past three hundred and seventy years of literary history, we can see as prescient Xu's sense that his preface might not figure into the transmission of Jin's work. Xu notes that Jin Shengtan became widely known after the publication of his *Fifth Work of Genius*, a commentary edition of the vernacular novel *Water Margin*. This and Jin's *Sixth Work of Genius*, his annotated edition of the song-drama *Romance of the Western Chamber*, went on to become Jin's most influential works, to the extent that his heavily annotated and redacted editions overshadowed earlier versions among Chinese readers for several centuries. Jin's name became closely associated with his unprecedented commentarial contributions to vernacular fiction and drama. The first history of Chinese literature, compiled by Japanese modernizing reformers, consequently presents him as an early proponent of vernacular literature.3 This characterization of Jin's intellectual endeavor, which developed alongside the establishment of literature as a modern scholarly discipline in East Asia, circulated back to China during the twentieth century and gradually made its way into global literary scholarship. To this day, Jin Shengtan's commentaries are treated as the work of a proto-modern literary critic—someone with distinctly literary interests, in particular those associated with the genre of the novel as we know it today.[4] But this is not how Xu Zeng described his teacher's work.

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caizi bidu shu. A facsimile of the 1723 (17th Year of Shunzhi) *Dunhua tang* 敦化堂 edition of this anthology with Xu Zeng's preface, located in the National Taiwan University Library collection, has been published in a modern bound edition: *Jin Shengtan xiansheng ping caizi guwen* 天下才子必讀書, ed. Han Daocheng 韓道誠 (Taibei: Shuxiang chubanshe, 1978). Xu Zeng's writings feature prominently in Lu Lin's 陸林 research on Jin Shengtan's life and work, in particular Jin's social network. See Lu Lin, *Jin Shengtan shishi yanjiu* 金聖歎史實研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2015), especially pages 323–349. The 1985 edition does not contain either Jin Shengtan's classical prose anthology or Xu Zeng's preface.

[3] For an account of how Meiji-period Japanese scholars engaged with Chinese vernacular fiction, including Jin Shengtan's commentary edition of *Water Margin*, see William Hedberg, *The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction:* The Water Margin *and the Making of a National Canon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). For an important examination of Jin Shengtan's place in the development of the Chinese literary canon during the early twentieth century, as well as how the canonization of Jin's vernacular literature commentaries lead to the repression of religious elements in his work, see also Patricia Sieber, "Religion and Canon Formation: Buddhism, Vernacular Literature, and the Case of Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1608–1661)," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 28 (2000): 51–68.

[4] One of the most frequently recurring themes in studies of Jin Shengtan's work is that of the author's capacity to carefully observe and represent a diverse world of distinctive human characters in a manner akin to

As is widely known, Jin Shengtan planned to publish six "Works of Genius" (*caizi shu* 才子書), of which he deemed his *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentaries the fifth and sixth volumes. The first through the fourth were all classical-language works: the philosophical work *Zhuangzi* 莊子, Qu Yuan's 屈原 (c. 340–278 BCE) poem "Encountering Sorrow" 離騷, the Han-dynasty historian Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 BCE) *Historical Records* 史記, and a collection of works by the Tang-dynasty poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770). Because the fifth and sixth works were the only two that Jin completed, however, scholars have long assumed his intent throughout was to champion vernacular literature.

According to Xu Zeng, the reason Jin Shengtan did not complete the other four works—aside from his untimely execution—was due to his fondness for drinking with friends. The delay this caused in his commentarial output seems to have brought his students, who, in Xu's account, were constantly urging him to complete his works, some anxiety. When, in breaks between drinking, Jin Shengtan breezily completed a commentary on Wang Shifu's 王實甫 (ca. 1250–1300) *Western Chamber*, his students quickly arranged to have it published. Wang Shifu's *zaju* 雜劇 version of the play consequently usurped the planned place of Dong Jieyuan's 董解元 (fl. 1190–1208) earlier version *Romance of the Western Chamber in All Keys and Modes* (*Xixiang ji zhugongdiao* 諸宮調) among Jin's *Sixth Work of Genius*.[5] On the eve of his execution, Jin composed a lyric expressing regret that:

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nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions of literary realism. Chapters two and three of the present study consider examples of such scholarly readings.

[5] Xu's explanation accounts for the fact that the first of Jin Shengtan's three personal prefaces to *Water Margin* refers to Dong Jieyuan's text as one of the Six Works of Genius but Jin's published *Sixth Work of Genius* is based on Wang Shifu's text. See Jin Shengtan, "Xu yi" 序一, *Diwu caizi shu Shi Nai'an Shuihu zhuan* 第五才子書施耐庵水滸傳, *juan* 1, in *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:16. Lu Lin bases the text of this edition on a Republican-era Shanghai Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 photographic reproduction of the original Chongzhen-era *Guanhua tang* 貫華堂 edition from the collection of the scholar and official Liu Fu 劉復 (1696–1737). Also see *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:5.

> For a long time I frittered my time away on trivialities,
> I only lament the books that remain in me.
> Though I am glad for the Tang poems I have cursorily explained,
> What of the *Zhuangzi*, "Encountering Sorrow," Sima Qian, and Dufu's poetry?
> 鼠肝蟲臂久蕭疏，
> 只惜胸前幾本書。
> 雖喜唐詩略分解，
> 《莊》《騷》馬杜詩何如？[6]

Jin could not have foreseen how later scholars' interest in the novel as a vehicle of modernity would shape later perspectives on his work, which would not perceive his commentarial project as a corpus whose aims extended well beyond any single genre.

Xu Zeng was a poet, but he did not look to Jin Shengtan for what we would today regard as literary training.[7] For Xu and his fellow students, and for generations of Chinese scholars and literati before them, studying the writing of the ancients was a means of moral self-cultivation. Usually, however, the texts that served this aim were the Confucian classics. The works Jin Shengtan selected for his commentarial program, by contrast, were widely read and appreciated, but not upheld as vehicles of orthodox Confucian morality. Nonetheless, Xu describes Jin Shengtan's project in terms of this traditional conception of writing:

> His commentaries on the *Works of Genius* had a purpose: Writing is an implement for conveying the teachings. The sages' teachings are scattered throughout the ancient books and records; consequently, if one wants to understand the sages' teachings, one must first understand the sages' writings. The sages' writings [contain] diverse methods and unfathomable variations. When reading their works, if does not understand their methods, then the writing will be obscured; if the writing is obscured, then whence can the teachings be illuminated? When Shengtan wrote commentaries for the six *Works of Genius*, he took their literary methods as equivalent to those of the *Six Classics*. If the

[6] Jin Shengtan, "Jueming ci" 絕命詞, in *Chenyinlou shi xuan* 沉吟樓詩選, *juan* 4, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1213; *JSTQJ* (1985), 4:839. Also translated and discussed (but specifically in relation to Jin Shengtan's ideas about poetry) in Patricia Sieber, "Getting at it in a Single Genuine Invocation: Tang Anthologies, Buddhist Rhetorical Practices, and Jin Shengtan's Conception of Poetry," *Monumenta Serica* 49 (2001): 40.

[7] With respect to his literary training, from an early age Xu Zeng was a poetic protégé of the cultural luminary Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664). For an account of Xu Zeng's life and his interactions with Jin Shengtan, see Lu Lin, *Jin Shengtan shishi yanjiu*, 323–349; Wu Guoping 鄔國平, "Xu Zeng yu Jin Shengtan: fu Jin Shengtan liang pian yi zuo" 徐增與金聖歎：附金聖歎兩篇佚作, in *Ming Qing wenxue lunsou* 明清文學論藪 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2011), 54-70.

> reader perfects the methods of the six *Works of Genius*, then they will understand those of the Six Classics. If the methods of the Six Classics are clarified, then the sagely teachings can be obtained and understood, so [Shengtan] took annotating the six *Works of Genius* as his starting point.
>
> 其評《才子書》蓋有故：夫文者，載道之器也。聖人之道，散現于典籍，故欲知聖人之道，當先知聖人之文。聖人之文，用法多端，變化不測。讀其書者，不知其法則文晦；文既晦矣，道何由明哉？聖歎之評六《才子書》，以其文法即六經之文法，讀者精于六《才子書》之法，即知六經之法；六經之法明，則聖道可得而知，故評六《才子書》為發軔也。[8]

Xu proceeds to explain that, while the *Zhuangzi*, "Encountering Sorrow," *Historical Records*, and Du Fu's poetry were higher on the list of works Jin Shengtan wanted to annotate, Jin reasoned that most people would not be able to make it all the way through these works. By contrast, if he conveyed his understanding of "literary methods" (*wenfa* 文法) via vernacular literature, then everyone, ranging from the old to the young, the wise to foolish (自少之老，自智至愚), would be able to read his work to the end.[9] Jin consequently introduced his program with *Water Margin*.

Xu Zeng's account of Jin Shengtan's aims quietly subverts its stated concerns. Throughout Confucian sources, the idea that writing is but a vehicle for the Way of the ancient sages is usually deployed to cast moral doubt on writers who are overly invested in displaying their literary prowess. Jin Shengtan's sustained attention to literary methods as a first step toward understanding the sages' teachings suggests that writing's means must be understood before one can glean writing's moral content, thus inverting a well-established hierarchy according to which writing's moral message comes first; writing's methods, second, if at all.

[8] *JSTQJ* (2008), 6:143.
[9] *JSTQJ* (2008), 6:143.

As is widely known, Jin Shengtan's fiction and drama commentaries attest to his investment in examining literary techniques. Jin provided each of his two completed Works of Genius with a long list of "Reading Guidelines" (*dufa* 讀法), many of which describe literary methods evinced by the work at hand. In both cases, many of these methods seem to pertain to plot development and characterization. The relatively understudied classical prose commentary Xu Zeng introduces, however, offers an opportunity to consider the pedagogical cornerstone of Jin's work from a new angle, one far removed from the genre-specific concerns of his two most famous *Works of Genius*. Moreover, because Jin's *Must-Read Works* does not feature the dense array of paratextual materials—prefaces, reading guidelines, and supplementary materials—Jin normally provided his works, this posthumous publication provides for a less guided, somewhat more distant, reading of his annotations, and, in turn, a broader view of what Jin regarded as "literary methods."

What comes forth most clearly upon perusing Jin's annotated prose selections are the commentator's recurring figurations of brush and ink. Jin introduces each passage with a prefatory comment ranging in length from one to several sentences. Instead of providing historical background for his selections, as many classical prose anthologies of his time do, Jin omits historical context and instead uses these prefatory discussions to establish the main themes of his in-line annotations. Many of Jin Shengtan's prefatory comments establish their themes in relation to an affectively charged image of writing as a gestural engagement with brush and ink. His in-line comments carry this imagery forward, such that Jin often seems to describe a physical act of writing in process.

Upon first glance, there is nothing remarkable about Jin Shengtan's descriptions of the brush. The compound "brush and ink" (*bimo* 筆墨), for instance, is normally not read literally

but simply serves to refer to writing in general. Similarly, "to raise the brush" (*qibi* 起筆) merely means to begin writing. Like the pen in English, this traditional implement appears throughout Chinese literary criticism as a clichéd metonym for writing in remarks such as "marvelous writing" (*miaobi* 妙筆) or the slightly more evocative (but still not literal) expressions "unrestrained writing" (*linli zhi bi* 淋漓之筆) and "vigorous writing" (*bifeng qiaoba* 筆鋒峭拔).

Jin extends these conventions into lively configurations that push the bounds of metonymy towards metalepsis, describing the writing on the woodblock printed page as though it moved with phrases such as: "the brushwork flies aloft and begins" 筆勢軒翥而起; "again he flourishes the brush tip open" 又將筆端颺開; "I don't dare look again to where his brush has turned" 不敢更望有轉筆處. These descriptions are somewhat more noteworthy because they occur so persistently throughout Jin Shengtan's annotations, and, moreover, vary from one classical prose author (and, often, from one classical prose piece) to another. While not every passage in Jin Shengtan's anthology features such figurations, most do, and, importantly, the same mode of commentary appears throughout his other *Works of Genius*. For this reason, it is probably safe to surmise that this mode of description has something to do with Jin Shengtan's elevation of literary technique as a vehicle of sagely morality.

To illustrate, let us consider a famous prose piece attributed to Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE), a general under Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) who ordered Li Ling to lead an ill-fated campaign against the northern Xiongnu. Upon his defeat, Li Ling surrendered. Emperor Wu of Han was outraged by this defection, and the former general was accused of treason. One of the few people to come to Li Ling's defense was the aforementioned court historian Sima Qian, who was subjected to the punishment of castration for offending the

Emperor. Sima's personal postface to his famous *Historical Records* recounts this political disaster and frames his indignation over this traumatic humiliation as the motivation for writing his masterwork, which Jin Shengtan would identify as the *Third Work of Genius*. No such context, however, is provided by Jin Shengtan's prefatory comment to Li Ling's "Letter in Reply to Su Wu 蘇武 (Ziqing 子卿, 140–60 BCE)" 答蘇武書, in which (according to the traditional attribution) Li Ling expresses a personal sense of injustice over what has transpired. Instead, Jin concentrates on the affective force of the passage's literary techniques, which he describes in relation to Li Ling's bodily actions and figurations of the brush. The main theme that Jin Shengtan establishes for this passage is that of the "spirited" (*jingshen* 精神) quality of Li Ling's writing. I note phrases that pertain to this focusing theme in bold:

> Regard the contours of his brush and ink: truly, he is a peerlessly heroic solider! He personally endured the utmost sorrow, harboring it most deeply. One day he could no longer tolerate it. Thereupon, opening his throat and letting out a cry, he suddenly expelled an scene of sorrow. **Look how every section is spirited, every stroke of the brush flies to and fro.** But for Shaoqing [Li Ling] himself, no one else could substitute for his brush. People of former times suspected this text was a fabrication, but in this, they erred greatly.
>
> 相其筆墨之際，真是蓋世英傑之士。身被至痛，銜之甚深，一旦更不能自含忍，于是開喉放聲，平吐一場。**看其段段精神，筆筆飛舞**，除少卿自己，實乃更無餘人可以代筆。昔人或疑其偽作，此大非也。[10]

In the opening section of the letter, Jin provides a series of seven comments noting the content of Li's account of his campaign against the Xiongnu. With his seventh comment, Jin re-introduces the prefatory theme of Li Ling's spirited writing:

> First, he lauds Ziqing, and this is done.
> Next, he thanks Ziqing for his letter, and this is done.
> Next, he writes of his tragic circumstances from the time of his fall to the present.
> Next, he writes of the countless injustices in his heart.
> Next, he clarifies the reason for not ending his own life.

[10] "Li Ling da Su Wu shu" 李陵答蘇武書, in *Tianxia caizi bidu shu*, *JSTQJ* (2008), 5:334–335.

Next, he writes of the confused circumstances, which were not such that someone could mediate [on his behalf].
From here onward, he again narrates how he lost the battle and fell in amongst the Huns.
Every section is spirited.

先勞子卿，畢。
次謝遺書，畢。
次寫自初降至今日，景況之慘。
次寫無數冤毒在心。
次明不自引決之故。
次寫忽忽之狀，非人所得解勸。
自此以下，重敘戰敗降胡之事，**段段精神。**[11]

From this point onward, the bulk of Jin's in-line annotations emphasize the "spirited" quality of Li Ling's writing through recurring descriptions of Li Ling's brush and occasional historical clarifications or observations of content:

So few troops!
And wanting for reinforcements!
He writes with such spirit!
He specially composes this flying stroke.
He writes with such spirit!
In every section, he specially composes these strokes which fly to and fro.
He writes with such spirit!
He narrates his defeat.
All strokes which fly to and fro.
He references the founding emperor, and this is just to depict himself [by means of contrast]. **Spirited to the utmost!**
He spontaneously turns [the brush].

少卒。
失援。
寫得何等精神。
特作此飛舞之筆。
寫得何等精神。
段段特作此飛舞之筆。
寫得何等精神。
敘敗。
皆是飛舞之筆。
引高帝，正是自寫，**精神之極。**

[11] *JSTQJ* (2008), 5:335–336.

隨手曲折。[12]

Jin's figural annotations imbue the text with a strong gestural sense of rhythm. The care with which he varies these rhythms over the course of his anthology imagines prose pieces as having been composed differently, not only with respect to their rhetorical styles, but in terms of the embodied gestures that gave rise to these literary objects. In fact, this feature of Jin Shengtan's commentary also appears in his *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentaries. In those contexts, however, this mode of annotation is somewhat obscured by Jin Shengtan's more extended comments as well as his emphasis on the diverse literary features of fictional narrative.[13]

Jin Shengtan's figurative descriptions of brush and ink pose something of an interpretive problem: If we are meant to read something into it, the information at hand does not provide any indication as to what that something might be. Such evocative language can helpfully induce the perspectival shifts central to argumentation, but, according to modern theorists of rhetoric, the success of a figural line of argument depends on the listener's ability to understand and agree to

[12] *JSTQJ* (2008), 5:336.

[13] To my knowledge, no study has yet examined Jin Shengtan's recurring figurations of brush and ink as a distinct feature of his approach to annotation. Several scholars have, however, identified metaphors for literary techniques among some of these figurations. Such studies are concerned not with Jin's recurring references to the implements of writing, but with the literary techniques to which he sometimes refers by means of those references. See, for instance, Chen Guo'an's 陳果安 identification of a theory of nondiegetic literary elements in Jin's references to "leisurely writing" (*xianbi* 閑筆) in "Jin Shengtan de xianbi lilun——zhonguo xushi lilun dui feiqingjie yinsu de xitong guanzhu" 金聖歎的閑筆理論——中國敘事理論對非情節因素的系統關注, *Hubei shifan daxue shehui kexue xuebao* 湖北師範大學社會科學學報 Vol. 27 (1998) 5: 81–85; Sally Church's discussion of Jin's "theory of implicit meaning" in "Beyond the Words: Jin Shengtan's Perception of Hidden Meanings in *Xixiang ji*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59, no. 1 (1999): 5–77; Wu Zhenglan 吳正嵐, "'Zhengbi,' 'xianbi' bian" "正筆"、"閑筆" 辨, in *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan* 金聖歎評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanse, 2006), 330–350; Zhou Xishan's 周錫山 discussion of "writing possessed of creative force" (*huagong zhi bi* 化工之筆) in *Jin Shengtan wenyi meixue yanjiu* 金聖歎文藝美學研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016), 200–201. Sally Church discusses Jin's "theory of implicit meaning" in relation to certain figurations and also lists several phrases describing the writer's brush that have no metaphorical referent and therefore need not be incorporated into analysis. None of these studies accounts for the sheer volume of Jin's carefully varied descriptions of brush and ink, not as metaphors for particular techniques, but as metalepsis—a means of bringing the body into the printed text.

the validity of the shift in perspective that figural speech invites. If no such shift is achieved, "the figure will be considered an embellishment, a figure of style."[14] Given that some scholars have at least noticed that Jin Shengtan's comments include references to the brush but have opted not to read an argument into them, it seems Jin's comments have been taken as just this, an embellishment. In what has become a canonical discussion of Chinese fiction criticism, Andrew Plaks includes figurative references to the brush among the category of "impressionistic comments," which he describes as:

> Quantitatively the most numerous but for the most part *of perhaps dubious value in terms of critical content*; *this fact might help explain why the editors of reprints of the major works of fiction eliminated criticism of this type from nearly all of the modern typeset editions* until very recently. These materials consist mainly of *subjective reactions* to turns of plot, revelations of character, ideas expressed in dialogue, or the general tone or mood of a given passage, *supposedly jotted down in the margins of the commentator's copy of the work during the course of close reading*…[15]

In accord with Plaks's critical conclusion, gestural and affective descriptions of brushwork such as those that appear in Jin Shengtan's classical prose commentaries have been dismissed as "impressionistic" or altogether omitted from analysis.[16] When attending to Jin Shengtan's discussions of the brush, scholars have instead preferred to examine metaphorical terms that might suggest concrete literary techniques or theories. In this manner, a vast quantity of Jin Shengtan's annotations has been omitted from scholarly analysis almost out of hand. But if we were to do away with such comments in the context of Jin Shengtan's anthology, which Xu Zeng clearly deems a *Work of Genius* in its own right, we would not be left with much at all.

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[14] Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tytica, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 169.

[15] Andrew Plaks, "Terminology and Central Concepts," in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and David Rolston (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 77. Emphasis added.

[16] Sally Church cites Plaks's reasoning in "Beyond the Words," 44–45.

Before the modern period with its valorization of vernacular fiction, Jin's figural annotations were subject to a similarly sweeping act of omission. In 1694, Wu Chucai 吳楚材 and Wu Diaohou 吳調侯 published their comprehensive annotated anthology *The Best of Classical Prose* (*Guwen guanzhi* 古文觀止), a famous anthology of classical prose which is to this day still used as a textbook for classical Chinese prose instruction.[17] A detailed examination by Jyrki Kallio reveals that the editors copied their annotations from a wide array of previous anthologies, such that each of their entries combines annotations from several (unnamed) sources.[18] In his introduction to a 1985 edition of *Must-Read Works for Geniuses*, Zhang Guoguang noted that the later anthology lifts a great deal of commentary from Jin Shengtan's compilation.[19] Zhang, strongly influenced by the May 4th understanding of Jin Shengtan as a champion of vernacular literature and individual expression, perceives an ideological difference in the Wu pair's editorial reworking of Jin Shengtan's comments, construing the later commentators' work as evincing a more "feudal" (*fengjian* 封建) perspective. Possible differences of political perspective notwithstanding, I am not convinced that this is the most accurate way to read Wu Chucai and Wu Diaohou's excisions, which in all cases seem primarily concerned with eliminating Jin Shengtan's references to the brush. In the case of Li Ling's piece,

[17] The present study refers to Wu Chucai 吳楚材 and Wu Diaohou 吳調侯, *Guwen Guanzhi* 古文觀止, ed. Zhong Wengu 鐘文谷 (Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 1978). *Guwen guanzhi* was collated 1694 (33rd Year of Kangxi) and was first printed and supplied with a preface by Wu Chucai's paternal uncle (*bofu* 伯父) Wu Xingzuo 吳興祚 the subsequent year. The next two extant editions are the Qianlong-era *Hongwen tang* 鴻文堂 and *Yingxue tang* 映雪堂 editions, printed in 1774 (39th Year of Qianlong) and 1789 (54th Year of Qianlong), respectively. Both Qianlong editions are based on Wu Xingzuo's edition. The Zhonghua shuju edition is based on the 1789 *Yingxue tang* 映雪堂 edition. For an overview of *Guwen guanzhi*'s publication history, see Tian Hui 田慧, "*Guwen guanzhi* banben liubian de san ge jieduan" 《古文觀止》版本流變的三個階段, *Wenjiao ziliao* 3 (2021): 41–43;

[18] Jyrki Kallio, *Enlightenment for the Masses: Confucian Education in the Manner of* Guwen Guanzhi (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2011). Kallio's study does not mention Jin Shengtan's *Must-Read Works*.

[19] Zhang Guoguang 張國光, ed., *Jin Shengtan piping caizi guwen* 金聖歎批評才子古文 (Hubei: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1986), 3–11.

the Wus incorporate a single line from Jin's prefatory comments into their own (which focus on providing historical context), but with an interesting change. Jin's sentence reads, "But for Shaoqing [Li Ling] himself, really there is absolutely no other person capable of substituting for his brush" 除少卿自己，實乃更無餘人可以代筆.[20] Wu Chucai and Wu Diaohou change this to "But for Shaoqing himself, there is no other person who could have composed this" 除少卿卿自己，無餘人可以代作.[21] At the outset of the passage, the editors retain Jin's first seven content-oriented comments with the exception of the last phrase, "every section is spirited" (*duanduan jingshen* 段段精神). Here I provide a complete account of their editorial emendations to Jin's in-line comments, accounting for their excisions with strikethrough formatting and noting their additions in parentheses. The comments they retain are formatted in regular text:

> So few troops!
> And he lost his aid!
> ~~**He writes with such spirit!**~~
> ~~**He specially composes this flying stroke.**~~
> ~~**He writes with such spirit!**~~
> ~~**In every section, he specially composes these strokes which fly to and fro.**~~
> ~~**He writes with such spirit!**~~
> He narrates his defeat.
> ~~**All strokes which fly to and fro.**~~
> He references the founding emperor, and this is just to depict himself [by means of contrast]. ~~**Spirited to the utmost!**~~
> ~~**He spontaneously turns [the brush**~~]. (A pause)
> ~~**An exceedingly spirited brush!**~~
> ~~**An exceedingly spirited brush!**~~
> ~~**He writes with such spirit!**~~
> ~~**He writes with such spirit!**~~
> ~~**He spontaneously turns.**~~ (A pause.)
> Xiao He and Fan Kuai. (Adds historical content.)
> Han Xin and Peng Yue. (Adds historical content.)
> Zhou Bo and Wei Ji. (Adds historical content.)
> ~~**Every stroke effects a momentum that flies to and fro.**~~
> Above, he mentions the various ministers in general; here, he yet brings in [the successful general] Li Guang. (Adds historical content.)

[20] *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:335.
[21] *Guwen guanzhi*, *juan* 6, 258.

~~**Every stroke effects a momentum that flies to and fro.**~~
~~**He spontaneously turns.**~~ (First twist.)
~~**He spontaneously turns.**~~ (Second twist.)
~~**He spontaneously turns.**~~ (Third twist.)
He yet adds two more phrases.
Here, he yet inserts Ziqing [Su Wu] himself, ~~**Every stroke effects a momentum that flies to and fro.**~~
~~**Such spirit!**~~
~~**These eight words are so spirited!**~~
~~**Such spirit!**~~
~~**Every flies to and fro and rises!**~~
~~**Such spirit!**~~
"Old friends" refers to the various ministers at court, such as those who stood up [on his behalf?], Huo Guang (d. 68 BCE), Senior Official Jie, and so on. (Retains gist.)
Among the Xiongnu, Su Wu took up a wife and had a son, who was named Tongguo. He hopes for a letter in reply.

少卒。
失援。
~~寫得何等精神。~~
~~特作此飛舞之筆。~~
~~寫得何等精神。~~
~~段段特作此飛舞之筆。~~
~~寫得何等精神。~~
敘敗。
~~皆是飛舞之筆。~~
引高帝，正是自寫，~~精神之極。~~
~~隨~~手曲折。~~~~ (頓挫)
~~最精神之筆。~~
~~最精神之筆。~~
~~寫得何等精神。~~
~~寫得何等精神。~~
~~隨~~手曲折。~~~~ (頓挫)
蕭何、樊噲。 (Adds historical content.)
韓信、彭越。 (Adds historical content.)
周勃、魏其。 (Adds historical content.)
~~筆筆作飛舞之勢。~~
上泛舉諸臣，此又忽入李廣 (Adds historical content.)
~~筆筆作飛舞之勢。~~
~~隨~~手曲折。~~~~ (一折)
~~隨~~手曲折。~~~~ (二折)
~~隨~~手曲折。~~~~ (三折)
又另添二語。

此又忽入子卿自己，~~筆筆作飛舞之勢。~~
~~何等精神。~~
~~八字何等精神。~~
~~何等精神，筆筆飛舞而起。~~
~~何等精神。~~
「故人」謂在朝諸臣，如任立政、霍光、上官桀等。 (Retains gist.)
武在匈奴取胡婦，生子，名通國。
望後書也。[22]

This aggressive reworking of Jin Shengtan's commentary is consistent with the other passages from which the Wus adopted Jin's annotations. Unfortunately, we will probably never be able to ascertain the editors' motivation for excising Jin Shengtan's lively descriptions of brush and ink along with these implements' attendant affective and gestural implications. Perhaps this mode of commentary was too readily associated with Jin Shengtan's work and the Wu pair did not want to draw attention to their borrowings. Or perhaps the later anthologists did not want to waste wood, paper, and ink on comments they regarded as lacking in substance. Either way, the Wus seem not to have accepted the validity of the shift in perspective that Jin Shengtan's figural descriptions of classical prose invite. The argument implicit in Jin's elevation of the methods of writing has consequently been removed from the discursive space of the *Best of Classical Prose*.

I offer the above image of the Wu editors' excisions as an analogy for how Jin's creative deployment of the extra-literary rhetoric that gives his commentarial project meaning has also been largely excluded from the discursive space of literary scholarship. To return to modern rhetorical theory, the progression of a successful argument requires that we "conceive of a step from the common to the uncommon, and… return to another order of commonness" with a new perspective, one that allows for some form of agreement with our interlocutor.[23] The "uncommon" figurations Jin Shengtan offers modern literary scholarship, however, are perhaps

[22] *Guwen guanzhi*, *juan* 6, 258–265.
[23] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tytica, *New Rhetoric*, 171.

too far afield from what we are inclined to recognize as a viable literary argument. Rather than perceiving a point in Jin's descriptions of brush and ink, we, along with Wu Chucai and Wu Diaohou, consequently treat them as embellishments. In so doing, we risk losing sight of Jin's claims about the transformative potential of a uniquely embodied understanding of literary practice.

Xu Zeng's preface to *Must-Read Works* grants us just enough discursive background to formulate a question about Jin's unusual mode of commentary: What does this obsessive attention to the methods of writing (*wen fa* 文法) have to do with transmitting the sages' teachings? Jin Shengtan's *Water Margin* commentary provides a direct answer this question, but his answer comes in the form of another category of figural speech, in this case, one inviting us well beyond what we are liable to recognize as common literary discourse. In an extended prefatory comment to chapter 55 of *Water Margin*, Jin Shengtan declares that the author's writing, like other worldly phenomena, "also arises according to [the Buddhist law of] causes and conditions" 其文亦遂因緣而起. He proceeds to elaborate:

> Whoever reads this commentary will, in cultivating their moral integrity, necessarily be able to regard causes and conditions with trepidation. To regard causes and conditions with trepidation is to study the method of the sages—this is what [the Song-dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200)] commentary [on the Classics] calls "Wary [even in places where one is] not seen; fearful [even in places where one is] not heard."[24] In cultivating the moral integrity of others, [such a person] will necessarily be able to

[24] When Jin Shengtan refers to "the commentaries" (*zhuan* 傳, a term which in isolation usually refers to the *Zuo Tradition*), he appears to be quoting directly from the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi's discourses on the Four Books 四書 (*Great Learning* 大學, *Analects* 論語, *Mengzi* 孟子, and *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸) in *The Categorically Arranged Dialogues of Master Zhu* (*Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類). Zhu Xi 朱熹, "Zhongyong yi" 中庸一, in *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), *juan* 62, 4:1499. The first section of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) states the same thing in slightly different words: "The noble person is wary of that which he does not see, is fearful of that which he does not hear" 是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞. The point here is that the good Confucian exercises extreme moral caution even when they think no one is watching. References to the Four Books appear throughout Jin Shengtan's *Water Margin* commentary. Wu Zhenglan has identified many of these references in *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 488–492, but does not mention Jin's references to *Zhuzi yulei*.

> refrain from contemplating evil. Not contemplating evil is the Sage's teaching of fidelity and reciprocity.
>
> 讀此批也，其于自治也，必能畏因緣。畏因緣者，是學聖人之法也，《傳》稱「戒慎不睹，恐懼不聞」是也。其于治人也，必能不念惡。不念惡者，是聖人忠恕之道也。[25]

According to this statement, Jin Shengtan's commentary is a guide to the operation of causes and conditions. This is to take writing as an instantiation of Buddhist truth, the idea that all phenomena arise out of an infinite and infinitely complex web of causes and conditions. According to Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, such causes and conditions make phenomena what they are in two senses. From the standpoint of conventional, day-to-day experience, causes and conditions explain why things appear as they do—why certain events occur, why people are possessed of distinct forms of speech, action, and thought. According to Buddhist teachings such appearances are not the way things "really" are; they are consequently understood as "false" or, more technically speaking, as merely "provisional truth" (*jiadi* 假諦). The "absolute truth" (*zhendi* 真諦) is that all things are empty of intrinsic identity (*zixing* 自性); everything is dependently co-arisen, equal and undifferentiable.

Jin Shengtan's commentaries repeatedly suggest that literature can impart an understanding of Buddhist truth, and, in turn, give rise to the kind of moral conduct traditionally associated with Confucian teachings. In his third preface to *Water Margin*, where he first elaborates on his Buddhist conception of literary Genius, Jin defines the traditional Confucian concept of "fidelity" (*zhong* 忠) in terms of phenomena's (explicitly including literary phenomena's) fidelity to their own dependently co-arisen nature. Immediately thereafter, he defines the Confucian concept of "reciprocity" (*shu* 恕) as the understanding that all things are

[25] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 60, in *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:999; *JSTQJ* (1985), 2:315.

dependently co-arisen and therefore equal.[26] In his prefatory comments to chapter 42 of *Water Margin*, Jin Shengtan discourses at great length on Confucian moral teachings, but relates such moral conduct to one's ability to "understand that happiness, anger, grief, and joy are without self and without other" 知喜怒哀樂無我無人[27]—a distinctly Buddhist teaching. Jin in this manner presents Buddhist truth as the ideal means of preventing the kind of selfish conduct that Confucian discourse generally aims to counteract. And he presents literary form as an excellent demonstration of phenomena as dependently co-arisen. Xu Zeng's preface suggests that Jin planned to impart this approach to moral self-cultivation by means of literary analysis of his *Six Works of Genius*, which Jin offered as a complement to the Confucian *Six Classics*.

The above description of Jin Shengtan's commentarial program falls far afield from most literary interpretations of his work. While literary scholarship has noted Jin's use of Buddhist rhetoric, this rhetoric has, with very rare exceptions, been read as a metaphor for literary production, not as a synthetic Buddhist-and-literary approach to cultivating moral conduct. In some cases, scholars have cited late-Ming "syncretism"—the coalescence of Confucian, Buddhism, and Daoist thought—as a reason not to read too much into Jin's use of Buddhist rhetoric, or to read him primarily as a Neo-Confucian.[28] This understanding of syncretism may accurately describe some late-Ming thought, but it should not be taken as a given. Jennifer

[26] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20; *JSTQJ* (1985), 2:10. Jin's discussion of these terms plays on Zhu Xi's dialogues on the *Analects*. See Zhu Xi, "Liren pian xia" 理仁篇下, in *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 27, 2:669–708. I discuss this passage in detail in chapter one.

[27] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 47, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:771; *JSTQJ* (1985), 2:125.

[28] John Ching-yu Wang only mentions Jin's engagement with Buddhist thought superficially, most often in relation to the clichéd trope that "life is but a dream." He confidently asserts that Jin Shengtan was a Confucianist. See Wang, *Chin Sheng-t'an* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), 65. For detailed rationale explaining why Jin Shengtan's Buddhist rhetoric should not be considered too carefully, see Ling Xiaoqiao 凌筱嶠, "'Jinxiu caizi' yu shehuixing yuedu—xinlun Jin Shengtan *Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji*" 「錦繡才子」與社會性閱讀—新論金聖歎《第六才子書西廂記》, *Zhongzheng hanxue yanjiu* 中正漢學研究 31 (2018):192–193 and 207–208. In chapter three, I explain why Ling's rationale do not justify a clear-cut distinction between Jin's literary and philosophical thought.

Eichman's research on diverse approaches to self-cultivation among late-Ming literati convincingly undermines the idea that literati only drew on Buddhist rhetoric as a common social parlance devoid of philosophical charge.[29] At the same time, these late-Ming practitioners were not "religious" in the sense that we might commonly understand this term today. Eichman relates, "Sixteenth-century conceptions of engagement with Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist cultivation regimens could take many forms and was likely driven by interest in a particular path to self-cultivation, not a general profession of faith as one might expect with monotheistic traditions."[30] Jin Shengtan's commentarial project can be understood as a contribution to this interdiscursive environment, but as one that also drew on the particular conceptual affordances of a "fourth teaching:" literature.

By reading Jin Shengtan's interdiscursive approach to commentary as an activity directed toward explicitly aesthetic aims, scholarship risks obscuring a historical understanding of literary form as a transformative medium, something that has the potential to impart forms of knowledge that can affect the way people relate to the world. Even in cases where scholars have examined Jin's use of Buddhist rhetoric in painstaking detail, this rhetoric has been understood as a metaphor for literary production, not a statement of literary knowledge's extraliterary potential. In such cases, scholarship understands Jin Shengtan's discussions of dependent co-arising as a metaphor for the author's imaginative capacity to portray distinctive individuals. But we might

[29] Jennifer Eichman, *A Late-Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship: Spiritual Ambitions, Intellectual Debates, and Epistolary Connections* (Boston: Brill, 2016). For a case study of one literatus's synthesis of self-cultivation practices, see Eichman, "Intertextual Alliances: Huang Hui's Synthesis of Confucian and Buddhist Paths to Liberation," *T'oung Pao* 100 (2014): 120–163.

[30] Eichman, *A Late-Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship*, 57. Eichman reasons that the mid-seventeenth century "marked the end of an era of Confucian experimentation in the intertwining of Buddhist and Confucian ideas," 76. This puts Jin Shengtan right at the end of the intellectual trend of which, I propose, his work was a part.

ask: What is this aesthetic appreciation of individual character meant to lead to in the context of one's moral conduct?

The present study is as invested in examining Jin Shengtan's morally directed program of literary and Buddhist self-cultivation as it is in addressing the reasons the most creative aspect of his endeavor has gone unacknowledged for so long. In pursuit of this dual aim the first two chapters develop intellectual-historical and methodological frames of reference that might enable literary scholarship to attend to the shift in perspective that Jin's Buddhist and scriptive rhetoric invite.

Chapter one reconstructs Jin Shengtan's intellectual-historical context by positioning his unusual conception of Genius (*caizi* 才子) against the backdrop of the late-Ming moral-philosophical debates with which he was engaged. Recovering this context begins with Jin's obscure reference to another late-Ming thinker's classical literature anthology in one of Jin's guidelines for reading *Romance of the Western Chamber*. This other thinker is Zhang Nai 張鼐 (courtesy name Dongchu 侗初, *jinshi* 1604), an intellectual affiliate of the so-called "expressionist" critic Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) and the iconoclastic philosopher Li Zhi 李贄 (Zhuowu 卓吾, 1527–1602).[31] As a supposed proponent of vernacular fiction, Jin Shengtan has long been associated with Li Zhi, but, as my analysis of these various thinkers' creative fusions of literature and philosophy reveals, Jin formulated his conception of Genius in

[31] Several excellent English-language studies of Li Zhi have come out in recent years: Pauline C. Lee, *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Rivi Handler-Spitz, *Symptoms of an Unruly Age: Li Zhi and Cultures of Early Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); for translations of Li Zhi's selected writings, see *A Book to Burn & A Book to Keep (Hidden)*, ed. and trans. Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); for a compilation of studies examining diverse aspects of Li Zhi's thought, see Rivi Handler-Spitz, Paulin C. Lee, and Haun Saussy, ed., *The Objectionable Li Zhi: Fiction, Criticism, and Dissent in Late Ming China* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2021).

opposition to Li Zhi's valorization of personal indignation and the expressionist critics' sweeping denigrations of literary form. At the same time, while Jin Shengtan's program directs itself toward orthodox moral conduct, his system of thought does away with the idea of a transpersonal moral principle (*li* 理) that undergirds Neo-Confucianism. Instead, Jin Shengtan presents the apprehension of causes and conditions—specifically by means of literary form—as a foundation for unselfish, moral conduct. In pursuit of this aim, he fashioned an original system of literary hermeneutics anchored by a theoretical conception of the authorial Genius as a bodhisattva.

Having clarified Jin Shengtan's intellectual aims, in chapter two I undertakes the challenge of developing a method of literary analysis that allows Jin's investment in Buddhist philosophy to come to the fore. This effort entails setting aside the genre-based frameworks according to which Jin Shengtan's work has traditionally been construed. Asuka Sango's observations regarding medieval Japanese Buddhist manuscripts offers a valuable starting point for reorienting analysis in this regard. Sango notes that scholarship on such manuscripts tends to privilege colophons that pertain to canonical interpretation or the scribe's material context. She suggests that analysis might better do justice to a scribe's personal aims by examining seemingly tangential, "expressive" colophons. Incidentally, Jin Shengtan's commentaries are replete with comments that have been identified as tangential to the text at hand.

Jin Shengtan's social and pedagogical context asks us to rethink what qualifies as superfluous in the context of Jin Shengtan's literary commentaries. Rather than taking up Jin's work on fiction and drama from the standpoint of how we read fiction and drama today, I consider how Jin's students were encouraged to read such works in pursuit of moral self-cultivation. Here Xu Zeng reappears, this time addressing a letter to his fellow student, Jin Shengtan's friend Wang Daoshu 王道樹 (1619–1665), a figure who, along with his brother

Wang Zhuoshan 王斲山 (b. c. 1612), frequently features in Jin Shengtan's commentaries. Noting that Xu Zeng read Jin's *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary in the hope of overcoming his karmic shortcomings, I ask how this social context might invite a new perspective on the many moments in Jin Shengtan's commentaries (as in his classical prose commentary above) that seem to offer merely aesthetic commentary.

This question opens onto a series of methodological adjustments that aim to treat Jin Shengtan's paratext and discursive context as primary. The first such adjustment involves reading Jin's commentary as a coherent apparatus, one in which recurring words, phrases, and concepts anchor physically disparate moments of text, both within and across his *Works of Genius*. This adjustment gives way to the insight that Jin Shengtan structures his aesthetic insights around Mahāyāna Buddhist thought even—and, in fact, especially—in spaces where Buddhist rhetoric is not present, or is only alluded to.

This discovery invites a second adjustment, which pertains to our understanding of the relationship between narrative structure and Buddhist thought. Literary scholarship tends to understand this relationship in only two ways. The first is in terms of a simplistic causal logic of karmic retribution (*yinguo baoying* 因果報應). The second, more sophisticated conception is identifiable in terms what Francisca Cho has termed a narrative structure of recession, whereby the "false" or provisional realm of aesthetic experience (such as a novel or play) recedes to suggest (but never reveal) a higher order of reality, one which persistently eludes conceptualization.[32] Qiancheng Li's recent groundbreaking work on religion and late imperial Chinese literature suggests a similar narrative structure at work in Jin's commentary on *Romance*

[32] Francisca Cho Bantly, *Embracing Illusion: Truth and Fiction in* The Dream of Nine Clouds (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 174. Also see Francisca Cho, "Buddhist Literary Criticism in East Asian Literature." In *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature*. Edited by Rafal K. Stepien. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020

of the Western Chamber, the conclusion of which asserts that the distinction between self and other and the concomitant affect of desire are but transient illusions.[33] As numerous scholars have observed, a similar revelation operates in Jin Shengtan's edition of *Water Margin*, which truncates the novel and appends a concluding chapter in the form of a dream.[34]

While the narrative structure of recession plays an important role in Jin Shengtan's commentary editions, I argue that Buddhist structures of thought are at play in his work not only when the aesthetic illusion gives way, but also when it operates at full force, presenting the reader with an affectively and somatically compelling reality. Jin Shengtan's highly original mode of attention to literary form *as* Buddhist truth was, I suggest, inspired by Tiantai Buddhist thought, in particular the idea that all phenomena in existence (*fa* 法, Skt. *dharma*) are, by virtue of their dependently co-arisen nature, reducible to any single phenomenon. To translate this into more literary terms, all phenomena in existence may be understood as reducible to writing, or to the mind of the author, or to the brush. Jin's literary-philosophical innovation will have appealed to a cohort of Jiangnan literati who participated in a late-Ming resurgence of Tiantai thought.[35]

This new understanding of literature's relation to Buddhist truth, in turn, grants us a new conception of literary forms as rūpa, according to which such forms are not secondary representations of a reality that exists in an order above literature, but are coextensive with reality itself, understood as an infinite extension of dependently co-arisen phenomena that includes the reader and author. The Genius author, as a bodhisattva possessed of Buddhist truth, simultaneously perceives reality from the standpoint of absolute truth, as one and equal, and

[33] Qiancheng Li, *Transmutations of Desire: Literature and Religion in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020), 138.

[34] See Robert Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[35] Yungfen Ma, "The Revival of Tiantai Buddhism in the Late Ming: On the Thought of Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 (1554–1628)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011).

from the standpoint of provisional truth, as filled with an infinitely diverse array of phenomena. In this way, Jin Shengtan's system of hermeneutics accommodates the individual expression valorized by Li Zhi and other expressionist critics, but treats its as one form among others, not a foundation for morality, the latter of which is provided for a vision of all things as equally empty of own-being.

The third chapter applies the interpretive frameworks developed in the first and second chapters to a rereading of Jin's two most famous works of Genius, now no longer conceived as "drama" or "fiction" criticism but as integral components of the work of Genius—Jin Shengtan's morally directed system of literary self-cultivation. Part one of this chapter presents a close reading of just one act from *Romance of the Western Chamber*, which, I propose, Jin Shengtan reworks into a scene of Buddhist repentance, the aim of which is to invite the reader into an experience of reality as "one mind" (*yixin* 一心) or the "body of truth" (*fashen* 法身, Skt. *dharmakāya*). I argue that insightful readings of Jin's commentaries, in particular those presented by Xiaoqiao Ling and Liangyan Ge, have in fact already identified this body operating in Jin Shengtan's commentaries. Ling observes a fusion of "author, reader, commentator, and other identities and subjectivities into a single body,"[36] and Ge identifies "a field of intersubjectivity, where each person's self has to be determined and conditioned by those of others."[37] Both of these conceptions are, I propose, aestheticized reflections of dharmakāya, an embodied understanding of emptiness that undoes the distinction between mind and body as well as subject and object. By offering a literary theorization of this Buddhist concept, Jin Shengtan offers

[36] Ling, "'Jinxiu caizi,'" 211–212.

[37] Liangyan Ge, "Authoring 'Authorial intention:' Jin Shengtan as Creative Critic," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 25 (December 2003): 12.

literary criticism a new conception of the body, the experience of which, his commentaries suggest, can be mediated by works of art.

Chapter three, part two presents a more extensive rereading of Jin's *Sixth Work of Genius* as an introduction to the system of self-cultivation that he bases on this conception of Genius as dharmakāya. I read Jin's famous three prefaces to this vernacular novel as an attempt to undermine pre-existing systems of moral self-cultivation, in particular Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) Study of Mind (*xinxue* 心學) and Li Zhi's hermeneutics of the childlike mind (*tongxin* 童心) by means of literary parody and a carefully constructed interplay of moral arguments based on provisional and absolute truth. Following Jin Shengtan's commentarial apparatus, I read his prefaces alongside conceptually revealing moments in his chapter commentaries. This reinterpretation of the *Fifth Work of Genius*, not as a commentary on a vernacular novel, but as the work of Genius illuminated by the aesthetic particularities of vernacular fiction, highlights Jin Shengtan's conception of literature as medium of karma and a vehicle of moral transformation. In this way, it is my hope that Jin's argument may finally succeed in inviting us to "conceive of a step from the common to the uncommon, and… return to another order of commonness," whereby literature looks a little different.

CHAPTER ONE

REDEFINING TALENT

Shortly after the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, Jin Shengtan published what would become a classic of literary commentary, his *Fifth Work of Genius: Shi Nai'an's Water Margin* 第五才子書施耐庵水滸傳. Despite its title, this was the first of Jin's commentary editions and would go on to be his most famous, widely read in China and Japan for centuries after its publication. The *Fifth Work of Genius* was meant to be but one installment of a six-part multigenre program of annotated literary classics aimed at transforming readers into literary and moral paragons. Somewhat surprisingly, the text with which Jin launched his morally aspirational sextet was a popular work of vernacular fiction depicting the ribald exploits of 108 violent outlaws. For its unapologetic depictions of theft, murder, and even cannibalism, all presented in a rollicking vernacular style, tradition would not have regarded *Water Margin* as either a moral or a literary model. Jin, however, so admired the work's formal execution that he lionized its author, whom he identified with the shadowy historical figure Shi Nai'an 施耐庵,[1] as a consummate talent (*caizi* 才子), a genius worthy of canonization alongside five of China's most popular historical, philosophical, poetic, and dramatic authors. Representative works of these six literary virtuosos were to constitute Jin's commentated program of literary classics, collectively known as the *Six*

[1] Jin Shengtan was the first to attribute *Water Margin* to Shi Nai'an alone. Prior to his edition, the authorship of this work in its various recensions was attributed to the only slightly less uncertain historical personage Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (also known as the author of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 三國志通俗演義) or to both Luo Guanzhong and Shi Nai'an. For a detailed discussion of *Water Margin*'s various attributions and their respective degrees of viability, see Andrew Plaks, *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 292–302.

Works of Genius 六才子書, only two of which he had completed at the time of his beheading for participation in a political protest in 1661.[2]

To assist in the transformation that reading this novel was meant to enact, Jin drew on the resources of China's rich commentarial tradition, employing almost every format that had ever been used to annotate a literary work: densely arrayed in-line comments (*jiapi* 夾批); intermittent upper-margin comments (*meipi* 眉批); and lengthy prefatory comments for each chapter. In addition to all this, he also furnished his edition with three prefaces in his own name, which he presented alongside a forged authorial preface; two annotated excerpts of historical material pertaining to the novel's content; and a set of sixty-nine "Guidelines for Reading" (*dufa* 讀法). All of these paratextual forms would have been familiar to Jin's readers, who were accustomed to reading canonical works of history, philosophy, and classical prose and poetry as well as more leisurely materials in prefaced and annotated editions. But perhaps never before had such a diverse array of commentarial forms been so systematically mobilized on the basis of a popular novel.

Partly as a consequence of Jin Shengtan's untimely biographical end, and of the fact that the second installment of his program was a commentary edition of the vernacular song-drama *Romance of the Western Chamber* 西廂記, Jin has gone down in history as an early proponent of vernacular literature. In certain respects, he was. But Jin Shengtan's primary aim was not to argue for vernacular literature's value, for this case had already been made by earlier critics. In fact, both *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* had been widely read, admired,

[2] Jin Shengtan was executed for playing a leading role in a protest against excessive grain taxation practices of Ren Weichu 任維初, who became the county magistrate of Wu 吳 in 1660 (17th Year of Shunzhi). For a detailed account of the events leading up to and following this protest, see Wu Zhenglan, *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 161–166. Wu's book is an important resource regarding Jin Shengtan's thought in relation to seventeenth-century intellectual history. The present chapter adds several specific findings to Wu's broader observations.

and published in commentary editions for decades prior. The wave of appreciation for vernacular literature that had given rise to these earlier editions had accompanied a philosophically inspired turn in favor of expressive modes of writing. In line with earlier instances of praise for vernacular fiction, Jin commends *Water Margin*'s accessibility relative to the stylistic restraint of classical forms. Somewhat surprisingly given his status as a proponent of the novel, however, his position on vernacular fiction's capacity to express outbursts of emotion is somewhat conservative. In fact, he vociferously protests his commentarial predecessors' valorization of personal indignation, which, when taken to extremes, Jin argued, might threaten social and moral order. For this reason, while literary histories have generally attended to what Jin Shengtan's commentaries did for vernacular fiction as a genre, it is worth considering what this particular work of fiction, with all its attendant aesthetic appeal and moral risk, did for his program of literary commentary.

The present dissertation sets out to do just this. The full significance of this novel's relationship to Jin Shengtan's commentarial project unfolds over the course of this and the next two chapters, but I will say at the outset that for Jin Shengtan, *Water Margin*'s transformative promise derived primarily from two factors. The first was the role that this particular novel had played in an earlier interweaving of literary and philosophical discourses, which Jin seems to have perceived as having aggravated a crisis in Neo-Confucian ethics.[3] Jin aimed to resolve this

[3] That is, Confucian philosophy after its Song-dynasty revival, when philosophers re-interpreted the Confucian classical tradition in relation to a metaphysical or cosmological conception of moral principle (*li* 理). In Chinese, this later tradition of Confucian philosophy is broadly known as *Lixue* (literally, "the study of principle") or *Daoxue* ("the study of the Way"), which I translate, according to anglophone scholarly convention, as Neo-Confucianism. Within this broad tradition, "Study of Principle" (*lixue*) also refers specifically to orthodox Neo-Confucian philosophy as developed by Zhu Xi and the brothers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) prior to the development of Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucian "Study of Mind" (*xinxue* 心學). See Joseph Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014); Chen Lai 陳來, *Song Yuan Ming zhexue shi jiaocheng* 宋元明哲學史教程 (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2010).

crisis, starting with several of the same literary sources his predecessors had used—foremost among which was *Water Margin*.

He intended to do this by drawing on the novel's other two distinguishing features: its diverse array of lively characters and literary techniques. While earlier critics and commentators had lauded vernacular fiction for its capacity to convey strong personal sentiments, Jin Shengtan's attention to fiction's technical features was unprecedented. The densely arrayed annotations that distinguish his commentary edition of *Water Margin* attend obsessively to the author's ingenious grasp of literary form, with respect to both the lively writing that constitutes the work and the vivid human figures that populate its pages. His commentary draws frequent parallels between the author's capacity to realize both. In his third preface, he approvingly declares that in *Water Margin*, "each person bears their own personality; each bears their own demeanor; each bears their own appearance; and each bears their own manner of speaking" 人有其性情；人有其氣質；人有其形狀，人有其聲口. Shortly thereafter, he marvels over the fact that "the words bear forms of diction, the phrases bear forms of phrasing, the sections bear forms of sectioning, and the work [as a whole] bears the form of a work" 字有字法，句有句法，章有章法，作有作法.[4] The meticulous manner in which Jin attends to these textual features underscores his intention to present the Six Works of Genius as a latter-day counterpart to another morally transformational literary program: the Six Classics 六經 thought to have been

[4] Jin Shengtan, "Xu san," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:10–11. My unusual gloss of *fa* 法 as "form" is based on Jin Shengtan's tendency to play on this word's practical and philosophical denotations. In the former case, *fa* usually refers to "method" or "technique;" in the latter, *fa* denotes dharmas, the Buddhist term for all phenomena in existence. I believe he wants us to read both meanings at once, so have compromised with "form," which might simultaneously refer to the literary forms resulting from writerly techniques and the idea that such forms are also simultaneously a category of dharmas. Readers will note that Jin Shengtan's characteristic style of writing draws heavily on repetition to establish strong parallels among ideas in his writing. Because these parallels often contribute to the overall structure and meaning of his ideas, I have chosen to retain them in translation.

compiled by Confucius 孔丘 (551–479 BCE) to transmit the teachings of the ancient sages.[5] Over the long history of Chinese humanistic studies, a tradition developed on the basis of the Six Classics whereby readers aimed to recover sagely morality from these archaic texts and revive it in their own time. Commentaries aimed to assist in this socially transformative pursuit. So too in the case of Jin Shengtan's commentary, but he aimed to transform his readers on the basis of a different philosophical discourse.

For his own program, Jin Shengtan proposed an approach to reading that fundamentally diverged from that of the Confucian classics. In the middle of his first preface to *Water Margin*, he proclaims, "When the sages composed works, they employed morality; when [non-sagely] people of the past composed works, they employed talent" 聖人之作書也以德，古人之作書也以才.[6] Jin refers to talent (*cai* 才)—which he presents in such hyperbolic terms that "Genius" (hereafter capitalized) is a more appropriate English rendering—throughout the titles, prefaces, and annotations of his commentarial oeuvre, including several publications beyond the scope of his Six Works. As Henry Lem has proposed, Genius operated as a brand for Jin's literary work, something that set his publications apart from those of other early modern commentators.[7] Beyond concerns of commercial and social influence, however, Genius is the conceptual cornerstone of Jin's entire commentarial endeavor, and a new basis for literature's transformative potential.

[5] The Six Classics include the *Classic of Poetry* (also known in English as the *Book of Odes*) 詩經, the *Book of History* 尚書, the *Book of Rites* 儀禮, the (no longer extant) *Classic of Music* 樂經, the *Classic of Changes* (which many English speakers know as the *I-Ching* or *Yijing*) 易經, and Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋.

[6] Jin, "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:14; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:4.

[7] Henry Lem, "Branding 'Literary Genius' in Jin Shengtan's 70-Chapter Edition of *Water Margin*," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 14, no. 3 (2020): 480–513.

But Jin's understanding of talent as Genius occupies a peculiar position in the history of Chinese literary criticism. From the Song through the Qing dynasties, Neo-Confucian critics frequently denigrated talent as an aspect of personality that was always potentially at odds with orthodox morality's command to set aside selfish interest. In the context of the imperial interests such critics typically served, writing was meant to guarantee social order—which often entailed individual self-sacrifice on behalf of court or kingdom—whereas writing of talent risked serving the self. This stark difference of literary priorities stood at the heart of many a scholarly debate as late as the eighteenth century.[8] Even in Kang-i Sun Chang's analysis of female poets' transgressive appropriation of this term, talent retained its tense opposition to moral duty. A group of women who published their work under the auspices of the prominent scholar Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) deliberately presented themselves as talented writers embodying "the kind of *xingling* [性靈] (spontaneous self-expression) that Yuan Mei claimed to be the primary consideration in poetry writing" over and against the normative moral assertions of their detractor Zhang Xuecheng 張學誠 (1738–1801), who insisted that women's poetry should evince not personal expression but classical learning and uphold the traditional "three obediences and four virtues" (*san cong si de* 三從四德) proper to women's social standing.[9]

While Yuan Mei promoted talent as an expression of the individual voice, Jin Shengtan's references to talent pertain not to the personal but the technical. As Hua Laura Wu has pointed

[8] For examples of such debates, see Richard John Lynn, "The Talent-Learning Polarity in Chinese Poetics: Yan Yu and the Later Tradition," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 5, no. 1 (July 1983): 157–184.

[9] Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of 'Talent' and 'Morality,'" in *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Conflicts, and Accommodations*, ed. Bin Wong, Ted Huters, and Pauline Yu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 237. The "three obediences" are obedience to her father before marriage, obedience to her husband after marriage, and obedience to her son after her husband's death; the "four virtues" are morality 德, proper speech 言, proper manner or appearance 容, and diligence in work (in particular embroidery) 功.

out in a study of the *Fifth Work of Genius*, "What the maker of the text expresses, in Jin Shengtan's view, is not his private feelings or emotions but his own literary talent and aesthetic capacities."[10] Jin Shengtan does not, however, identify talent with the individual author's person. Instead, at the height of their literary capacity, writers of Genius are—quite literally—interchangeable. Jin says as much in his first preface to *Water Margin*, where he declares, "only [the ancient philosopher] Zhuangzi could have composed the [Han-dynasty] *Historical Records*, and only [the Han-dynasty historian] Sima Qian could have composed the [ancient work of philosophy] *Zhuangzi*. How do I know this? I came to know it by reading *Water Margin*" 惟莊生能作《史記》，惟子長能作《莊子》。吾惡乎知之？吾讀《水滸》而知之矣.[11] By presenting talent as a decidedly *impersonal* attainment of literary excellence, Jin Shengtan's work makes conspicuous use of this familiar literary critical term but does so in reference to something far removed from the word's traditional connotations.

While Wu's characterization of talent's role in Jin's work is perhaps too individualistic, she and others have correctly observed that, for Jin, Genius plays out in the text's formal attributes. A characteristic feature of Jin's commentaries is his emphasis on *wenfa* 文法, which literary scholars have generally translated as "literary method" or "literary technique." In his reading guidelines for *Water Margin*, Jin identifies fifteen such techniques, including "advance insertion" 倒插法, "detailed and extended narration" 大落墨法, and "incomplete repetition of a topic" 略犯法, in addition to the poetically termed "otter's tail" 獺尾法, "clouds cutting mountains in half" 橫雲斷山法, and "joining a broken zither string with glue" 鸞膠續絃法.[12]

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[10] Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtan (1608–1661): Founder of a Chinese Theory of the Novel" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 107.

[11] Jin Shengtan, "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:21; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:11.

[12] Jin Shengtan, "Dufa" 讀法, in *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 3, *JSTQJ* (2008) 3:34–36; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:22–24. These terms are translated by John Wang in "Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the *Shui-hu chuan* (The Water

Sally Church has noted that Jin's understanding of literary techniques in *Romance of the Western Chamber* is somewhat more elusive, as he refrains from providing specific examples from the text.[13] There, too, however, his commentary consistently attends to the author's grasp of textual features.

Without detracting from such literary understandings of *fa* in Jin's work, I propose a more expansive reading of *fa* as at once technique and "form" in the Buddhist sense of the word. This dual reading is invited by Jin's third preface to *Water Margin*, where he pronounces the Buddhist dictum that "causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena [Skt. *dharma*]" 因緣生法 shortly before noting that *Water Margin* contains forms of diction, phrasing, sectioning, and the form of a work as a whole—all literary phenomena that fall under the category of visible and material dharmas known as forms (*se* 色, Skt. *rūpa*).[14] David Rolston has observed in passing a correspondence between Jin's praise for the author's grasp of literary character—perhaps the foremost category of forms with which his commentary is concerned—and Jin's "conception of the author of genius as one able to impersonate characters without a trace of his own ego."[15] Indeed, throughout Jin Shengtan's commentaries, there is an intrinsic relation between Genius's

Margin)," in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and David Rolston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 124–145.

[13] Sally Church, "Beyond the Words," 15.

[14] Several authoritative Jin Shengtan scholars have provided more purely literary readings of this statement by construing it as a metaphor for the individual author's creative genius. See Chen Hong 陳洪, "Shi *Shuihu* Jin pi 'yinyuan sheng fa' shuo" 釋《水滸》金批"因緣生法"說, *Nanke xuebao* 南科學報, no. 2 (1984): 42–75; and *Jin Shengtan zhuanlun* 金聖歎傳論 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1996), 168-179; Zhong Xinan 鍾錫南, *Jin Shengtan wenxue piping lilun yanjiu* 金聖歎文學批評理論研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 22, 62-66; Wu Zhenglan, *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 11–12, 25, and 30; and Wu Zhenglan, "*Lun fojiao 'yinyuan' shuo dui Jin Shengtan wenxue lilun de yingxiang*" 論佛教"因緣"說對金聖歎文學理論的影響, in *Mingqing sixiang wenhua bianqian* 明清思想文化變遷, ed. Xu Sumin 許蘇民 and Shentu Luming 申屠爐明 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2009). The present study contends that, while such metaphorical readings are perfectly viable, accepting the philosophical implications of Jin's Buddhist terminology allows for a much richer reading of his approach to examining literary form.

[15] David Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 26.

impersonal aspect and the author's capacity to attend simultaneously to forms of writing and forms of being—and, though it has not yet been noted, this relation bears important Buddhist implications.

And yet long ago, Jin Shengtan's attention to fiction's formal features and distinctive personae served to establish his historical reputation as a decisively literary figure. According to William Hedberg's examination of *Water Margin*'s reception among Meiji-period (1868–1912) Japanese scholars, Jin's commentarial attention to literary character helped solidify *Water Margin*'s status as a work of "pure literature" (*jun bungaku*) at a formative moment in Chinese literature's development as a modern discipline of study.[16] Along similar lines, throughout the twentieth century, scholars have attended closely to Jin's focus on literary form and creative innovation. For its attention to such features of literary experience, his work has been favorably compared to that of literary critics ranging from Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette to Roland Barthes.[17] Through the accretion of such analyses, Jin Shengtan's image has come to be that of a proto-modern literary critic, a brilliant mind primarily invested in matters of aesthetic interest. Scholarship's tendency to read Jin Shengtan's critical stance along such disciplinary lines of interest, however, has produced a historically persistent contradiction that the present chapter aims to resolve.

[16] According to William Hedberg, Kubo Tenzui uses this phrase to describe vernacular fiction and drama of the Ming dynasty, which, he presumed, "stood outside traditional ideology." Hedberg, "Histories of Reading and Nonreading: *Shuihu zhuan* as Text and Touchstone in Early Modern Japan," in *The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction:* The Water Margin *and the Making of a National Canon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 140.

[17] Martin Huang, "Author(ity) and Reader in Traditional Chinese Xiaoshuo Commentary," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 16 (December, 1994): 41–67; Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtan (1608–1661): Founder of a Chinese Theory of the Novel," 141–142, 175–177, 212–237; Ellen Widmer, "Reading Between the Lines: Chin Sheng-t'an and the Reconstruction of the 'Author' in *Shui-hu chuan*," in *Margins of Utopia:* Shui-hu hou-chuan *and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 103–106.

This contradiction pertains to how we conceive the relationship between Jin Shengtan and his most influential critical predecessor, the intellectual firebrand Li Zhi 李贄 (Zhuowu 卓吾, 1527–1602). Decades before Jin Shengtan published his *Water Margin* commentary, Li Zhi printed his "Preface to *The Loyal and Righteous at the Water Margin*" 忠義水滸傳序 as a standalone essay in his incendiary collection of personal writings *A Book to Burn* 焚書 (published in 1590 or 1592),[18] which remained wildly popular among late-Ming readers even after it was politically censured and, quite literally, put to the flames. Li Zhi's preface was later incorporated into highly popular 100- and 120-chapter commentary editions of *Water Margin* (published in 1610 and 1612, respectively), the latter of which probably served as the basis for Jin Shengtan's heavily revised and redacted 70-chapter edition.[19] In stark contrast to Jin's skepticism regarding personal expression's moral merit, Li Zhi lauded *Water Margin* as a work of authorial indignation, insisting that the novel's outlaws be read as the loyal and righteous antitheses to the hypocritical officials whose corruption had driven otherwise upstanding people to society's margins. In his preface, Li reasons that Shi Nai'an and his purported co-author Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (c. 13th–14th century), outraged over the political events that had led to the downfall of the Song dynasty in which the novel is set, vented their indignation through the

[18] Li Zhi, "Zhongyi shuihu zhuan xu" 忠義水滸傳序 ("Preface to the *Loyal and Righteous at the Water Margin*"), in *Fenshu* 焚書, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 108–09; also *Fenshu zhu* 焚書注, ed. by Zhang Jianye 張建業 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 302. For a translation, see Huiying Chen and Drew Dixon, trans., "Preface to *The Loyal and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh*," in Li Zhi, *A Book to Burn*, 125–28.

[19] Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 29. The two most influential predecessors to Jin Shengtan's edition of *Water Margin* were the 100-chapter Hall of Abandon (*Rongyu tang* 容與堂) edition (published in 1610 in Hangzhou) and the 120-chapter Yuan Wuya 袁無崖 edition (published c. 1612 in Suzhou). Jin Shengtan's commentary follows the latter edition but excises the last fifty chapters. His annotations frequently draw on those of the Yuan Wuya edition, but add a great deal of detail, in addition to a philosophical framework that is absent in earlier editions.

work's outlaws, whom Li deemed morally exemplary for their embodiment of the Confucian virtues of loyalty and righteousness.

Jin Shengtan took issue with Li Zhi's moral appraisal of *Water Margin*'s outlaws. In his short but vehement second preface to the novel, Jin denounces the "unknown" latter-day person who added the words "loyal and righteous" to the novel's title (whom almost all late-Ming readers would have immediately recognized as the famously censored Li Zhi) as a "chaos-loving scoundrel" (*haoluan zhi tu* 好亂之徒) on the grounds that conflating brigandage with the Confucian moral ideals of loyalty and righteousness is bound to promote social disorder. Jin specifically protests Li Zhi's understanding of the novel as a work of authorial indignation inspired by personal feeling. Instead, in this preface and through his forged authorial preface, he characterizes the author as a politically detached man of leisure who took an episode from Song-dynasty history as material for a great work of historical adventure fiction.

Herein arises the contradiction: numerous scholars have noted that Jin Shengtan's ardent rejection of the novel's status as an expressive work seems not to accord with his palpable aesthetic admiration for the work's portrayal of its 108 bandits.[20] According to William Hedberg, even the prominent Japanese fiction writer Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭 馬琴 (1767–1848) "spent much of his lengthy career addressing Jin's hermeneutic agenda—namely, the question of how the ethically troubling actions of the Liangshan outlaws might be reconciled with the bewitchingly compelling narrative itself" and complained of "Jin's inability to decide whether [*Water Margin*]

[20] John Ching-yu Wang identified a contradiction in Jin's condemnation of outlawry, on the one hand, and his frequent expressions of sympathy for the outlaws in the text, on the other, *Chin Sheng-t'an*, 60–65. David Rolston provides reasoning to this effect in "Contradictions in the Jin Shengtan Commentary Edition," in *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 41–42. Zhong Xinan perceives the same contradiction in Jin Shengtan political thought; see his "Sixiang de maodunxing" 思想的矛盾性, in *Jin Shengtan wenxue piping lilun*, 52–55. Xiaoqiao Ling attributes Jin's attempt to distinguish his definition of talent from Li Zhi's conception of excellent writing to an anxiety of influence, *Jinxiu caizi*, 186.

was a work born of authorial 'indignation' or the 'free and easy mind-set' he posited in his preface."[21] In the context of present-day scholarship, as a consequence of precisely this seeming contradiction, Jin's points of disagreement with Li Zhi have often been read against the grain of their own word, as ironic denunciations of personal expression or as evidence of Jin's anxiety over Li Zhi's literary influence. Somewhat remarkably, given his protestations, Jin Shengtan has long been associated with the same school of expressionist criticism to which Li Zhi belonged.

But the sincerity of Jin Shengtan's opposition to Li Zhi should not be too readily dismissed. In 1641, the date of Jin's third preface, rebel uprisings were an urgent political problem. As in the novel, in the 1620s rebel groups—some taking themselves to be politically independent from the court—established themselves in mountain hideaways and conducted raids on Ming outposts.[22] *Water Margin* was in fact banned from 1642 to the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 (when Jin Shengtan was finally able to publish his edition) for what authorities perceived as its promotion of such outlawry.[23] Robert Hegel has observed that Jin's most significant editorial liberty, his excision of the novel's last fifty chapters, does away with the chapters wherein the outlaws receive imperial pardon, thus denying the outlaws any opportunity to politically redeem themselves.[24] Hegel reasons that this and numerous other revisions attest to Jin's opposition to the practice of granting political pardon, a recurring feature of late-Ming governance.[25] Hegel's historicist reading is compelling for its integral treatment of Jin Shengtan as both a literary critic and a politically engaged historical actor. Given that Jin Shengtan, who

[21] William Hedberg, *The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction*, 79–80.

[22] In a review of several works on this subject, John W. Dardess recounts this detail from Larisa Vasil'evna Simonovskaia, *Antifeodal'naia bor'ba kitaiskikh krest'ian v XVII veke* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1960), 116–118. See John W. Dardess, "Review: The Late Ming Rebellions: Peasants and Problems of Interpretation," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1972): 103–117.

[23] Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 105.

[24] William Hedberg, *The Japanese Discovery of Chinese Fiction*, 68–69.

[25] Robert Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*, 78.

was executed for protesting official corruption in Suzhou, died for an ethical cause, it stands to reason that he may have written for one, too.

Jin Shengtan's unusually impersonal understanding of talent as Genius was intended to serve this cause. This fact comes to light when we consider both his attention to literary form and his opposition to Li Zhi from a less purely literary perspective—as points of philosophical concern.

It is not altogether surprising that such concerns would have played out on the platform of vernacular fiction. As I aim to demonstrate, in drawing on vernacular and other expressive forms of writing, the late-Ming expressionist critics who preceded Jin had already boldly reworked fundamental points of Ming-dynasty Neo-Confucian thought, in particular that of the mind's role in serving as a basis for moral knowledge. In order to combat these earlier literary-philosophical interventions, Jin Shengtan returned to many of the same literary works, but used them to impart a radically different philosophical basis for moral conduct. In line with these observations, Hegel's now-canonical work on *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China* makes a compelling case for the idea that the rise of the novel in early modern China was in fact related to its role in offering literati a venue for ideological expression.[26] Hegel's insight challenges the idea of the novel as a strictly literary form, a mere product or artistic correlate of Neo-Confucianism's aforementioned turn to the mind. This insight invites an examination of the novel as a medium of philosophical thought unto itself.

[26] Hegel, *The Novel*, xii. On page 64 of the same work, Hegel points out, "In their concern with didactic impact, China's seventeenth-century novelists did not differ in any significant way from writers in more orthodox literary forms." In a forthcoming essay, Hegel also reads fiction commentary attributed to Li Zhi (which he identifies as the work of the commercial commentator Ye Zhou) along philosophical lines, which further suggests that readers of these novels may have had certain philosophical expectations in coming to these works.

These extraliterary aspects of Jin's work remain largely understudied. Patricia Sieber has previously remarked upon such scholarly oversights with respect to the role of Buddhist discourse in Jin's drama commentary. In a groundbreaking article on this subject, she observes:

> the modern silence on the religious dimensions of Jin's work, much more than merely a serendipitous coincidence, emblematizes one of the contingencies of modern canon formation. More specifically, a review of biographical and critical writings on Jin Shengtan will show that enforcing disciplinary divisions between local "religious" elements and seemingly global "philosophical" or "literary" standards opened up the possibility of integrating traditional Chinese literature into the emergent category of "world literature."[27]

In response to such disciplinary limitations, Sieber's research has examined how Buddhist discourse gives voice to the soteriological aims of Jin Shengtan's poetry and drama commentaries. In fact, sinophone scholarship both before and since Sieber's call to interdisciplinary action has examined Jin Shengtan's use of Buddhist rhetoric. Wu Zhenglan's comprehensive survey of Jin Shengtan's intellectual context as well as Xiaoqiao Ling's recent work on Jin's *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary consider Jin's diverse references to Buddhist texts and tropes in meticulous detail.[28] But these studies consistently expunge Jin's Buddhist rhetoric of its moral and philosophical charge, choosing instead to treat the interdiscursive moments in his commentary as metaphors for a purely literary mode of thought.[29] This and the chapters that follow offer a significant expansion on Sieber's insight by reading these rhetorical moments as constructing a literary-philosophical intervention. The literary approach that develops alongside Jin's more philosophically charged comments responds to a seventeenth-century moment of hermeneutic crisis and shapes a morally directed approach to

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[27] Patricia Sieber, "Religion and Canon Formation," 52–53.

[28] Wu Zhenglan, *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 247–282, 437–487; Ling Xiaqiao, "'Jinxiu caizi'" and "Jin Shengtan piping *Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji*——chuancheng, chuangxin yu jieshou" 金聖歎批評《第六才子書西廂記》——傳承、創新、與接受, *Renwen Zhongguo xuebao* 人文中國學報 25 (2018): 49–84.

[29] This is the case in both Wu's and Ling's studies, as well as in the analyses conducted by Chen Hong and Zhong Xinan cited above.

self-cultivation by means of a Buddhist reframing of literary form. Sieber herself suggests this possibility near the end of the above article when she states that: "Buddhist ideas about nonduality may have provided certain imaginative resources in dealing with a sense of social crisis pervading the socio-literary field of the seventeenth century." And "Propelled by a sense that literature, conventionally conceived, failed to offer remedies for a crisis of signification, Jin and his modern critics sought redress in texts through the vernacular canon."[30] Sieber's studies limit the development of this idea in relation to Jin's *Romance of the Western Chamber* and Tang poetry commentaries and the broad backdrop of seventeenth-century society. The present study contends that Jin's intervention applied to a more specific moral-philosophical crisis and unfolded alongside all his commentarial endeavors, not only in the explicitly Buddhist passages of drama and poetry commentary that Sieber's articles consider. Jin Shengtan drew on what we would today regard separately as religious, philosophical, and literary discourses to develop an innovative system of hermeneutics that he intended to apply to all literary works—and the world beyond their margins.

By way of adding to Sieber's above insight regarding the "religious" aspects of Jin Shengtan's work, I would suggest that literary scholarship has likewise overlooked the more "philosophical" elements at play in Jin Shengtan's commentaries by focusing somewhat exclusively on the secular, aesthetic dimensions of a broadly Confucian tradition associated with the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, the compilation of which was historically attributed to the Sage himself.[31] While this understanding of Confucianism's role in literary criticism is not incorrect, it is incomplete, for Confucianism from the Song dynasty onward is also profoundly

[30] Patricia Sieber, "Religion and Canon Formation," 64.
[31] For an overview of this tradition, see David Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 145–150.

concerned with an ontology founded on a conception of moral principle (*li* 理).[32] Scholars have occasionally noted in passing that Jin Shengtan's choice to append "Reading Guidelines" (*dufa* 讀法) to his first two published Works of Genius seems to have been inspired by the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi's discourses on literature, but none have considered the possibility that Jin Shengtan intended to present himself as Zhu Xi's interlocutor in this metaphysically charged discourse—an intention he reveals in his first preface to *Water Margin*, where he begins by speaking (though somewhat subversively) in Zhu Xi's voice.[33] But given that literary analysis seems obliged to pursue the aesthetic lines of inquiry that developed alongside the discipline, how are literary scholars to do full justice to literary criticism's philosophical imbrications?

Jin Shengtan's preferred intellectual medium invites us out of this methodological impasse. Unlike modern fields of study, Chinese literary commentary is inherently "undisciplined." This is especially so in the context of vernacular fiction, which was a relative latecomer to the Chinese commentarial tradition.[34] Commentators working outside the institutional parameters of the court or organized religion—of which there were many during the institutionally unstable late-Ming and early-Qing periods—drew freely on diverse fields of interest to develop and promote unofficial modes of thought and systems of value. Such

[32] According to Wing-tsit Chan, *li* first arose as an important theme in Confucian philosophy in the teachings of Han Fei (d. 233 BCE), who may have been strongly influenced by the *Zhuangzi*'s 莊子 emphasis on natural or heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理). Chan observes that during the thousand years preceding the advent of Song-dynasty establishment of Neo-Confucianism, *li* was most significantly developed by Buddhist thinkers. See Wing-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept of Li as Principle," in *Neo-Confucianism, etc.: Essays by Wing-tsit Chan* (Hanover, NH: Oriental Society, 1969), 45–87. For an examination of *li*'s development in Chinese discourses prior to the advent of Neo-Confucianism, see Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought: Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); and Ziporyn, *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents* (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 2013).

[33] I discuss this preface in chapter three, part two.

[34] For a study of fiction commentary's influence on the development of fiction and fiction criticism during the early modern period and beyond, see David Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*.

commentary is in this sense naturally geared toward intellectual innovation, as some conservative thinkers were wont to complain.[35]

In accord with the intellectual freedom commentary afforded, Jin Shengtan's concerns frequently depart from the aesthetic parameters of his base texts, a fact to which his contemporaries were sensitive. The dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80), for instance, though an innovative fiction writer and commentator in his own right, balked at Jin Shengtan's inclination to read *Romance of the Western Chamber* with little regard for the work's musical and performative features.[36] Jin's commentarial eccentricities were likewise known at court. In dialogue with Chan Master Hongjue Daomin 弘覺道忞禪師 (1594-1674), who was visiting the capital in 1659, the Qing Shunzhi Emperor (1638–61) remarked that he was acquainted with Jin's "commentaries on *Romance of the Western Chamber* and *Water Margin*, and his remarks [therein] are exceedingly thought-provoking, but his interpretations are really too forced. I think he is a person of outstanding talent but eccentric opinion" 他曾批評得有西廂、水滸傳。議論儘有遐思，未免太生穿鑿，想是才高而見僻者.[37] But it was precisely by means of such provocative interpretations that Jin Shengtan worked literary, Neo-Confucian, and Buddhist traditions of thought together to develop a hermeneutic approach anchored by a new conception of Genius.

[35] Wang Yangming evinces just such a critical stance toward commentary in a dialogue with his disciple Xu Ai 徐愛 (1487–1517). See *Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄 (*Instructions for Practical Living*), 1:11. Translated in Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 17–22.

[36] Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 43.

[37] *Tiantong Hongjue min chanshi bei you ji* 天童弘覺忞禪師北遊集, *juan* 3, J 26.B180.295c17.

Defining Talent

Talent appears frequently enough in literary criticism from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries that its recurring role in Jin's work initially seems rather unremarkable. During this long historical span, talent refers broadly to a scholar's capacity (either inborn or trained) for literary interpretation and composition, skills traditionally, if idealistically, associated with an individual's suitability to serve as a morally upright official and therefore integral to success in the essay-based imperial examinations (*keju* 科舉). Along similar lines, the notion of the talented scholar frequently figures as a thematic element in romantic "talent-and-beauty" (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) narratives such as the aforementioned song-drama *Romance of the Western Chamber*. Such pragmatic figurations of talent, however, tend to glance over this term's contested philosophical implications, which are of greater consequence to understanding Jin Shengtan's work.

To fully appreciate Jin Shengtan's idea of Genius, we need to recover the unusual definition of talent against which he formulated his flagship term. Locating this semantic origin requires us to read well beyond the margins of his fiction commentary. Jin Shengtan repeatedly invites us to do just this. He regarded his edition of *Water Margin*—and all of his other commentary editions—as a node within a wide multigeneric web of works. Within this web, *Water Margin* occupies a position of particular significance, as a gateway to other forms. At the close of his third personal preface to *Water Margin*, which he addresses to his ten-year-old son, he proclaims:

> Read [*Water Margin*] and you'll obtain a method for reading all works. If you are truly able to excel at this method, then next year's classical learning is already complete. Just use it to read all the works of the realm, and the ease of this task will turn out to be like that of splitting bamboo. And then you will exclaim that Shi Nai'an's *Water Margin* is truly the comprehensive key (*zongchi* 總持, an expression also used to translate the Buddhist term *dharani*) to literary works.

讀之即得讀一切書之法也。汝真能善得此法，而明年經業既畢，便以之遍讀天下之書，其易果如破竹也者，夫而後歎施耐庵《水滸傳》真為文章之總持。[38]

By declaring his commentary edition a path to formal literary attainment, Jin Shengtan presents this popular novel's portrayal of diverse characters and literary techniques as something akin to a literary anthology, a genre of publication which was in his day in great demand.[39] Like the anthologies of our own time, such publications gathered broad assortments of short works of classical prose, poetry, or examination-essay writing to acquaint students with cultural and technical knowledge and expose them to a range of authorial styles. In the imperial Chinese context, these literary lessons were likewise studied for their association with models of moral conduct. For the sake of their students' literary and ideological betterment, anthology editors often provided their selections with annotations to clarify literary content and provide ideological guidelines for interpretation. Elsewhere in his writings, Jin denigrates the broad and shallow approach overwhelmed students must often have applied to reading such preparatory materials. Here he suggests that, like the short Buddhist dharanis (incantations or spells) thought capable of standing in for all the world's sutras, *Water Margin* might replace such educationally exhaustive—and exhausting—efforts. He proposes that rather than attempting to devour an incredible number of literary selections, students attend to the way in which the formal nuances of just this one work might open onto a wider world of literary forms.

Beyond issues of pedagogical convenience, it turns out that Jin Shengtan had an ideological axe to grind with one anthology, in particular. In his next Work of Genius, published sixteen years after he composed the above preface, Jin returns to the subject of literary

[38] Jin Shengtan, "Xu san," in *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:751; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:12.

[39] For historical study of the Ming-dynasty popularity of this sort of publication, see Timothy Clifford, "In the Eye of the Selector: Ancient-Style Prose Anthologies in Ming-Dynasty (1368–1644) China" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2017).

anthologies and slyly hands his readers a key to his entire commentarial program. His seemingly offhand comment guides us away from the lively realm of vernacular literature toward an equally lively arena of philosophical debate. This divergence appears in the fourteenth of Jin's eighty-one "Guidelines for Reading the *Sixth Work of Genius: Romance of the Western Chamber*," wherein he compares his drama commentary to an unpublished anthology of classical prose he compiled at around the same time he published his edition of *Water Margin*:

> In the past, because I wanted my son and nephews to produce fine compositions, I once took up writings from the *Zuo Tradition*, *Strategies of the Warring States*, *Zhuangzi*, "Encountering Sorrow," *Gongyang*, *Guliang*, *The Historical Records*, *The Book of Han*, Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, the three Sus, and such and compiled over a hundred miscellaneous passages. I imitated Mr. Zhang Dongchu's old title *Must-Read Classical Literature*,[40] only I added the word "Geniuses" (*caizi*) calling it *Must-Read Works for Geniuses*, because I expected those who read it would certainly become Geniuses. I have long wanted have it carved on blocks [i.e., published] so that I might distribute it and ask for corrections, but sadly, due to the bloodshed and chaos [following the fall of the Ming dynasty], my household has been poor and without means, and up to today I haven't succeeded in doing so. Now, having submitted *Romance of the Western Chamber*, I will not worry about this again.
>
> 僕昔因兒子及甥輩要他做得好文字，曾將《左傳》、《國策》、《莊》、《騷》、《公》、《穀》、《史》、《漢》、韓、柳、三蘇等書雜選一百餘篇，依張侗初先生《必讀古文》舊名，只加「才子」二字，名曰《才子必讀書》，蓋致望讀之者之必為才子也。久欲刻布請正，苦因喪亂，家貧無貲，至今未就。今既呈得《西廂記》，便亦不復念之矣。[41]

The anthologist Jin mentions is Zhang Nai 張鼐 (courtesy name Dongchu 侗初, *jinshi* 1604), whose name appears infrequently in present-day studies, but who in his own day was an influential literary figure. The anthology Jin mentions was probably well-known, as can be

[40] *Guwen* 古文 typically refers specifically to classical prose, but the volume in question contains works of poetry, as well, so I have opted for a broader translation.

[41] Jin Shengtan, "Du Diliu caizi she *Xixiang ji* fa" 讀第六才子書西廂記法, in *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji* 貫華堂第六才子書西廂記, *juan* 2, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:856–7; *JSTQJ* (1985), 3:12. Lu Lin's 2008 edition follows the Qing Shunzhi-era *Guanhua tang* 貫華堂 edition, checking this edition against the 1720 (59th Year of Kangxi) *Jiezi yuan huixiang Diliu caizi shu* 芥子園繪像第六才子書 edition.

inferred both from Jin Shengtan's familiar reference to the work and the fact that it was printed in several different editions, including one with an additional layer of commentary appended.[42]

Casual though Jin's comment may seem, any reader familiar with Zhang's anthology would have readily recognized in this statement a contest of perspectives over literature's function, a contest which hinges upon differing conceptions of talent. This is because Zhang's anthology advertises its stance on talent most emphatically. The contents of Zhang's anthology are organized into four ranked categories prominently advertised on the compilation's title page. Among these, Zhang includes a category for works of literary talent—only to rank this category last. The heading of this fourth abased category implies a judgment: "What is called 'literature' is ornament added to the Way. Talented persons [use it to] attain their ambitions. We rank it last" 文者，道之華，才人得意，終之.[43] At the other end of this evaluative schema, the prime position in Zhang's anthology is reserved for "Texts that prioritize moral integrity and are therefore ranked first. Such works inspire rectitude in people and establish moral principle" 文章以氣骨為主，故先，正人立節.[44] Taking this organizational rationale into account, an alternate title for Zhang's compendium might be *Must-Read Works against Talent*. In this light, Jin's passing reference to the earlier text is not innocent. For by valorizing talent throughout his commentary editions, Jin not only advertises a promise of literary excellence—he inverts Zhang Nai's system of literary value.

[42] Zhang Nai, et al., ed., *Zhang Dongchu taishi pingxuan jujie bidu guwen gangmu* 張侗初太史評選句解必讀古文綱目 (Gest Library, Princeton University: c. 1626–27), hereafter *Bidu guwen*. Two alternate editions of this work are *Xinjuan Dongchu taishi yongsi zhai pingxuan guwen bidu* 新鐫侗初太史永思齋評選古文必讀, 8 *juan* (Maeda Ikutokukai 前田育德会, Ming dynasty) and *Zhang Dongchu xiansheng huiji bidu guwen zhengzong* 張侗初先生彙輯必讀古文正宗 (University Library Special Collections, Chinese University of Hong Kong).

[43] Zhang Nai, *Bidu guwen*, 1:15a.

[44] Zhang Nai, *Bidu guwen*, 1:14b.

This system of value, at least insofar as Zhang advertises it, derives from the most orthodox Neo-Confucian sources. Zhang's description of literature as "ornament added to the way" immediately recalls a famous remark by Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), the forefather of the Song-dynasty Confucian revival. In this remark, Zhou describes writing as a vessel for the Way, a cosmic and moral standard which in Confucian discourse refers to the teachings of the sages and worthies (*shengxian* 聖賢) who exemplify moral conduct:

> Literature is that which is used to convey the Way. If a carriage is decorated but no one uses it, then the decorations are in vain. How much more so in the case of an empty carriage! Literature and rhetoric are techniques; the Way and morality are substance. When someone firm in substance as well as skilled [in writing] writes down [the Way], if it is beautiful, then [people] will love it; if [people] love it, then it will be passed on.
>
> 文所以載道也。輪轅飾而人夫庸，徒飾也，況虛車乎？文辭藝也，道德實也。篤其實而藝者書之，美則愛，愛則傳焉。[45]

For Zhou Dunyi, beautiful writing assists in transmitting moral substance but is also at risk of conveying nothing at all. Such strained pairings of capacity and morality, literary craft and the Way, however strained in their implications, appear frequently throughout Neo-Confucian discourse. In such contexts, discussions of talent often pertain to the relation between literature (*wen* 文), broadly construed to include all the stuff of humanistic study, and the Way. The former is broadly associated with talent; the latter, with morality and canonical study. The tension between these two terms persists in debates surrounding literary practice, in particular with regard to poetry, well into the Qing dynasty. Scholars including Kang-i Sun Chang and Richard John Lynn have examined this literary-philosophical dyad in terms of a tension between talent

[45] Zhou Dunyi, "Wenci di'ershiba" 文辭第二十八, *Tongshu* 通書, in *Zhou Dunyi ji* 周敦頤集, ed. Chen Keming 陳克明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 2:34. Translation slightly adapted from Richard John Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist and Critic," 337.

and moral learning.[46] In order to illuminate Jin Shengtan's point of contention with Zhang Nai, however, it is useful to rethink this tension in somewhat different terms, ones we can derive from earlier critiques of talent's role in literary self-cultivation.

The sense of unease that Neo-Confucian thinkers express in relation to literary excellence attests to an anxiety about something more threatening than vapid ornamentation. I propose that this something more is at the crux of a critical point of difference Richard John Lynn identifies between Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), perhaps the brightest literary luminary in Chinese history, and the philosopher Zhu Xi, who established the basic form and syllabus of the imperial examination system employed from 1315 until 1905. Zhu Xi recognized the beauty and wondrousness (*huamiao* 華妙) of Su's writing, but censured the littérateur for his understanding of the relationship between writing and the Way. In Zhu Xi's estimation,

> According to [Su], it is always a matter of starting with writing then gradually working up to discussing the principles of the Way; it is never a matter of first understanding the principles of the Way before one starts to write. For this reason, absolutely everything he writes is deficient.
>
> 緣他都是因作文，卻漸漸說上道理來；不是先理會得道理了，方作文，所以大本都差。[47]

In thus disparaging Su Shi's understanding of the relation between writing and the Way, Zhu Xi oppugns Su Shi's emphasis on personal experience, as opposed to canonical study, as the means of apprehending the Way.[48] For Su Shi, Lynn explains, "the Way comes to one indirectly and

[46] Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of 'Talent' and 'Morality;'" Richard John Lynn, "The Talent-Learning Polarity."

[47] Zhu Xi, "Lun wen shang" 論文上, in *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 139, 8:3319. Translation slightly adapted from Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist," 338.

[48] It is likely that Zhu Xi's characterization of Su Shi's thought is oversimplified for rhetorical impact. Su Shi's understanding of personal experience was probably not "personal" in the sense that we understand this word to mean today.

subjectively through experience and action."[49] In this respect Su Shi, who was receptive to Daoist thought, seems to have regarded personal experience as possessed of an intrinsic cosmic and moral value. Su Shi's aim was to "employ writing to connect up with the Way" (*wen yi guan dao* 文以貫道). Yet for him, writing need not be mediated by canonical study in order to attain this goal.

Such philosophical differences notwithstanding, both Zhu Xi and Su Shi (who was also a prominent official) valued literary excellence as well as canonical study. The key discrepancy between them was whether writing well entailed expressing personal experience or exhibiting moral attainment through canonical study. What Neo-Confucian philosophers perceived as a threat, then, was not talent per se, but rather the personal or individualized element with which talent was affiliated.

This would explain why Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians often evince a bifurcated understanding of talent's place in self-cultivation. On one hand, capacity was crucial to implementing good governance; on the other, personal inclination risked incurring selfish interest. The latter is precisely what Confucian morality—with its emphasis on fidelity (*zhong* 忠) and reciprocity (*shu* 恕)—fundamentally eschewed. Early Neo-Confucian thinkers understood both of these paramount virtues in relation to a diminished or decentered self, describing fidelity as "committing oneself entirely to others" (*jin ji wei ren* 盡己為人) and reciprocity as "extending oneself toward others" (*tui ji ji ren* 推己及人). The self was that which orthodox morality aimed to contain such that it could work for a greater good.

[49] Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist," 339. Lynn's reading of Su Shi's thought is informed by Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi* 中國文學批評史 (Xianggang: Hongzhi shudian, 1970), 341–42 and 353–55.

In this context, elevating talent came dangerously close to celebrating the self for its own sake. In a comment inscribed at the end of the first event recorded in his famous historical work *The Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) discourses at length on the distinction between morality and talent in political affairs, explaining, "If talent and morality are both complete, we call this a sage; if both talent and morality are absent, we call this a fool; if morality outweighs talent, we call this a Confucian gentleman; if talent outweighs morality, we call this a petty person" 才德全盡謂之聖人，才德兼亡謂之愚人，德勝才謂之君子，才勝德謂之小人.[50] While both aspects have certain value, Sima presents talent as in need of morality's tempering influence, explaining that, historically, the unrestrained talent of a "petty person" is likely to topple a kingdom or bring down a clan through selfish conduct: "Those who are perceptive and resolute are deemed talented; those who are upright and moderate are deemed moral. Talent is morality's resource; morality is talent's marshal" 夫聰察強毅之謂才；正直中和之謂德。才者，德之資也；德者，才之帥也.[51] In this context, morality compensates for talent's perceived inclination toward the self-serving behavior that undermines social order. By means of such formative debates, the concept of talent was closely associated with the idea of sagehood even as it was also associated with people of the most dangerous kind.

Zhu Xi's remarks likewise evince this dual stance on talent. While the philosopher held a generally favorable opinion of talent's political and literary applications, he also expressed explicit concern about talent's tendency to grant precedence to the personal. When asked to

[50] Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, 1:13.
[51] Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 1:13.

elaborate on the distinction between talent and morality, Zhu Xi reflected on Sima Guang's assessment and recommended a generous view of talent:

> How could talent ever be altogether bad? Some people possess talent that is disciplined and resolute, and this is simply good. [As for] morality, there is also what is known as "benighted morality." If someone were such an idiot that they could nowhere be put to use, how could any moral benefit be derived from them!?
>
> 才如何全做不好？人有剛明果決之才，此自是好。德，亦有所謂『昏德』。若塊然無能為，亦何取於德！[52]

While a talented person might be useful, Zhu Xi nonetheless insisted that such people take special care in their literary training. He presents Su Shi's writings as particularly dangerous material for people of talent:

> If a person is possessed of a talented personality, then one must not make them read writing such as [Su Shi's]. If a person is possessed of a talented personality, then they must commit to the standards of moral conduct, otherwise, they are bound toward moral dissipation.
>
> 人有才性者，不可令讀東坡等文。有才性人，便須取入規矩；不然，蕩將去。[53]

This remark identifies talent as an aspect of personal nature (*xing* 性) susceptible to moral eccentricity—a pull away from the standards (*guiju* 規矩, literally the "compass and square") of orthodox morality. The danger of introducing a talented mind to Su Shi's writing is not simply that his writing is too beautiful, but that his theory of literature is founded on a literary ontology that takes personal experience as a direct means of accessing the Way without the measured guidance of canonical standards.

Bracketing talent's technical aspect and reconceiving the talent-morality debate in terms of the personal and the moral allows us to trace the source of this conceptual tension more precisely. While Qing-dynasty critics consistently associate talent with the writing's personal

[52] Zhu Xi, "Li dai yi" 歷代一, *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 134, 8:3205.
[53] Zhu Xi, "Lun wen shang," *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 139, 8:3322.

aspect, Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians evince a dual understanding of talent as a capacity that might be usefully employed on behalf of others or dangerously deployed to serve the self. Throughout these debates, morality's opponent is not talent in general, but its personal aspect in particular. And this personal aspect was sometimes criticized because it posed a risk to Neo-Confucianism's foundational teaching that the self must be contained to align with moral standards. Notably, however, it is not this aspect of talent that Zhang Nai's anthology disparages.

Redefining Morality

Zhang Nai and his editorial collaborators emphatically present their compendium as a work that elevates morality over aspects of writing traditionally associated with personality. As mentioned above, the anthology's title page advertises the four ranked categories according to which the collection's contents are arranged. In addition to this, the editors discuss their organizational principles among their prefaces and reiterate their rationale in the four headings under which they arrange the table of contents. Even the work's full title, *Major and Minor Works of Must-Read Classical Literature Annotated, Selected, and Interpreted by Academician Zhang Dongchu* 張侗初太史評選句解必讀古文綱目, underscores an overarching arbitration of literary value. What I have translated here as "major" and "minor" (a terminological pairing that may also be broadly translated as "compendium") refer to the two "guiding principles" (*dagang* 大綱) and two "minor items" (*ximu* 細目) according to which the anthology's four categories—morality, statecraft, expression, and wordcraft—are grouped, with the former two categories granted clear precedence over the latter two. In one of the anthology's prefaces, Zhang's collaborator Li Yuanzhen 李元珍 (fl. 1620s) elaborates at length on the reasoning behind these organizational principles:

> [*Must-Read Works of Classical Literature*] takes the establishment of moral principles for its first body of selections. From ancient times to the present, only moral integrity and righteous behavior have been of primary importance—we do not merely take writing as intrinsically superior. [The compendium] takes administering the kingdom and enriching its people [as the subject] for its second body of selections. [These works] pursue what is of substance and set no store by empty words. As for [works by] exceptional individuals who disport themselves according to personal temperament, emulating the mechanisms of creation, and setting their brushtips to lofty aims, this is [a matter of] understanding one's natural endowment. These are thus incorporated into the third body of selections. As for deliberately ornate writings of trifling skill, [those which] obtain transient success, even if they are made known for a thousand years, these are but excesses of carefully plotted writing! They are therefore selected for the fourth category.
>
> 其以立節屬第一選者。古今只有節義第一，不專以文勝也。以經濟屬第二選者，求實際不尚虛詞也。至於達人遊詠適情，造化之機，亦復翱翔筆端，所謂知命之學，故屬第三選。若夫雕蟲小技，得意一時，布景千載，則又筆陣之餘耳，故選第四.[54]

Li Yuanzhen's explanation of these evaluative rationale maintains the old opposition of talent and morality, but with a slight difference. While Li clearly demeans talent on the basis of its association with selfish, careerist conduct, the conception of talent that he presents is divested of its association with personal expression. A slightly higher position is allotted to the sort of writing we might associate with Su Shi, that of "exceptional individuals who disport themselves according to personal temperament." Both of these categories, however, are but "minor items." By contrast, the self-evidently orthodox values of morality and statecraft occupy the anthology's upper ranks. Were we to conclude our examination here, it would seem that Jin Shengtan champions a relatively amoral conception of talent as technical proficiency and individual brilliance. If we are to root out the source of Jin's difference with Zhang Nai, however, our examination must proceed further.

This is because Zhang Nai's excessive emphasis on orthodox morality deliberately belies his actual investment in personal expression. We can ascertain Zhang's allegiance to expression

[54] Zhang Nai, *Bidu guwen*, 1:10b–11b.

on the basis of his affiliation with the late-Ming school of criticism whose foremost representatives were Li Zhi and Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610).[55] While differences persisted among these so-called "expressionist" critics, their collective stance was one of a reaction against literary archaism (*fugu* 復古, literally "recovering antiquity").[56] The main progenitor of this earlier approach was the official and prolific writer Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1530), who advised studying particular literary forms for their exemplary manifestation of the Way. He famously pronounced that the models for "prose must be that of the Qin and Han dynasties, and [for] poetry must be that of the High Tang; if not thus, then it does not accord with the Way" 文必秦漢。詩必盛唐。非是者弗道.[57] By emulating such forms, Li Mengyang proposed, scholars could internalize moral principle and spontaneously manifest it in their own writings.[58] In his regard for technical proficiency's role in ethical self-expression, Li Mengyang was influenced by earlier Ming critics,[59] but he developed this poetic stance into a fully developed theory of literary self-cultivation, key to which was his identification of highly regulated historical forms of writing as manifesting the Way and his recommendation that the poet's unique voice should develop through the emulation of such forms. Reading this through the lens of Song-dynasty debates over the respective virtues of talent and morality in writing, Li

[55] Along with his brothers Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1560-1600) and Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1626), Yuan Hongdao founded the famous Gong'an School of poetry, which placed particular emphasis on expressing one's individual voice. Upon the invitation of Li Zhi's close associate Wang Benke 汪本鈳, Zhang Nai composed one of the three prefaces to Li Zhi's *Another Book to Burn* 續焚書, which was published in 1618, sixteen years after Li Zhi's death. In his preface, Zhang Nai explains that he never met Li Zhi, but he clearly demonstrates his sympathy with and loyalty to Li Zhi's writings. For an introduction to and translation of Zhang Nai's prefaces to that work, see Rivi Handler-Spitz, trans., "Upon Reading Old Zhuowu's Writings," in *A Book to Burn*, 233–37.

[56] Out of respect for the differences among these critics' respective understandings of personal expression, I henceforth refer to them not as belonging to an "expressionist" school of thought, but as anti-archaists.

[57] This famous saying is recorded in Li Mengyang's biography in *The History of the Ming* (*Mingshi* 明史).

[58] Daniel Bryant, *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483–1521) and His World* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 395–96.

[59] In particular Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1447–1516). See Bryant, *The Great Recreation*, 393–94.

Mengyang's theory offers a means of tempering talent's dangerous personal aspect by honing it against the moral principle he understood to be immanent in literary forms.

By delimiting talent to its definition as a mere capacity for superficial ornament, the anti-archaists developed a rhetorical strategy for disparaging Li Mengyang's approach to cultivating poetic expression. The anti-archaists took issue with this approach to shaping personal style and decried the emulation of archaic forms as but shallow mimicry conducted for the sake of pursuing a false moral reputation—thus divesting talent of its personal aspect but retaining its association with selfish conduct. This particular mode of critique is evident in an essay discussing *Romance of the Western Chamber* in Li Zhi's *A Book to Burn*:

> I have heard it said: A horse whose hooves can chase the wind and keep up with lightning is certainly not to be determined on the basis of whether the horse is a stallion or a mare or whether the horse has a black or a gold coat; a sage whose voice genuinely responds and whose *qi* immediately attracts others is not to be found among those scholars who count their lines and weigh out their ink; and writing that moves like wind over water is certainly not to be discerned in the marvel of a word or phrase. Whether a work's structure is tightly woven and parallel lines are perfectly matched; whether it accords with principle and agrees with ideal models; whether the beginning and end echo each other and the abstract and concrete elements are in balance—such various detrimental criteria are used to discuss literature. Yet all of these are useless in discussing the most superior literature on earth.
>
> 且吾聞知:追風遂電之足，決不在於牝牡驪黃之間;聲應氣求之夫，決不在於尋行數墨之士；風行水上之文，決不在於一字一句之奇。若夫結搆之密，偶對之切；依於理道，合乎法度，首尾相應，虛實相生，種種禪病皆所以語文，而皆不可以語於天下之至文也。[60]

In Li Zhi's judgement, the formal capacity with which Li Yuanzhen and Zhang Nai pejoratively associate talent is a worthless indicator of real value. While it is likely that Li Zhi's writings provided the inspiration for Zhang Nai's diminution of talent, however, a key difference pertains between Li Zhi's comments and those presented in the compendium, the latter of which are

[60] Li Zhi, "Za Shuo" 雜說, *Fenshu*, 96; *Fenshu zhu*, 272; translation adapted from Pauline C. Lee, trans., "On Miscellaneous Matters," in *A Book to Burn*, 103.

deliberately couched in Neo-Confucian rhetoric. While both Li Zhi and his anti-archaist allies denounce mere literary capacity, the latter are more visibly concerned with upholding what at least appears to be a Neo-Confucian conception of a timeless moral principle.

In fact, it is precisely on the basis of such a timeless principle that Zhang's anthology insists upon undoing Li Mengyang's emphasis on literary periodization. Zhang's opposition to Li Mengyang is implicit in the compendium's non-chronological arrangement and is made explicit by the very first lines of the anthology's first preface, which resolutely refuse archaism's characteristic valorization of particular dynastic forms:

> There is no distinction between classical and contemporary among literary works. That there is such a distinction is due to literati having made it up themselves. That there is no such distinction is due to the literary mind's making it thus. That there [seems to be] a distinction between classical and contemporary without there actually being such a distinction is due to the fact that, while there is no ruler among literary works, there is a fulfillment of [literary] phases. Therefore, [when it is said that] after the Han there is no [great] prose and after the Tang there is no [great] poetry, it is not the case that there is [no longer any great] prose or poetry.
>
> 文章無古今。其有古今之別者，文人自為之也。其無古今之別者，文心自為之也。其有古今之別而實無古今之別者，則文章無主而氣運有靈者也。故漢以後無文，唐以後無詩，非無文與詩也。[61]

Whereas Li Mengyang took the formal regulations of archaic prose and poetry as embodiments of the Way, this preface fundamentally devalues such formal distinctions. Another anti-archaist anthology (published in 1620), this one of late-Ming writings compiled by Yuan Hongdao and edited by Zhang Nai, expresses exactly the same sentiment. This anthology's first preface justifies an achronological approach to literary cultivation on the basis of a transhistorical substance, which we may in this context take to be the Way:

> Do contemporary and classical writings stand alone? We say, "Absolutely not." Do the practices of reading contemporary and classical writings stand apart? We say,

[61] Zhang Nai, *Bidu guwen*, 1:4b–5a. The preface proceeds to dismiss the cliched association of prose with the Han dynasty and poetry with the Tang dynasty.

> "Absolutely not." Writings of today are entirely smelted together with and cast from ancient writings, yet a historical period will spit out a brilliant literary form or a splendid rhyme-scheme. When [such forms] are new, they are called contemporary writings, but they can just as well be called ancient writings.
>
> 今文古文觭乎哉？曰否否。讀今文與讀古文觭乎哉？曰否否。今之文俱融鑄古文，而時吐以英華體裁音調彪炳。一新雖謂今文，即古文可也。[62]

By invoking this historically transcendent substance, Yuan Hongdao's anthology asserts a continuum of literary worthies extending from the ancient sages to the present. According to the collection's (likewise non-chronological) table of contents, this continuum includes Yuan himself, his brothers, Zhang Nai, and Li Zhi, as well as pieces by the Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529).

These anti-archaist pronouncements against periodization, combined with Zhang Nai's highly visible valorization of morality over personality, invite a practical question: if neither archaic forms nor personal expression signal a literary work's moral merit, what does? The answer is precisely that to which Jin Shengtan's conception of Genius was opposed.

And this answer resides not so much in Zhang Nai's redefinition of talent as in the surreptitious redefinition of morality from which his emphatic denunciations of talent distract. Zhang's conceptual sleight of hand reveals itself upon a closer examination of his anthology's top category, that of works which "inspire rectitude in people and establish moral principle." This first section commences with Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (c. 365–427) famous poem, "On Returning Home" 歸去來兮. Tao Yuanming, also known as Tao Qian 陶潛, was a writer and disappointed official who lived in reclusion during the politically unstable Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). He was posthumously esteemed as a paragon of both talent and morality who had a

[62] Yuan Hongdao et al., *Dingjuan zhufangjia huibian huangming minggong wenjuan* 鼎鐫諸方家彙編皇明名公文雋 (Gest Library, Princeton University: 1620), 1:6b–7a.

penchant (evinced by many of his poems) for heavy drinking. Both Su Shi and Zhu Xi held Tao Yuanming in the highest regard, but for different reasons. As Yuan Xingpei has explained, Su Shi's admiration for Tao conclusively established the latter poet's position as a cultural icon from the Song dynasty onward.[63] Su and countless other writers engaged in "matching" (*he* 和) Tao's poems with poetic responses of their own. According to Yuan, "The cultural significance inherent in this 'matching Tao' literary activity can be seen in its intense aspiration to purity and a high-mindedness of character as well as its resolute defense of integrity with a clear wish to preserve one's natural temperament."[64] In other words, Tao Yuanming, a literary icon famous for his "spiritual freedom, natural, pure and unsullied, a freethinking spirit, unhindered by custom or tradition,"[65] fully embodies Su Shi's understanding of the relation between writing and the Way. For Zhu Xi, by contrast, Tao stood among those poets who attained "spontaneity within the rules of form and expression of the cultivated individuals—the self that stays within the rules of morality (as [Z]hu understands the Way of the Sages)."[66] The compendium's emphasis on orthodox morality is engineered to suggest that Zhang Nai grants precedence to the latter reading, but, in fact, he is taking Tao Yuanming as the exemplar for yet a different interpretive agenda.

This agenda reveals itself through the works ranked alongside Tao Yuanming's, many of which are precisely writings of a sort that Zhu Xi insisted could not serve as moral models: those of impassioned political martyrs. This uppermost rank, which contains 27 pieces in all, is replete with such figures. Herein we encounter writings by the Southern Song patriots Wen Tianxiang

[63] Yuan Xingpei, trans. Alan Berkowitz, "Tao Yuanming: A Symbol of Chinese Culture," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, (November 2014): 216–240.
[64] Yuan Xingpei, "Tao Yuanming," 220.
[65] Yuan Xingpei, "Tao Yuanming," 217.
[66] Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist," 349.

文天祥 (1236–1283) and Xie Fangde 謝枋得 (1226–1289), both of whom died in support of the Song when it was overtaken by the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (1279–1368); no fewer than five selections attributed to the legendary martyr Qu Yuan; and, as a concluding piece, the famous "Letter in Reply to Su Wu" attributed to the disgraced general Li Ling. Ranked alongside such figures, Tao Yuanming is no longer Su Shi's unfettered spirit nor Zhu Xi's model of restrained spontaneity, but rather one who suffered political injury and lodged his frustration in writing.

In thus reframing Tao Yuanming as another Qu Yuan while simultaneously presenting him as a moral model, Zhang Nai redefines Neo-Confucian morality. This redefinition comes forth most starkly when we set Zhang Nai's anthology alongside Zhu Xi's "Preface to the Collected and Annotated *Lyrics of Chu*," wherein Zhu Xi expresses his appreciation for Qu Yuan even as he insists that such a writer cannot serve as a moral model:

> As for Qu Yuan's person, although his intention and conduct rather exceeded [those advocated by] the *Doctrine of the Mean* such that he cannot serve as a model, everything [he did] arose from the sincere mind of one loyal to his ruler and devoted to his country. As for his writings, although the significance of his words might have tended toward the unrestrained and demonic, and his enmity and resentment were aroused to such a degree that [his writings] cannot be used as standards, [nonetheless] all were born from such profound sentiments of concern and worry that he could not restrain himself.
>
> 原之為人，其志行雖或過於中庸而不可以為法，然皆出於忠君愛國之誠心。原之為書，其辭旨雖或流於跌宕怪神、怨懟激發而不可以為訓，然皆生於繾綣惻怛不能自已之至意。[67]

Zhu Xi goes on to explain that, while such writings must not be taken as moral models, they effectively arouse the laments of others who suffer injustice, inspire sympathy among those in positions of power, and thus ultimately contribute to the development of moral and social order. Zhu Xi's appraisal of Qu Yuan is most positive in its acknowledgement of the poet's loyalty

[67] "Chuci ji zhu xu" 楚辭集註序, in *Hui'an Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵朱文公文集 [*Sibu congkan* edition] 76:33b. Also cited in Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist," 346–347.

(*zhong* 忠) and sincerity (*cheng* 誠), two important Confucian virtues. Zhu describes the affective impact of these virtues' literary force as a form of sympathy, which, in turn, might inspire moral rectitude. Such convictions would have offered particular appeal to Zhang Nai, who was among the many officials endangered by the corrupt machinations of the infamous court eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627). Despite the positive social role Zhu Xi conceived for such writings, however, he is steadfast in his stance against emotional excess, which deviates from the Confucian moral ideal of self-restraint. Zhang Nai takes advantage of Zhu Xi's positive evaluation of such loyal and sincere sentiments only to present writings of this sort as being exactly what Zhu Xi insists they are not: models of morality.

In the context of Zhang Nai's anthology, talent in this manner serves as a semantic decoy that allows for a stealthy redefinition of morality. On its surface, the anthology maintains the traditional opposition between talent and morality, selfish interest and ethical conduct. But upon closer examination we discover that Zhang Nai's conception of talent bears only half the dual meaning it held for Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians. Talent is still associated with selfish conduct but—reduced to a mere capacity for literary form, associated with "deliberately ornate writings of trifling skill" and "excesses of carefully plotted writing"—now divested of the personal aspect for which it was formerly opposed to morality.

There was precedent for this devaluation of literary prowess in earlier Ming-dynasty writings. Over a century before Zhang Nai's anthology was published, the philosopher Wang Yangming explained that the writings of those who transmit Confucius' teachings have greater merit than the widely lauded writings of Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), who was merely "a giant among literary men" 文人之雄.[68] The third and fourth categories of Zhang Nai's anthology

[68] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu*, 1:11.

confirm Wang Yangming's criticism, as Han Yu ranks first in both of these diminished categories. Whereas Wang Yangming, however, contrasted Han Yu with the Confucian scholar Wang Tong 王通 (584–617), Zhang Nai conflates Confucian moral teachings with sentiments of exile and political resistance. Along these lines, Zhang's anthology does in fact reserve a less prominent position for one of Han Yu's much-lauded pieces, "Preface on Seeing Li Yuan off upon His Return to Pangu" 送李愿歸盤谷序, a piece associated with themes of political disappointment and exile. While Zhang's pejorative take on talent seems to uphold the terms of Neo-Confucian discourse, then, his true allegiance lies with a mode of indignation long championed in literary contexts.

The writings of these anti-archaist critics, which were profoundly influential during the late-Ming, somewhat ironically promoted personal feeling as *the* site of orthodox moral authority. In order to accomplish this conflation, they divested mere "literary" excellence of its former association with personality. But it was in precisely this peculiar (and historically transient) redefinition of talent that Jin Shengtan found an opening for a new approach to literary self-cultivation. He took these "deliberately ornate writings of trifling skill," these "excesses of carefully plotted writing," the "counting of one's lines," the "marvel of a word or phrase," and all such "detrimental criteria" as the basis for a formally attentive approach to literature that might lead to a better society. By attending to form, Jin proposed, we might overcome the selfish worldview that undermines ethical conduct.

Jin's commentary on Han Yu's "Preface on Seeing Li Yuan off" offers a glimpse of how this might work. This piece appears in the classical prose anthology he mentions above, *Must-Read Works for Geniuses of the Realm* 天下才子必讀書, which was published by his associates shortly after his death. In stark contrast to Zhang Nai's anthology, Jin's is arranged

chronologically and contains fifteen pieces by Han Yu (and, incidentally, only one piece attributed to Qu Yuan). Rather than celebrating the particular sentiment that Han Yu's piece conveys, Jin's prefatory comment attends to how the form of Han Yu's "Preface" and its attendant poem effectively blurs the affective distinction between the literary hero and his literary subject, Han's friend Li Yuan. This subtle confusion of sentiments is brought about in part by the fact that Han Yu's preface is ventriloquized, as it purports to transcribe Li Yuan's own words. Jin explains:

> At the beginning [of this piece], [Han Yu] merely describes Pangu in a few words; at the end, he merely [provides] a poetic description of Pangu with a verse. As for Li's returning to Pangu, he only employs two passages of Li's own speech. Since he says he cannot desire to be [the illustrious but corrupt official described] in the first passage, he is therefore willing to be [the simple recluse described] in the second passage. One can readily see that the one returning to Pangu is but the most incomparably magnificent person on earth, not at all the sort of person who's rotten beyond bearing.
>
> 前只數語寫盤谷，後只一歌詠盤谷。至于李之歸此谷，只用李自己兩段話。自言欲為第一段人不得，故甘為第二段人。便見歸盤谷者，乃是世上第一豪華無比人，非朽爛不堪人也。[69]

While the distinction between writer and subject is clear at first, by the end of his prefatory remark, Jin deliberately weakens this distinction by heaping lavish praise upon "the one" (or ones) returning to Pangu. His interlineal comments, which, like almost all of Jin's commentaries, do indeed go so far as to count characters and recurring lines and remark upon the marvelous literary effect of certain words and phrases, repeatedly highlight the fact that Han Yu relies on Li Yan's speech as a substitute for his writing 憑愿之言代行文. At the end of Han Yu's poem, Jin remarks, "He is seeing Li off, yet touches upon [the fact that] he himself also wants to go back, what inspiration!" 送李，卻說到自亦欲往，何等興會![70] What Jin prizes, in this case and

[69] "Song Li Yuan gui Pangu xu" 送李原歸盤谷序, in *Tianxia caizi bidu shu*, *JSTQJ* (2008), 5:406.
[70] "Song Li Yuan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 5:407.

throughout his writings, is not the author's *personal* feelings, but precisely those feelings which, for the fact that they are distributed across bodies through the author's brilliant grasp of literary form, might be understood as *impersonal*.

By turning to form in this manner, Jin Shengtan aimed to resist not only the anti-archaists' valorization of personal feeling, but also, as noted at the outset of this chapter, the orthodox Neo-Confucian emphasis on literature as a vehicle for morality. When he identifies talent as a latter-day replacement for morality in his first preface to *Water Margin*, he deliberately breaks away from both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, both figures with whom the first half of that preface is in dialogue. This break is somewhat surprising given Jin's clear dedication to upholding conventional forms of moral conduct: filial piety, loyalty, sincerity, and exercising extreme moral caution in solitude—all moral categories drawn from the Confucian Classics. His case seems to be that a careful attention to form unto itself provides an alternate, if not better, basis for moral conduct than the Neo-Confucian examination of forms for the moral principle (*li* 理) thought to be concealed (and revealed) therein.

A Principle of Uncertainty

But what motivated his determination to provide such a basis, which was so heartfelt that he aimed to illustrate it by means of his *Six Works of Genius*? The answer, I propose, resides in a problem of his moment. Studies of seventeenth-century literature often focus on the politically and culturally cataclysmic transition from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the Qing (1644–1912). While this historical rupture was indisputably significant, the epoch more broadly defined was also host to an ongoing intellectual crisis that had been building since the early sixteenth century. This contemporaneous crisis developed alongside the Ming empire's gradual political

unraveling, but its trajectory was not characterized by the rhythm of traumatic rupture and gradual accommodation that characterizes the dynastic turnover. Instead, the intellectual crisis that took root in Neo-Confucianism in the sixteenth century seems to have proceeded uninterrupted. It is with this predicament that Jin Shengtan's work was primarily involved, a fact which accounts for the remarkable intellectual consistency among the commentary editions he prepared before and after the fall of the Ming. At the heart of this problem, at least insofar as Jin understood it, was the tension between the personal and the moral in Neo-Confucian ontology.

The crisis arose in large part from an advancing uncertainty surrounding the identity of Neo-Confucianism's primary object of knowledge: moral principle. For Zhu Xi, the goal of self-cultivation was to extend one's knowledge through the careful examination of phenomena (*gewu* 格物) and bring one's conduct into alignment with the moral Way of the sages as exemplified by the Classics. In the Ming dynasty, Neo-Confucian thought underwent a revolution when the official and philosopher Wang Yangming promoted the idea that moral knowledge could not precede moral action, that the two must be simultaneous. He drew on the teachings of the early Confucian philosopher Mencius 孟子 (4th century BCE), who insisted upon the fundamental goodness of human nature, to assert a doctrine of innate moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知). In order to cultivate oneself in alignment with moral principle, Wang advocated, one should focus on recovering the original mind, not studying outward forms.

It is well known that anti-archaist criticism was informed by Wang Yangming's Study of Mind, but for the purpose of appreciating what was at stake in the anti-archaist project and why Jin Shengtan so opposed it, it is important to recognize that the highly personal, authorial mind the anti-archaists valorized is a far cry from the mind upon which Wang Yangming aimed to apprehend the Way. In this respect, anti-archaist criticism and Yangming Neo-Confucianism

made for an imperfect meeting of minds. Nonetheless, Wang Yangming's turn away from outward forms laid the groundwork for this collision of philosophical and literary idea systems. For, while both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming would have regarded moral principle as simultaneously transcendent and immanent in the material world, Wang's theory of innate knowledge emphasized moral principle's transcendence and inculcated a general distrust of outward forms as indicators of moral attainment.[71] It is just such a distrust of forms that we see on full display in the prefaces to Zhang Nai's and Yuan Hongdao's anthologies.

Wang Yangming's discussions of moral principle and moral knowledge attest to an anxiety about the possibility that his own emphasis on moral principle's transcendence might lead to selfish conduct. Sometime between 1514 and 1516, Wang's disciple Xu Ai 徐愛 (1487–1517) asked his teacher to elaborate on Zhu's commentary on the *Great Learning* (*daxue* 大學), one of the four works comprising the basis of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian program of self-cultivation:

> Ai said, "[According to the *Great Learning*,] 'Only after knowing in what to abide [i.e., the highest good (*zhishan* 至善)] can there be certainty.' Zhu Xi took this to mean that "all events and things possess [in themselves] certainty of moral principle.' This seems to counter your explanation." The Teacher [Wang] said: "To seek out the highest good on the basis of events and things is but to treat righteousness as external [to the mind]. [In fact,] the highest good is identical to mind's original substance. This is nothing but [what the *Great Learning* refers to as] 'manifesting one's clear virtue' to the point of utmost refinement and singleness of mind. Yet never has [moral principle] been separate from events and things. When Zhu Xi's commentary [on the *Great Learning*] says, 'fully realizing Heavenly principle without so much as a hair of the selfishness of human desire,' he gets the idea."
>
> 愛問，「『知止而後有定』朱子以為『事事物物皆有定理』，似與先生之說相戾。」先生曰，「於事事物物上求至善，卻是義外也。至善是心之本體。只是明明

[71] Wing-tsit Chan notes that in Neo-Confucian philosophy from Zhu Xi onward, *li* is conceived as at once immanent and transcendent, at once manifest through the particularity of all phenomena and universal. See Chan, "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept of Li as Principle," 45–87.

> 德到至精至一處便是。然亦未嘗離卻事物。本注所謂『盡夫天理之極，而無一毫人欲之私』者，得之。」[72]

In this discussion Wang Yangming states his case only to offer a concession to his predecessor on the basis of an uncertainty Wang's own case incites: If moral principle transcends the events and things of observable reality, then how does one identify morally authoritative conduct (or, for that matter, morally authoritative writing)? The concession, that "Yet never has [moral principle] been separate from things and events" 然亦未嘗離卻事物, comes as a necessary reassurance against arbitrary attributions of sagehood. In practice, both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming ascertained moral attainment according to orthodox standards of conduct. Wang Yangming did not propose doing away with canonical study. In theory, however, Wang Yangming's emphasis on moral principle's transcendence allowed for the possibility that unorthodox forms of conduct—including unorthodox writings—could claim moral authority, so long as they could also claim a lack of selfish intent.

Wang Yangming's moral caveat anticipates anti-archaist critics' later conflation of personal expression with moral principle, for, in adopting Study of Mind rhetoric—in particular the idea of a transhistorical moral substance—to justify their movement, anti-archaists would need to make a similar concession to outward indicators of moral conduct. This meant that, rather than celebrating personal expression for its own sake, anti-archaists would consistently assert expression's moral efficacy. This rhetorical necessity puts personal expression on par with moral principle.

Scholarship understands anti-archaist critics to have been more concerned with the former than the latter. Daniel Bryant explains that, while the archaists conceived literary self-

[72] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu*, 1:10. Translation adapted from Chan, trans., *Instructions for Practical Living*, 6–7.

cultivation as "a process whose results would be in conformity with the orthodox tradition, … their opponents saw self-realization as leading to a uniquely personal insight and expression."[73] But anti-archaist critics such as Zhang Nai, Yuan Hongdao, and even their radically individualist associate Li Zhi consistently assert the moral authority of personal expression in terms of its capacity to bring about social order. In most cases, such assertions seem to have been made in earnest. Beyond rhetorical framing, many anti-archaist critics, Zhang Nai included, evince a concern with identifying morally conscionable—if unorthodox—material for consumption. For Zhang, this took the form of works displaying the loyalty and sincerity of an upright official.

This conflation of moral principle and expressive force, and not merely the fact of their emphasis on personal expression, is, I suggest, what made the anti-archaist stance so revolutionary—and for many seventeenth-century thinkers, Jin Shengtan included, so problematic. While it is generally taken for granted that the Study of Mind invited an emphasis on personal expression, the foregoing analysis of anti-archaism's philosophical foundations suggests that the conflation of the personal and the moral was more of a literary innovation than a Neo-Confucian one.

We can trace the development of this innovation by examining different thinkers' understandings of what Wang Yangming above refers to as "the mind's original substance" (*xin zhi ben ti*), which he conceives as the individual mind at one with moral principle. Wang Yangming was absolutely clear about the fact that the original mind was not the personal mind. His above reference to "singleness of mind" (*yixin* 一心) pertains to this pursuit of a decidedly impersonal moral character. In another exchange with Xu Ai, Wang explains that people recover singleness of mind, a mode of consciousness at one with moral principle, by clearing away the

[73] Bryant, *The Great Recreation*, 541–542.

desire (*yu* 欲) that contaminates the moral mind (*daoxin* 道心). Wang Yangming distinguishes between the moral mind's original state and its polluted condition, which he specifically describes as the personal or human mind (*renxin* 人心).[74] For Wang, the mind's original substance pertains not to personal experience or feeling but to a universal element—namely, moral principle—accessible to all human minds at all times. The moral mind is decidedly impersonal.

Despite the careful distinctions Wang Yangming drew between the personal and impersonal mind, an uncertainty inhered in his discussions of moral principle, and it was this uncertainty that paved the way for anti-archaists' literary interventions. If his disciple's writings are to be trusted, Wang Yangming himself exacerbated this uncertainty in 1527, in the first of four famous statements he provided to summarize his teachings in "Confirmation of the Way at Tianquan" (*Tianquan zhengdao* 天泉証道). Whereas Wang Yangming's other teachings consistently present the mind's original substance as good, here he asserts that "Beyond the distinction of good and evil is the original substance of mind."[75] On the basis of this teaching, his disciple Wang Ji developed a radical understanding of innate knowledge.[76] The twentieth-century philosopher Tang Chun-i [Tang Junyi] 唐君毅 (1909–1978) describes this later understanding in terms that suggest moral principle might finally have lost its tether to outward indicators of morality. According to Tang, this later conception of innate knowledge is:

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[74] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu*, 1:10. Chan, *Instructions*, 16–17.

[75] Tang Chun-i [Tang Junyi] 唐君毅, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and the Conference on Ming Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 111.

[76] Wang Ji's understanding of moral knowledge is strikingly similar to, but predates, the monk Yunqi Zhuhong's (1532–1612) understanding of One Mind (*yi xin*), for an extended examination of the latter, see Leon Hurvitz, "Chu-hung's One Mind of Pure Land and Ch'an Buddhism," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 451–481.

> superconsciousness as Nothing (*wu* 無), and also as transcendental being, always unexpressed as well as always expressed, and supremely good as well as beyond good and evil. Therefore, when talking about *liangzhi* in this highest sense, Wang Ji in his terminology even cut off the word *liang*, which implies goodness.[77]

Wang Ji in this manner replaced his teacher's conception of innate knowledge of morality with an innate knowledge beyond morality. In this respect Tang Chun-i regards Wang Ji as having potentially exceeded the bounds of Neo-Confucianism.[78] By articulating this supramoral consciousness in relation to non-being, however, Wang Ji at least retains a sense of innate knowledge as impersonal and therefore a potentially viable platform for unselfish conduct, a point which may explain why Wang Yangming approved Wang Ji's interpretation of his teachings even as he acknowledged this interpretation might mislead lesser students.

Wang Ji's move to replace innate moral knowledge with an innate supramoral knowledge nonetheless foretells an even more radical development, one that occurred within the field of literary criticism. This development took place many decades later when Li Zhi published his famous essay "On the Childlike Mind" 童心說, which he composed in response to a commentary he had read on *Romance of the Western Chamber*.[79] In this essay, Li Zhi introduces the childlike mind as a foundation for a radically expressive stance on literary cultivation, positing what he takes to be the genuine expressions of human feeling invested in works such as *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* against the moral affectations of the Six Classics and other canonical works. At the very outset of this essay Li Zhi equates the childlike

[77] Tang, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind," 116.
[78] Tang, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind," 117.
[79] In the discussion that follows, I recover the coherence of Li Zhi's philosophical conception by reading his work alongside Neo-Confucian discourse. For another approach to tracing Li Zhi's thought on the childlike mind, see Pauline C. Lee's elegant analysis, "The Heart-Mind: Reading 'On the Child-like Heart-Mind,'" in *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire*, 45–68. Lee points out that earlier scholarship has tended to emphasize the *lack* of coherence in Li Zhi's philosophical thought, a generalization that scholars perhaps wield at late-Ming thinkers too frequently. My reading corroborates Lee's.

mind with the discursively overdetermined term "genuine mind" (*zhenxin* 真心), which in conventional contexts refers to sincerity and moral rectitude and in Buddhist discourse describes the attainment of seeing things as they truly are. As the introduction proceeds, Li draws on a combination of Buddhist and Neo-Confucian rhetoric to put moral principles (*daoli* 道理), here conceived as fragmentary teachings rather than a unitary transcendent substance, on par with sensory perception, as external perceptions that pollute the genuine mind:

> Childhood is a person's preliminary condition, and the childlike mind is that of the mind. How can it be that the mind's preliminary condition is lost, such that the childlike mind hurriedly slips away? As one starts out, sights and sounds enter through the eyes and ears, and, from using these to direct one's innermost being, the childlike mind slips away. As one grows, moral principles enter through hearing and sight, and, from using these to direct one's innermost being, the childlike mind slips away. Over time, moral principles and perceptions accumulate by the day; consequently, what we know and feel broadens accordingly. From this, moreover, we come to understand that a good reputation is something to be desired, and as we eagerly endeavor to advance ourselves, the childlike mind slips away; we come to know that a bad reputation is something to be hated, and as we eagerly endeavor to protect ourselves, the childlike mind slips away.
>
> 童子者，人之初也；童心者，心之初也。夫心之初曷可失也，然童心胡然而遽失也？蓋方其始也，有聞見從耳目而入，而以為主于其內而童心失。其長也，有道理從聞見而入，而以為主于其內而童心失。其久也，道理聞見日以益多，則所知所覺日以益廣，於是焉又知美名之可好也，而務欲以揚之而童心失；知不美之名而可醜也，而務欲以掩之而童心失。[80]

In its suggestion that moral principle is not a transcendent value to be sought within but an accumulation of fragmentary external forces that impinge on the mind from without, this essay offers nothing short of an attack on the Study of Mind, the implications of which go much further than even the teachings of Wang Ji. Indeed, while Li Zhi held Wang Ji in high regard, the

[80] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, 98; *Fenshu zhu*, 276. For yet two alternate translations, see *A Book to Burn*, 106–13. Based on my reading of this essay's philosophical import, where Li Zhi later refers (pejoratively) to *lixue* 理學, this should be translated broadly as "Neo-Confucianism," not (as in one of the translations in *A Book to Burn*) narrowly, as the "School of Principle" with which Wang Yangming's "School [or Study] of Mind" is typically contrasted. This is because Li Zhi is not expressing his allegiance with the latter but is rather breaking from *all* schools of thought that maintain a notion of a transcendent moral principle.

structure of Li Zhi's rhetoric in this passage at once parallels and undercuts Wang Ji's remarks on the Mencian declaration that "All things are all complete within me" 萬物皆備於我, which served as an important basis for more radical readings of Study of Mind teachings. In these remarks, Wang Ji prioritizes the individual as the site of moral knowledge, but, unlike Li Zhi, clearly upholds Wang Yangming's faith in a transpersonal moral substance. He explains Mencius' statement thus:

> As for what everyone calls humaneness, "all things are already complete within me"—it is not something to be thought through. Encountering colors, my eyes can distinguish green and yellow in and of themselves. This is [because] the eyes are already complete with the colors of all things. Encountering tones, my ears can distinguish between the high and low in and of themselves. This is [because] the ears are already complete with the sounds of all things. My mind's innate moral knowledge, upon encountering my father, can understand filial piety in and of itself; upon encountering my elder brother, can understand fraternity; upon encountering my lord, can understand respect. Upon seeing a child about to fall into a well, it can understand alarm in and of itself; upon seeing an ox being led to sacrifice, it can understand shivering with fear.
>
> 夫一體之謂仁，萬物皆備於我，非意之也。吾之目遇色自能辨青黃，是萬物之色備於目也。吾之耳遇聲自能辨清濁，是萬物之聲備於耳也。吾心之良知，遇父自能知孝，遇兄自能知弟，遇君上自能知敬，遇孺子入井自能知怵惕，遇堂下之牛自能知觳觫。[81]

In stark contrast to Li Zhi's emphasis on the externality of perceptions and moral precepts, Wang Ji understands both sensory perceptions and moral standards as "already complete within the self." In this respect, Wang Ji's emphasis on the individual suggests an intense faith in the pre-existence and accessibility of moral principle. Li Zhi's essay on the childlike mind, by contrast, does away entirely with intrinsic moral substance, as he concludes his essay by comparing the Confucian classics to but so many medicinal treatments developed to treat particular ailments at particular times, all of no use to later ages. Li Zhi's childlike mind is in this respect not simply an

[81] Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, "Zhezhong Wang men xue'an er" 浙中王門學案二, in *Ming ru xue'an* 明儒學案, *juan* 12 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1:243.

innovative take on transcendent moral principle, but a fundamental replacement of the universal with an endless array of human particularity. If Wang Ji pushed the bounds of Neo-Confucianism, Li Zhi blasted through them.

In this light, Li Zhi's "Preface to *The Loyal and Righteous at the Water Margin*," presents an incendiary interworking of literary and Neo-Confucian ontologies, a fire that later thinkers such as Jin Shengtan sought to put out. Scholars have frequently observed that Li Zhi drew on the Study of Mind to cultivate a new appreciation for the expressive value of vernacular fiction. This literary critical innovation, however, is inseparable from the fact that Li Zhi's remarks on fiction also bear implications for the Neo-Confucian discourse in which they are rhetorically embedded. Every declaration of this preface, then, requires what is for us a dual lens. Since the literary lens has already been applied many times elsewhere, let us attempt a more philosophically inflected reading here.

From this standpoint, rather than saying that Li Zhi drew on the Study of Mind to promote vernacular fiction, it would be more appropriate to say that he drew on a tradition of literary expression to upend the Study of Mind. The beginning of Li Zhi's preface invokes a tradition of "composing out of indignation" (*fa fen er zuo* 發憤而作) first articulated by the Han-dynasty court historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 BCE) in his "Personal Postface" 自序 to the *Historical Records* 史記.[82] In a pained rumination over the hardships he has endured to see his work through to completion, Sima Qian describes a lengthy and prestigious genealogy of authors who composed under emotional duress, including King Wen of Zhou's 周文王 (1112–1050 BCE) compilation of the *Classic of Changes* 易經, Confucius' (551–479 BCE) *Spring and*

[82] As mentioned in the introduction, Sima Qian only lived to write this history because he submitted himself to the penalty of castration for his involvement in a political debacle involving the General Li Ling.

Autumn Annals 春秋, and Qu Yuan's poem "Encountering Sorrow" 離騷, among others. Li Zhi extends Sima Qian's line of thought to promote his own view of authorial impetus:

> The Grand Historian says, "'The Difficulty of Persuasion' and 'The Loner's Indignation' are works of wise men and sages that were written to express their indignation. From this we can see that if the ancient worthies and sages weren't indignant, then they simply didn't write. Writing when you aren't indignant is like shivering when you're not cold, groaning and moaning when you're not sick. Although you could write *something*, would it really be worth reading?
>
> 太史公曰：《說難》與《孤憤》賢聖發憤而作。由此觀之，古之賢聖，不憤則不作矣。不憤而作，譬如不寒而顫，不病而呻吟也，雖作何觀乎？[83]

From here Li Zhi proceeds to explain that the novel before him will succeed in restoring moral order to a world that has turned politically upside down. Toward the end of this rumination he announces, "the one who runs the country can't afford *not* to read [*Water Margin*]. If only he'd read it once, then the loyal and righteous wouldn't be out at the water margin anymore—instead they'd be right back beside the ruler" 故有國者不可以不讀，一讀此傳，則忠義不在於水滸而皆在於君側矣.[84] By setting aside any reference to moral principle and asserting instead the moral efficacy of authorial indignation, Li Zhi draws a rhetorical parallel between Wang Yangming's conception of the moral mind and authorial affect.

Sima Qian himself could not have foretold Li Zhi's literary-philosophical intervention. When Sima wrote his personal postface to the *Historical Records*, he turned to tradition to trace an affective genealogy that would enhance the dignity of his life's work. The historian's strategy was in this respect more textual than metaphysical, for at no point does Sima (writing more than a millennium prior to the advent of Neo-Confucianism) suggest that his indignation should be

[83] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, 108; *Fenshu zhu*, 301. Translated by Huiying Chen and Drew Dixon, A *Book to Burn*, 125.

[84] Li Zhi, "Zhongyi shuihu zhuan xu," in *Fenshu*, 109; *Fenshu zhu*, 302. Translation by Huiying Chen and Drew Dixon, "Preface to *The Loyal and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh*," in Li Zhi, *A Book to Burn*, 127.

taken as an expression of Heavenly principle. By invoking Sima Qian's cry of frustration in relation to the moral authority of the ancient worthies and sages, Li Zhi maps the Grand Historian's genealogy of indignation onto Wang Yangming's understanding of the moral mind, thoroughly replacing the moral with the personal, the universal with the particular. In Li Zhi's writings, moral principle is rendered so uncertain that even a legion of violent outlaws might be deemed loyal and righteous, on account of the fact that they are, at least, true to themselves. In so heavily reworking Neo-Confucianism's key article of faith, Li Zhi will have contributed directly to the ethical crisis that had been building in Neo-Confucianism for the greater part of the sixteenth century.

Several decades after Li Zhi's death, just one year before the fall of the Ming dynasty and at the very moment Jin Shengtan was preparing his *Water Margin* commentary for publication, this ethical dilemma was still ongoing. In 1643 Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645), widely regarded as the last great Neo-Confucian philosopher, described the situation thus:

> These days everyone competes in discussing innate moral knowledge, to the extent that they do detriment [to the concept]. The reckless understand it as passion, thus taking everything to be innately good. The excessively pure reduce it to a mystical void, thus exiling goodness to the category of evil. Both are the excesses of those deploying knowledge.
>
> 今天下爭言良知矣，及其弊也。猖狂者參之以情識，而一是皆良；超潔者蕩之以玄虛，而夷良於賊，亦用知者之過也。[85]

According to Jen-tai Pan, Liu Zongzhou identified the more radical strains of Neo-Confucian thought, in particular that propounded by Wang Ji, as akin to moral nihilism and advocated for a return to orthodox morality through personal circumspection.[86] Disagreement prevailed,

[85] Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, "Zhengxue zajie" 證學雜解, in *Liu Zongzhou quanji* 劉宗周全集, ed. Wu Guang 吳光 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang chubanshe, 2007), 2:278.

[86] Jen-tai Pan, "Liu Zongzhou's Criticism of Wang Yangming's Followers and his Scheme for Moral Reformation," *Ming Studies*, no. 61 (April 2010): 14.

however, well after Liu's passing, even among his followers. In the early Qing, a key point of intellectual discord between Liu's disciples Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–95) and Chen Que 陳確 (1604–77) was precisely the question of whether or not moral principle could be equated with personal desire.[87]

While Liu Zongzhou blamed this confusion on Neo-Confucianism's intermingling with unorthodox—especially Buddhist and Daoist—thought from the Song-dynasty onward, it seems likely, given the popularity of their writings, that the anti-archaists also contributed to the Neo-Confucianism's seventeenth-century situation. Nor is it necessarily the case that only conservative thinkers such as Liu Zongzhou perceived a problem in the intermixing of discourses. In retrospect, Yuan Hongdao's and Zhang Nai's anthologies attest to an ethical anxiety among the anti-archaists who witnessed Li Zhi's grisly passing. On one hand, Li Zhi's assertion that personal feeling was *the* path to moral and social order (an assertion he also made with respect to his own writing) clearly informed Zhang Nai's anthology. On the other hand, when Zhang Nai establishes the same correlation between personal feeling and moral order, he camouflages Li Zhi's radical conflation by couching his claims in conservative Neo-Confucian rhetoric. This anti-archaist shift toward moderation is consistent with Chih-P'ing Chou's observation that between 1605 and 1610, Yuan Hongdao started writing in a more conventional style, a change which Chou reads as an outcome of a realization "that spontaneous emotional outbursts alone would not make good poetry, and that in writing poetry certain rules had to be observed."[88] Ultimately, however, such attempts to reconcile literature with the Way were

[87] According to Lynn Struve, one of Huang Zongxi's three key objections to Chen Que's thought was that "human desires cannot be equated with principle, even though it may be said that principle does not exist apart from the physical (including people's physical desire)." See "Chen Que Versus Huang Zongxi: Confucianism Faces Modern Times in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18 (1991): 13.

[88] Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 85.

insufficient to reassure Jin Shengtan that the ill-matched systems of thought undergirding anti-archaist criticism were ethically viable. Jin's own criticism was based on another system altogether, one which allowed him to break dramatically from both expressionist and moralist criticism while maintaining the best of both. This alternate discourse was Buddhism.

Replacing Moral Principle

With respect to seventeenth-century intellectual history, the idea that Buddhism might have served to reconcile the tension between the personal and the moral is somewhat ironic. Sectarian Neo-Confucian thinkers such as Liu Zongzhou and his disciple Huang Zongxi, the latter of whom played a formidable role in shaping the late-Ming intellectual historical narrative, condemned Buddhist thought for having contributed to Neo-Confucianism's morally wayward state.[89] Wang Yangming and his followers (like Zhu Xi before them) were indeed influenced by Buddhist discourse. According to Jen-tai Pan, Liu perceived a decidedly Buddhist influence in Wang Ji's understanding of moral knowledge as non-being, as a consequence of which, Liu maintained, "to what extent could [Wang Ji] have avoided falling into the Buddhists' trap" 幾何而不蹈佛氏之坑塹哉? [90] Pan observes that Liu understood this trap as a mode of moral nihilism. Among his many disparagements of the unorthodox, Liu once declared:

> The Buddhists abandon worldly entanglements and attend solely to the matter of life and death [*samsara*]. [In their thinking,] there is no evil to expel and no good to perform, [such that] all that remains is the genuine basis of emptiness upon which enlightenment manifests. To penetrate reality on this basis is the teaching of the Chan school. As for us Confucians who daily pursue our inborn nature and endowments on the basis of worldly phenomena, we are subject to the corrupting influence of desires that surface

[89] For Huang's comments to this effect, see Timothy Brook, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and Their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21, no. 1 (1993): 23.

[90] Huang Zongxi, "Wang Longxi ji" 王龍溪畿, in *Mingru xue'an*, 1:8.

> intermittently. In this context, if one speaks of the non-existence of good and evil, one offers a bridge to evil.
>
> 夫佛氏遺世累，專理會生死一事，無惡可去，並無善可為，止餘真空性地，以顯真覺，從此悟入，是為宗門。若吾儒日在世法中求性命，吾慾薰染，頭出頭沒，於是而言無善惡，適為濟惡之津梁耳。[91]

Liu's sectarian critique of Buddhism, like Wang Yangming's famous repudiation more than a century prior, was based on the idea that Buddhists pursue emptiness (frequently referred to in terms of *kong* 空 or *li* 理) at the expense of humane conduct such as political loyalty and filial piety, both of which were based in human feeling.[92] From Liu's standpoint, "emptiness" was dangerous because it was a moral void. The Neo-Confucian aim, by contrast, was to attain an intuitive mastery of the rational and decidedly *moral* principle inherent in all worldly phenomena as well as the mind. Only by vigilantly maintaining this singleness of the mind could one be regarded as sincere (*cheng* 誠) in the sense of being true to one's inborn moral nature. As Liu complains elsewhere in an essay that criticizes Buddhism and other teachings at some length:

> Today's heterodox teachings suffer not from a failure to understand, but from a failure to have extended [knowledge to the utmost through the examination of phenomena]. If they do not err toward feeling, then they err toward the unfathomable. Both [such errors] rest upon the disease of insincerity.
>
> 今之賊道者，非不知之患，而不致之患，不失之情識，則失之玄虛，皆坐不誠之病.[93]

But Liu's conception of emptiness as an unfathomable void, as well as his characterization of Buddhist teachings as devoid of ethical concern, offer a deliberately simplistic view of a teaching he regarded as a competitor to Neo-Confucian thought. In fact, several of the most prominent

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[91] Huang Zongxi, "Wang Longxi Ji," *Mingru xue'an*, 1:8. Also cited in Pan, "Liu Zongzhou's Criticism," 27.

[92] Wing-tsit Chan, "How Buddhist is Wang Yang-ming?," in *Neo-Confucianism, Etc.: Essays by Wing-tsit Chan* (Hong Kong: *Oriental Society*, 1969), 239–244.

[93] Liu Zongzhou, "Jie ershiwu" 解二十五, in *Zhengxue zajie* 證學雜解, *Liu Zongzhou quanji*, 2:278.

Buddhist monks from the sixteenth century onward were concerned with reconciling Buddhist and Confucian ethics.[94] These thinkers set an important intellectual precedent for Jin Shengtan's literary-philosophical intervention.

One of these monks was Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), a contemporary of Liu Zongzhou and Jin Shengtan. Ouyi began his education as a sectarian Confucian who frequently denounced Buddhism only to experience a profound revelation upon reading a line from the *Analects*, whereupon he burned his earlier anti-Buddhist writings and became a monk.[95] Jin Shengtan's commentaries evince a strong sympathy with Ouyi's thought and that of the famous Chan cleric Ouyi regarded as a teacher, Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623). While there is presently no evidence that Jin ever encountered Ouyi, both men were natives of Suzhou, and Ouyi resided there at around the time Shengtan published his edition of *Water Margin*, so it is at least possible that they knew (or knew of) each other. Because Ouyi was one of the foremost Buddhist exegetes of his day, it is highly likely that Jin Shengtan had some acquaintance with his ideas, whether by means of Ouyi's writings, his lectures, or a shared intellectual milieu. It seems significant in this connection that in his anthology of Ming-dynasty examination essays, Jin provides an overtly Buddhist reading of an examination essay on exactly the same line from the

[94] Recent studies of Ming-dynasty Buddhist practitioners reveal that the historical relationship between Buddhism and Confucian morality is far more nuanced than Liu Zongzhou's and Huang Zongxi's accounts suggest. See Corey Bell, "Genuine Anguish, Genuine Mind: 'Loyal' Buddhist Monks, Poetics and Soteriology in Ming-Qing Transition-era Southern China" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2016); Jennifer Eichman, *A Late-Sixteenth Century Buddhist Fellowship*; Liao Chao-heng [Liao Zhaoheng], *Zhong xiao puti: Wanming Qingchu kongmen yimin ji qi jieyi lunshu tanxi* 忠孝菩提：晚明清出空門遺民及其節義論述探析 (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhesuo, 2013); Hsüeh-yi Lin, "Qian Qianyi as a Buddhist in the Ming-Qing Transition," *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 31 (2018): 75–115.

[95] For an analysis of Ouyi Zhixu's life and thought, particularly with respect to his understanding of karma, see Beverly Foulks McGuire, *Living Karma: The Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Analects that incited Ouyi's realization.[96] More significantly, Jin's literary program draws on a Buddhist basis for Confucian morality which is also found, elegantly formulated, in Ouyi's teachings.

An intellectual association between these two innovative thinkers comes to light at exactly the point where Jin Shengtan's *Water Margin* commentary introduces a paradox. This apparent contradiction arises out of the interplay of Jin's three *Water Margin* prefaces. In his first preface, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Jin departs from the Neo-Confucian tradition of taking literature as a vehicle for morality, announcing that "When the sages composed works, they employed morality; when [non-sagely] people of the past composed works, they employed talent." To recap, given talent's established association with personal expression, Jin's turn to Genius initially would seem to suggest a favorable inclination to personal expression. His second preface, however, abruptly denies this possibility, as Jin condemns Li Zhi's expressive reading of the novel as running counter to Confucian morality and asserts that there is no way the novel's outlaws could be deemed "loyal and righteous," as Li Zhi had claimed. The tension between these first two prefaces invites us to read beyond both of the interpretive traditions the first two prefaces reject. In his third preface, Jin outlines an alternative. Reflecting on Shi Nai'an's Genius, he proclaims:

> That Shi Nai'an sets forth with one mind, and each of the 108 people [he conjures] attain the greatest degree of marvel is due to nothing other than his having spent ten years examining phenomena, such that then, one morning, all phenomena are examined. In this way, even if he were to employ one brush to portray hundreds upon thousands upon countless multitudes of people, he would of course not take this task to be difficult!
>
> Examining phenomena also has its method, as you should know. The method of examining phenomena takes fidelity and reciprocity as its gateway. What is called fidelity? Among all under Heaven, causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena, therefore one attains fidelity with no need to study it. All under Heaven is naturally

[96] The line in question is "One day, restraining oneself and returning to the rites" 一日克己復禮. See an essay on this topic (with appended commentary) in Jin Shengtan's annotated anthology of Ming-dynasty examination essays, *Xiaoti caizi shu* 小題才子書, in *JSTQJ* (2008), 6:641–43.

> thus— there are no forms that are not [possessed of] fidelity. Both fire and eyes are possessed of fidelity, therefore my sight is possessed of fidelity; both bells and ears are possessed of fidelity, therefore nothing heard is devoid of fidelity. Since I am possessed of fidelity, so too are others, as are thieves and bandits, dogs and rats. The fact that among thieves, bandits, dogs, and rats, there is nothing not possessed of fidelity is what is called reciprocity.
>
> 施耐庵以一心所運，而一百八人各自入妙者，無他，十年格物而一朝物格，斯以一筆而寫百千萬人，固不以為難也。
>
> 格物亦有法，汝應知之。格物之法，以忠恕為門。何謂忠？天下因緣生法，故忠不必學而至于忠，天下自然，無法不忠。火亦忠，眼亦忠，故吾之見忠；鐘亦忠，耳亦忠，故聞無不忠。吾既忠，則人亦忠，盜賊亦忠，犬鼠亦忠。盜賊犬鼠無不忠者，所謂恕也。[97]

Reading this passage as simply a hyperbolic declaration of the author's creative agency gives rise to the contradiction that long chafed at Kyokutei Bakin: how can Jin call the outlaws morally reprehensible while simultaneously celebrating their vivid portrayal? Moreover, Jin discusses the outlaws' aesthetic excellence with exactly the same term he uses to condemn them—that of "loyalty" or "fidelity" (*zhong* 忠). By means of this term, Jin renders this paradox most explicit: in one preface, the outlaws are disparaged for their utter lack of political fidelity; in the next, they are lauded for their fidelity to themselves. This is no accident of interpretive ambivalence, but a clear invitation to read in a way that renders both readings simultaneously viable.

The constellation of philosophical terms Jin inserts into the above passage points the way toward this alternate reading. Jin speaks of the author's capacity to "examine phenomena" such that the author might portray countless phenomena by means of just "one mind," a term which may also refer to "singleness of mind" as discussed above. Jin also incorporates the canonical Confucian pairing of "fidelity and reciprocity" to elaborate on the practice of examining phenomena. This same constellation of terms is mapped out over the course of Zhu Xi's dialogues on passages from two Confucian classics, Confucius' *Analects* and the *Great*

[97] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:10.

Learning. By drawing lines of association among these luminous concepts, Zhu Xi proposes an equivalence between sagely singleness of mind and the Confucian concept of fidelity. This conceptual configuration draws on a passage from the *Analects* where Confucius laconically summarizes his teaching:

> The Master said: "Zengzi! A unity runs throughout my teachings." His disciple Zengzi said, "So it is." The Master departed. The other disciples inquired, "What does this mean?" Zengzi replied, "The Master's way consists in fidelity and reciprocity, that is all."
>
> 子曰：「參乎！吾道一以貫之。」曾子曰：「唯。」子出，門人問曰：「何謂也？」曾子曰：「夫子之道，忠恕而已矣！」[98]

In his discourses on this exchange, Zhu Xi identifies Zengzi's "fidelity" with "a unity" and "reciprocity" with that which "runs throughout." For Zhu Xi, this "unity" refers the sagely mind's unity with moral principle; "reciprocity" refers to the sage's capacity to react to phenomena in accord with moral principle. As Zhu explains, "'A unity' is 'singleness of mind;' [that which] 'runs throughout' are the myriad phenomena. When he observes any phenomenon arising, the sage does so with only this mind" 一是一心，貫是萬事。看有甚事來，聖人只是這箇心.[99] By attaining this simultaneity of mind and moral principle, the sagely person spontaneously reacts to all phenomena in perfect alignment with principle, such that the sage exhibits moral conduct: "The unity running throughout is but the unitary moral principle, the substance of which is in the mind. [In this way] when attending to one's father, one enacts filial piety; when attending to one's lord, one enacts respect; [and so on]" 一貫只是一理，其體在心，事父既為孝，事君既為敬.[100] Elsewhere, in his dialogues on the *Great Learning*, Zhu Xi affirms a correlation between fidelity and reciprocity, on the one hand, and extending one's

[98] *Lunyu* 論語, 4:15.
[99] Zhu Xi, "Liren pian xia," *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 27, 2:669.
[100] Zhu Xi, "Liren pian xia," *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 27, 2:669.

knowledge to the utmost by examining the moral principle inherent in phenomena, on the other.[101] In light of this terminological gathering, Jin's author is not only a literary Genius, but also a sage whose mind is at one with the moral principle inherent in all things and events, such that he can conjure this vivid web of phenomena in a manner that aligns with this inherent principle.

Identifying this relation among terms is, as it turns out, only the first step toward resolving Jin Shengtan's moral paradox, as simply mapping the constellation has not yet transported us to dry land. In light of Zhu Xi's reasoning, it is safe to say that the Genius author has attained both singleness of mind and fidelity, but this does not suffice to explain why Jin insists upon the outlaws' lack of fidelity in one preface and their possession of the same in the next. What resolves this contradiction is the fact that Jin Shengtan's "one mind" and "fidelity" are, unlike Zhu Xi's, *not* based on moral principle. Jin's Genius examines phenomena to apprehend a rather different rationale—namely, causes and conditions (*yinyuan* 因緣), the Buddhist principle of dependent origination.

When Jin states above that "fidelity" refers to the idea that "causes and conditions give rise to all forms," he suddenly shifts from a Neo-Confucian to a Buddhist logic, the latter of which allows for a new understanding of "fidelity" as something apart from moral principle. Jin's statement amounts to a declaration that *all* phenomena—dogs and rats included—arise out of a complex web of causes and conditions. For this reason, *no* phenomenon can lay claim to an independent, permanent existence. In Buddhist terms, due to the fact of dependent origination, all things lack "own-being" (*zixing* 自性, Skt. *svabhāva*)—in other words, they are empty (*kong* 空). Contrary to what Liu Zongzhou would have us think, emptiness in this sense is not a void,

[101] Zhu Xi, "Daxue er" 大學二, *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 15, 1:298.

but rather an endless web of dependent co-arising. In this light, the existence of any one thing is necessarily dependent upon an endless array of other things, events, and circumstances. Accordingly, our day-to-day perceptions of objects as individual, independent, and substantive, are technically inaccurate. A more correct way of seeing things, according to this logic, is as a spatially and temporally infinite field of interrelated being. Emptiness is not nothing, but everything all at once. To see that any one thing possesses "fidelity" to its dependent origination is consequently to see that *all* things are thus and are in this sense indistinguishable from one another. This seems to be what Jin Shengtan means by "reciprocity"—everything is rendered equal within this field of dependent co-arising. While this new reading of Jin Shengtan's third preface does not account for the moral outrage he expresses in his second preface, our interpretive ship has finally set sail toward a resolution of Jin's seemingly contradictory claim that even thieves and bandits are possessed of fidelity—even as they are fundamentally immoral.[102]

Ouyi Zhixu's careful synthesis of the same concepts will see us to our destination by clarifying the relationship between Zhu Xi's "singleness of mind" and fidelity in Buddhist terms. He is able to do so fairly easily, as before Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians adopted this concept, One Mind belonged to Buddhist discourse.[103] Ouyi takes the relation that Zhu Xi draws between One Mind and fidelity to not only reclaim this term, but also propose a new basis for Confucian morality. He realizes this basis by drawing on the short but influential *Awakening of Mahāyāna*

[102] As mentioned in the introduction, several scholars, including David Rolston, Xiaoqiao Ling, and Zhong Xinan—as well as the Japanese author Kyokutei Bakin—have identified this as a contradiction in Jin Shengtan's reading of *Water Margin*.

[103] From this point onward, I refer to the Neo-Confucian adaptation of this concept as "singleness of mind" and the Buddhist term as "One Mind."

Faith 大乘起信論, which presents One Mind as having two aspects.[104] The first of these is the Suchness aspect (*zhenru men* 真如門), which is associated with the Buddhist truth that all things are dependently co-arising. In a manner somewhat akin to the Neo-Confucian adaptation of One Mind, the *Awakening* describes the Suchness aspect as bearing aspects of purity and changelessness and leading to enlightenment. One Mind's other aspect, termed the arising-and-ceasing aspect (*shengmie men* 生滅門) is based in phenomenal, or conventional reality. This is the mind as it operates in the day-to-day world, ever in flux and permeated with ignorance. In the following passage, Ouyi begins by citing Confucian teachings then swiftly delves into a discussion of One Mind's Suchness aspect:

> Confucianism takes fidelity and empathy as the explanation for [the idea that] "a unity runs throughout." Buddhism takes a pure mind as the basis for entering upon the Way. Pure Mind—this is to look correctly upon Suchness. Suchness is without deceptive appearance and is also called the Perfectly Sincere Mind. Suchness gives rise to the correspondence of Buddha bodies[105] and is also called the Profoundly Engaged Mind. The fact that Suchness pervades all worldly affairs is but another means of describing the Mind of Resolve to transfer one's merit and deliver all beings. These three minds are but One Mind.
>
> 儒以忠恕為一貫之傳。佛以直心為入道之本。直心者正念真如也。真如無虛偽相，亦名至誠心。真如生佛體同，亦名深心。真如遍一切事，亦名回向發願心。此三心者，即一心也。[106]

In this preliminary discourse, that which "runs throughout" all worldly affairs is no longer moral principle but Suchness. The faithful Mahāyāna practitioner's apprehension of Suchness motivates the three minds that Ouyi discusses here, which are collectively known as the "three

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[104] Hanshan Deqing, the famous cleric whom Ouyi identifies as his teacher (but whom he never met in person) discourses at length on One Mind's two aspects in his commentary edition of this Chinese sutra, which was highly influential during the late Ming. See *Dasheng qixinlun shulüe* 大乘起信論疏略 (2 *juan*), X 45.765.

[105] The *Nirvana Sutra* (*Daban Niepan jing* 大般涅槃經) relates this term to equality (*pingdeng* 平等). See T 37.1764.698.

[106] Ouyi Zhixu, "Fayu san" 法語三, in *Lingfeng Ouyi dashi zonglun* 靈峰蕅益大師宗論, *juan* 2, J 36.B348. Unfortunately, the disciple of Ouyi's who collated the monk's writings did not incorporate the dates of their composition.

resolves" (*san fa xin* 三發心). The practitioner (1) sees all phenomena as dependently co-arisen, and, understanding this truth, (2) seeks enlightenment to realize their own Buddha-nature, and (3) seeks to help others realize Buddhahood. Just as Zhu Xi describes the sagely conduct enabled by singleness of mind, Ouyi has outlined the conduct of one who has attained One Mind.

The second half of Ouyi's discussion draws on One Mind's arising-and-extinguishing aspect to present the apprehension of Suchness as the very basis for Confucian morality. Crucially, as the *Awakening* explains, One Mind's two aspects are not at odds with one another, but "harmoniously converge, neither one nor different" 和合，非一非異.[107] Accordingly, each of the three resolves finds its parallel in worldly forms of unselfish conduct:

> One Mind completely eliminates [the distinction between] inner and outer and is called "fidelity." One Mind is equivalent to all minds and is called "reciprocity." It is therefore said that the mind, the Buddha, and all beings—these three are without distinction. If one is resolute in understanding that these three are without distinction, then, should one desire for even an instant to deceive oneself, one would be unable to do so; should one desire for even an instant to benefit oneself, one would be unable to do so; should one desire for even an instant to differentiate oneself [from others], one would be unable to do so.
>
> 一心泯絕內外，謂之忠；一心等一切心，謂之恕。故曰心、佛、眾生，三無差別。果達三無差別，欲一念自欺自誑不可得，欲一念自私自利亦不可得，欲一念自分自局尤不可得矣。[108]

In Ouyi's formulation, fidelity no longer depends on extending one's knowledge by examining the moral principle inherent in all phenomena, but on the recognition of all phenomena as they really are: dependently co-arising, empty of own-being. On the basis of this realization, the distinction between inward perceptions and outward phenomena—Jin Shengtan's sight and hearing, fire and bells—is eliminated. All perceptions and phenomena are possessed of fidelity with respect to the fact of their dependent co-arising. This all-consuming Suchness is a great

[107] *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, T 32.1666.576.
[108] Ouyi Zhixu, "Fayu san," *Lingfeng Ouyi dashi zonglun*, *juan* 2, J 36.B348.

equalizer: any object or perception that might be conventionally distinguishable from others is an equal participant in this infinite web of interdependency. Consequently, One Mind is indistinguishable from all the world's minds. This, and not Zhu Xi's conception of reciprocity as "extending oneself toward others" (*tui ji ji ren* 推己及人) defines the reciprocity that allows for the Genius author's miraculous feats of human portrayal. The author need not extend themself toward others, for the author experiences themself *as* all others. In other words, the enlightened mind, like the Buddha, is not apart from all living things, no matter how polluted by worldly desires those things are, even as the enlightened mind itself is pure. This is because, on the basis of Suchness, there is no ontological basis for self-deception, selfish advantage, or differentiating oneself from others. Put simply, if fully realized, then Mahāyāna ontology eliminates the motivation for the selfish conduct that Confucianism is so concerned with restraining.

Drawing on Ouyi's discourse, in the very act of portraying even the most morally destitute characters to the utmost degree of perfection, the Genius author does not betray their own moral corruption, but the very basis for morality—an utterly impersonal grasp of all forms of being as dependently co-arisen, and naturally possessed of fidelity to their conditioned arising. Jin Shengtan's entire commentarial program, ranging from *Water Margin*, to *Romance of the Western Chamber*, to his commentaries on Tang poetry and classical prose, to his annotated anthology of Ming-dynasty examination essays, aims to guide the reader toward an apprehension of this Buddhist truth. Precisely how his commentarial approach attempts this is the subject of the next chapter, wherein we leave Jin's intellectual backdrop behind to delve more deeply into his conception of authorial Genius. Ultimately, what resolves the long-standing contradiction in Jin Shengtan's reading of *Water Margin* is the idea that the more perfect the author's portrayal of even the most morally corrupt characters, the more complete the author's awareness of

conditioned arising must be. As Jin Shengtan states in his prefatory comment to chapter 55 of the novel:

> Someone might ask, "Then what kind of person is Nai'an?" I say, "He is a Genius." "And on what grounds do you deem him a Genius?" I answer, "On account of the fact that he is someone who resolutely abides in preaching the teachings of [the Buddhist philosopher] Nagarjuna. Someone who preaches the teachings of Nagarjuna must be a bodhisattva. And a bodhisattva is someone who is truly able to 'examine phenomena' and 'extend their knowledge to the utmost.'"
>
> 或問曰：「然則耐庵何如人也？」曰：「才子也。」「何以謂之才子也？」曰：「彼固宿講于龍樹之學者也。」講于龍樹之學，則菩薩也。菩薩也者，真能格物致知者也。[109]

[109] This comes from Jin Shengtan's prefatory comments to chapter 55 of the novel. *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:999; *JSTQJ* (1985), 2:315.

CHAPTER TWO

RETHINKING ART AS UPĀYA

There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting: to see all the world's stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure...
—Barthes

Someone might ask, "Then what kind of person is Nai'an?" I say, "He is a Genius." "And on what grounds do you deem him a Genius?" I say, "On account of the fact that he is… a bodhisattva, and this is someone who is truly able to examine phenomena and extend knowledge to the utmost."

或問曰：「然則耐庵何如人也？」曰：「才子也。」「何以謂之才子也？」曰：「彼……菩薩也者，真能格物致知者也。」
—Jin Shengtan

The previous chapter recovered the intellectual context for Jin Shengtan's valorization of Genius. In the process, that analysis foregrounded a conflict in Chinese moral philosophy that often played out—and still plays out—in literary criticism: Is society better established through social actors' adherence to an individual morality or to a transpersonal one? Even within the relatively delimited historical context of the late Ming dynasty, diverse approaches to literary practice developed on either side of this debate. Very broadly speaking, however, schools of Neo-Confucian thought (and many of the Buddhist schools that informed them) upheld ideas of a pure, original mind that clearly favored a transpersonal value. The strongest case for individual morality seems to have developed alongside literary discourse, in particular that evinced by the expressionist theories of the Gong'an School and Li Zhi. While Gong'an critics and associated figures such as Zhang Nai maintained some allegiance to the conventions of Neo-Confucian morality, including an adherence to a notion of moral principle (albeit one much transformed from that of Zhu Xi), Li Zhi advocated for the expression of the highly individualized childlike mind, a deliberate inversion of the Neo-Confucian understanding of the moral mind, which was

itself, in turn, partly inspired by a northern Chan understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性).[1] *Water Margin* provided Li Zhi with the opportunity to push his case for the childlike mind to its moral limit, as he blasphemously declared that this work depicting theft, arson, murder, and cannibalism expressed the Confucian values of loyalty and righteousness, and would, by moving rulers to sympathy, serve to inspire a better society. As we saw in the last chapter, and as I will continue to explain in more detail, Jin found shortcomings in both sides' one-sidedness and formulated an alternative hermeneutics on the basis of literary form.

The debate around *Water Margin*'s moral value is still ongoing. The prominent contemporary intellectual Liu Zaifu 劉再復 has described *Water Margin* as the Chinese people's "gateway to Hell" (*diyu zhi men* 地獄之門) for its aesthetically appealing portrayals of profoundly immoral behavior, which he takes to have poisoned the hearts and minds of generations of Chinese readers.[2] To this, William Sin 冼偉林 has responded that the moral value of *Water Margin*'s brigands resides in their forthrightness of character (*zhixing* 直性). Sin defines this quality, which he relates to Nietzschean moral philosophy, as an agent's ability to act in accordance with their beliefs.[3] In the context of this debate, the sources of Liu Zaifu's moral position also merit observation. According to Min Qiao's recent overview of Liu's concept of subjectivity:

> Specifically, Liu is deeply affected by Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) idea of innate knowing and the view that the mind gives reason to the external world. Liu also

[1] John Jorgensen, "The Radiant Mind: Zhu Xi and the Chan Doctrine of *Tathāgatagarbha*," in *The Buddhist Roots of Zhu Xi's Philosophical Thought*, ed. John Makeham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–85.

[2] Liu Zaifu 劉再復, *Shuangdian pipan: dui "Shuihu zhuan" he "Sanguo yanyi" de wenhua pipan* 雙典的批判：對《水滸傳》和《三國演義》的文化批判 ("Critiquing Two Classics: A Cultural Critique of *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*") (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian), 64.

[3] William Sin, "The *Water Margin*, Moral Degradation, and the Virtue of *Zhixing*," in *Sociological and Philosophical Perspectives on Education in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Chi-Ming Lam and Jae Park (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 62.

> identifies with Laozi's philosophy of returning to infancy, to a primary state, and to simplicity and values the spirit of free wandering of Zhuangzi 莊子. Inspired by Chan Buddhism, Liu Zaifu reiterates that man's awakening, or recovery of one's Chan mind, relies on "one's own inherent nature." He holds that individuals "need not search for Buddha on the outside—it is all up to one's temperament, for the Buddha resides in one's heart."[4]

Initially, this may sound like a celebration of the individual, but by insisting upon the moral value of inherent nature and equating the individual with the Buddha, Liu holds people to a moral ideal comparable to that upheld by late-Ming Neo-Confucian thinkers, a high standard of thought and conduct that invites the individual into a struggle with their own conscience (a practice Neo-Confucians refer to as "rectifying the mind" *zhengxin* 正心).[5] Present-day moralists would do well to consider whether such struggles are worthwhile. A study by Lynn Struve, for instance, illuminates the obsessive, self-critical neurosis that plays out in the journal of Huang Chunyao 黃淳耀 (1605–1645), a scholar with strong Neo-Confucian and Buddhist ideals who wholeheartedly attempted to bring his thoughts into alignment with a transpersonal moral ideal in both waking and dreams. Struve proposes that Huang's disinvestment in the phenomenal world and pursuit of an otherworldly moral perfection may have been a stronger factor in his eventual suicide than the dynastic fall that led many a Ming loyalist to end their life.[6] At the same time, following Li Zhi and William Sin in lauding *Water Margin* for portraying killers and cannibals who are, at least, true to themselves seems a questionable means of sustaining a society anyone would actually want to live in.[7]

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[4] Min Qiao, "Rethinking 'Subjectivity' in Literature: Liu Zaifu's Theoretical Construction and Cultural Reflection," *Prism: Theory and Modern Literature* 17, no. 1 (2020): 179.

[5] Min Qiao explains that this struggle is at the heart of Liu Zaifu's understanding of subjectivity. See Qiao, "Rethinking 'Subjectivity,'" 172, 177, 179.

[6] Lynn Struve, "Self-Struggles of a Martyr: Memories, Dreams, and Obsessions in the Extant Diary of Huang Chunyao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 69, no. 2 (2009): 343–394.

[7] Li Zhi was able to justify the childlike mind according to the idea that someone who had *truly* recovered their childlike mind would not have any desire for self-promotion or other forms of selfish conduct. Sin, however, speaks rather too approvingly of violent conduct. He states, "Both Nietzsche's noble men and the outlaws in *Water*

The present chapter builds on the last by recovering the philosophical basis for Jin Shengtan's reconciliation of these two moral perspectives, which I propose Jin realized through a creative Buddhist reading of literary forms. This interpretation entails a shift in how literary scholarship construes Jin Shengtan's use of Buddhist discourse. While scholars including Chen Hong, Wu Zhenglan, and Zhong Xinan have examined Jin's references to Buddhist sutras and concepts, these aspects of his commentary have consistently been read as metaphors for specifically literary ideas. A persistent feature of these metaphorical readings is an interpretation of Genius as an authorial capacity to portray lively individuals by means of objective observation and diverse literary methods.[8] But these readings do not explain how Jin imagined engaging with literary methods as leading to a moral outcome. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, scholars who read Jin's commentary as a celebration of individuality, particularly in the context of *Water Margin*, also tend to perceive a contradiction in his moral and political outlook. Such readings no longer seem quite apt, given that Jin presented Genius in opposition to the anti-archaists' valorization of personal expression and denigration of expertise in literary form. The apparent moral contradiction in Jin's literary outlook dissolves when we read his attention to literary form as an exercise, not in celebrating personality for its own sake, but in contemplating literary character and literary methods from the standpoint of Buddhist emptiness. This, I argue, is exactly what his third preface's pronouncement that "causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena" invites readers to do.

Margin have a strong and uncompromising character; they stand in stark contrast to the hypocritical, self-deceived, and weak people, whom Nietzsche describes as slaves. *The latter type of personality may be cooperative members in modern society.... [I]f a person is to live and act healthily and truly, he may have to face an unpredictable future and a potentially hostile external environment*." Emphasis added. See "The *Water Margin*, Moral Degradation, and the Virtue of *Zhixing*," 59.

[8] Cited above. See See Chen Hong, "Shi *Shuihu* Jin pi 'yinyuan sheng fa' shuo;" Chen Hong, *Jin Shengtan zhuanlun*, 168-179; Zhong Xinan, *Jin Shengtan wenxue piping lilun yanjiu*, 22, 62-66; Wu Zhenglan, *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 11–12, 25, and 30; and Wu Zhenglan, "*Lun fojiao 'yinyuan' shuo dui Jin Shengtan wenxue lilun de yingxiang*."

The Mahāyāna Buddhist understanding of phenomenal reality as at once "false" or provisionally existent (*jia* 假) and fundamentally empty of own-being (*kong* 空) provides a philosophical basis for Jin Shengtan's elevation of literary phenomena as providing for an understanding of reality that might give way to moral conduct. Like many thinkers of his day, Jin cites from a wide variety of Buddhist sources, and his work attests to the shared influence of Chan 禪, Huayan 華嚴, and Tiantai 天台 thought.[9] Among these schools of thought, the Tiantai articulation of the relationship between provisional truth (*jia di* 假諦) and the absolute truth of emptiness (*kong di* 空諦 or *zhendi* 真諦) offers special insight into how Jin might have reimagined literary methods (*wenfa*) as bases for philosophical enlightenment. Tiantai doctrine was established by the patriarch Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), whose famous discourse on *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (593 CE, recorded by Zhiyi's disciple Guanding 灌頂) presented a classification of Buddhist teachings (*panjiao* 判教) according to how different traditions conceived of the relation between provisional reality and emptiness.[10] According to Zhiyi's classification, Tiantai thought—the consummate expression of which Zhiyi held to be the *Lotus Sutra*—rose above all other Buddhist traditions in maintaining the mutual identity of provisionality and emptiness, what Zhiyi (drawing on Nāgārjuna) identifies as the

[9] In general, Huayan and Tiantai are regarded as doctrinal or philosophical schools, whereas Chan and Pure Land 淨土 are regarded as practices. For a nuanced overview of the relative positions of schools of Buddhist thought and practice during the late Ming, see Jiang Wu, "Introduction," in *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-20.

[10] Zhiyi produced a number of important works, three of which, in particular, went on to serve as foundational texts of Tiantai thought. These are the *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, T.54.1716; *Fahua wenju* 妙法蓮華經文句, T.34.1718; and *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, T.46.1911. The first two of these are discourses on the *Lotus Sutra*; the third compiles Zhiyi's lectures on meditation practice. All three works were edited by Zhiyi's disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561-632). For a discussion and partial translation of the *Profound Meaning*, see Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989). Also see Swanson, *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T'ien-t'ai Chih-i's Mo-ho chih-kuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018).

truth of the mean (*zhong di* 中諦).[11] This equation of the real with the provisional, a paradoxical pairing that Brook Ziporyn refers to as value and anti-value,[12] has intriguing implications for art's role in historical attempts to promote morally responsible forms of intersubjectivity, especially in cultural contexts where Tiantai discourse flourished.

Early seventeenth-century Jiangnan was just such a context. After a phase of relative unpopularity after the Song dynasty, Tiantai underwent a resurgence during the late Ming. This was partly due to monastics' efforts to rehabilitate Buddhism by synthesizing the doctrinal teachings of Huayan and Tiantai Buddhism with Chan and Pure Land practices.[13] Among these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century synthesizers was the monk Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 (1554–1628), who was first drawn to Pure Land and Chan teachings and gradually came to interpret these traditions according to Tiantai thought.[14] In 1586, Chuandeng undertook the restoration of Gaoming Temple 高明寺, one of the twelve temples founded by Zhiyi, on Mt. Tiantai in Taizhou. Located less than two hundred miles from Jin's place of residence in Suzhou, the temple had become a thriving center of Buddhist study by 1613. Lang Chen, the first scholar to have undertaken a close examination of Youxi Chuandeng's intellectual network, proposes that Tiantai doctrine's amenability to literary practice (justifiable according to the identification

[11] Zhiyi adopts Nāgārjuna's words (as translated into Chinese) but not Nāgārjuna's intention (as evinced by the Sanskrit), though he attributes his understanding of threefold truth to Nāgārjuna. For a discussion of Zhiyi's adaptation, see Ng Yu-kwan, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

[12] See Brook Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[13] Such monastic efforts are the subject of Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-Hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[14] According to Yungfen Ma, Chuandeng asserted the compatibility of Chan and Tiantai doctrine and, at the age of sixty-nine, composed a *Commentary on the Collected Writings of the Chan School of Yongjia* 永嘉禪宗集註 from the standpoint of Tiantai thought. The distinction between these schools of thought should not be too firmly asserted, however, as Tiantai played an important role in the historical development of Chan. The Chan Master Yongjia 永嘉 (665-713) was himself said to have been enlightened by Tiantai teachings. See Ma, "The Revival of Tiantai Buddhism in the Late Ming," 22–27.

of the provisional with emptiness) would have appealed to late-Ming literati.[15] Indeed, Chuandeng's renovation of Gaoming Temple enjoyed the support of some of the most famous literati of the late Ming.[16] Jin Shengtan's contemporary and fellow resident of Suzhou Ouyi Zhixu, who had once been a devout Neo-Confucian, also studied with Chuandeng and became a steady advocate of Tiantai thought, even going so far as to compose Tiantai-inspired commentaries on Confucian classics ranging from the *Classic of Changes* to *Mencius*.[17] In 1640, Zhixu also produced a slim 2 *juan* compilation of selected passages from Zhiyi's *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, in this manner contributing to the accessibility of the patriarch's thought.[18]

The Neo-Confucian inspired approaches to hermeneutics we considered in the previous chapter suggest an object of knowledge beyond literary form. Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, by contrast, asserts that there is nothing beyond form. As the philosopher Nāgārjuna, to whom Jin Shengtan refers in his *Fifth Work of Genius*, famously states:

> All dharmas arising from causes and conditions
> I say are identical to Emptiness.
> It is also a Provisional Name.
> It is precisely what we call the Middle Way.
>
> 因緣所生法，我說即是空，
> 亦為是假名，亦是中道義。[19]

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[15] Chen Lang 陳朗, "Mad but not Chan: Tu Long (1543–1605) and the Tiantai School of Buddhism" 狂而非禪：屠隆與天台宗, *Foguang xuebao* 佛光學報 5, no. 2 (2019): 222–260.

[16] Yungfen Ma notes that Yu Chunxi 虞淳熙, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639) collaborated to produce a stele that stood in front of the Temple's meditation hall, "The Revival of Tiantai Buddhism," 34; according to Chen Lang, Tu Long 屠隆 (1542–1605) and his friends Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1548–1606) and Wang Shixing 王士性 (*jinshi* 1577 along with Tu and Feng) collaborated on an inscription for the stupa of Chuandeng's teacher Baisong 百松 (1538–1589), which was located beside the Temple.

[17] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 35.

[18] *Fahua jing xuanyi jieyao* 法華經玄義節要, X 28.0589.

[19] Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 118. Ziporyn's translation is designed to bring out Zhiyi's formulation of threefold truth as derived from the Chinese rendering of this passage, which allows for a degree of ambiguity not present in the original Sanskrit. Ziporyn's reading draws on Ng Yu-Kwan's analysis. See Ng, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*, 125–127.

This statement has historically been understood as expressing both a twofold and a threefold conception of truth. According to the twofold understanding that Nāgārjuna probably intended, Phenomena are dependently co-arisen and empty of own-being, but emptiness is also only a provisional concept. The "middle way" is this understanding of emptiness as empty, which keeps practitioners from going to extremes by pursuing some otherworldly value called emptiness. Zhiyi interpreted this as a statement of threefold truth, according to which all phenomena are dependently co-arisen and therefore both empty of own-being and provisionally existent. In this case, the "middle way" is the understanding that all phenomena are simultaneously empty *and* provisionally existent. While Nāgārjuna's twofold truth allows for the idea that there is no emptiness beyond provisional reality, Zhiyi articulates this more firmly, asserting that provisional reality is fully identical with emptiness.

When applied to Neo-Confucian thought, threefold truth has important moral implications. Zhu Xi's adaptation of Buddha nature to a Neo-Confucian view of singleness of mind (*yi xin*) suggests a hierarchy of value at odds with Buddhist truth.[20] Youxi Chuandeng's *Discourse on Inherent Good and Evil* 性善惡論 critiqued Neo-Confucian thinkers for having wrongly conflated worldly phenomena such as sentiment (*qing* 情), talent (*cai* 才), and cultivated good and evil with nature (*xing* 性), a confusion he perceived as having led Neo-

[20] Ziporyn suggests that non-Tiantai traditions of Buddhist thought ultimately maintain the superiority of emptiness over the provisional, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 17–18, 123, 131. In cases where this is true, Buddhist discussions of emptiness may resonate with the relative moral value Neo-Confucians placed on principle. At the same time, however, as mentioned above, Tiantai teachings played a role in the historical development of other schools of Buddhism, and historical thinkers often synthesized Buddhist teachings in creative and meaningful ways. Moreover, while Tiantai doctrine may offer the most systematic articulation of the equality of provisional truth and absolute truth, twofold truth also allows for this understanding of equivalence. For example, the Korean Buddhist Wŏnhyo, whom I discuss later in this chapter, also regarded provisional and absolute truth as equal without relying on Tiantai thought. For an introduction to Wŏnhyo and selected translations of his work, see "The Rise of Buddhism," in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Yŏng-ho Ch'oe, ed. *Sources of East Asian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), vol. 1, 515–526.

Confucianism to distinguish between a pure, cosmic nature (*tiandi zhi xing* 天地之性) and a material nature (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性) polluted by selfish desires.[21] According to the logic of threefold truth, nature is not a pure substance that gets contaminated or obscured by worldly attachments, but each individual phenomenon's simultaneous provisional existence (as a distinct, nameable object) and emptiness of own being, both of which aspects are the natural outcome of dependent co-arising. Viewed from this angle, moral and immoral individuals are such by virtue of causes and conditions—if one chooses to favor one type of individual (say, an outlaw) over another (perhaps a sage), then one has failed to perceive both as equally empty, even in the fact of their (dependently co-arisen) difference. And favoring one category of phenomena over another lends itself to partisanship, which may, in turn, lead to excessive or harmful behavior.

Just as threefold truth invites a new perspective on moral value and anti-value, so too does it invite a reconsideration of art's relationship to Buddhist truth. Despite the *Heart Sutra*'s famous pronouncement that "form is no different from emptiness; emptiness is no different from form" 色即是空，空即是色,[22] literary scholarship tends to emphasize art's capacity to serve as a metaphor for a world of false forms, regarding the bounds of the artistic work as a beckoning toward a world more real than that of the created work. This is to treat art as upāya—in this case, conceived as a lie that gives way to truth, a counterpart to the idea that "life is but a dream." While it is the case that historical thinkers articulated art's relation to Buddhist truth in this manner, the possibilities for this relation are in fact far more complex and varied, especially in cases where the concept of provisional truth is not superseded by a truth beyond form.[23]

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[21] *Xing shan e lun* 性善惡論, X 57.970. Ma, "The Revival of Tiantai Buddhism," 152–157.

[22] *Bore poluomiduo xin jing* 般若波羅密多心經 T 8.251.848.

[23] According to one classic trope, life is compared to events on a stage 人生如戲. Liao Chao-Heng 廖肇亨 discusses this trope in relation to Chan Buddhism. See "Chanmen shuo xi: yige fojiao wenhua shi guandian de changshi" 禪門說戲：一個佛教文化史觀點的嘗試, in *Zhongbian, shichan, mengxi: Mingmo Qingchu fojiao*

Early modern Buddhist readers and writers experimented with diverse approaches to treating literature as a vehicle for truth. Such experiments played out in the Chan-inspired poetics of the prominent monk Hanshan Deqing as well as the novella *Supplement to Journey to the West* 西遊補 (1641), which was composed by Hanshan Deqing's close friend Dong Sizhang 董斯張 (1587–1628), another resident of Suzhou and Jin Shengtan's near-contemporary.[24] I will discuss both thinkers' literary-philosophical conceits in more detail below, but what is worth noting straightaway is that both tend to highlight literary phenomena's instability or proximity to delusion as a means of inviting the reader to see worldly forms for what they really are—provisional or "false" (*jia*). Viewed in this way, literature reveals itself as mere surface, a phantasm which, like the illusory skillful means (*fangbian* 方便, Skt. *upāya*) bodhisattvas employ to save the deluded, gives way to awakening.

Jin Shengtan, by contrast, identifies dependent co-arising with literary form at the height of its reality. By drawing readers into exceptionally close modes of engagement with form (provisional reality) *as* emptiness (absolute truth), his commentary collapses the distinction between surface and depth and, in so doing, offers an alternative take on art as upāya, wherein the skillful means is itself identical to the truth that would otherwise serve as its end. I read Jin's innovation as a literary expression of Tiantai upāya theory, according to which skillful means—

wenhua lunshu de chengxian yu kaizhan 中邊•詩禪•夢戲：明末清初佛教文化論述的呈現與開展 (Taibei: Yunchen wenhua, 2008), 336–364. The monk-painter Kun Can 髡殘 (1612–1685) evokes this trope in relation to his art. See Yingzhi Zhao, "Catching Shadows: Wang Fuzhi's (1619–1692) Lyrics and Poetics," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 38 (2016): 44.

[24] For a detailed discussion of Hanshan Deqing's Buddhist poetics, which drew on secular poetry describing "hellish" landscapes, see Corey Bell, "Genuine Anguish, Genuine Mind;" Qiancheng Li discusses Deqing's association with Dong Sizhang and the role of Buddhist thought in *Further Adventures on the Journey to the West* in his introduction to The Master of Silent Whistle Studio, *Further Adventures on the Journey to the West*, trans. Qiancheng Li and Robert Hegel (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), xxvi–xxvii. For a more detailed discussion, see Li Qiancheng 李前程, ed., *Xiyoubu jiaozhu* 西遊補校注 ("A Variorum Edition of *Further Adventures on the Journey to the West*") (Beijing: Kunlun chubanshe, 2011), 1–47.

the story a bodhisattva makes up to save the deluded—is not only a means to realizing truth but is equivalent to truth itself. From a doctrinal standpoint, based on Zhiyi's interpretation of upāya, Tiantai thought could always admit literature and other arts—or, for that matter, absolutely any worldly form—as a means of "opening the provisional to reveal the real" (*kai quan xian shi* 開權顯實), in other words, to reveal a fiction as having always been real.[25]

The Tiantai understanding of upāya also has important implications for how we understand late-Ming intellectual "syncretism." The idea of opening the provisional to reveal the real may readily apply to any discourse or object, regardless of how secular, Neo-Confucian, anti-Buddhist, or immoral that discourse or object might initially appear to be. This is not to say we should set forth and read all cultural products of this period from the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy (although, from the standpoint of Tiantai doctrine, this is technically possible). But where Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thought seem to mingle, or when a work of art includes references to Buddhist philosophy, we should pause to examine the work's formal features for evidence of a philosophical position, rather than assume the work is simply making figurative or fuzzy use of a general cultural phenomenon. The present chapter will demonstrate how to approach this task. In so doing, I will explain how Jin Shengtan deployed Buddhist thought to develop a new approach of literary hermeneutics—starting with his commentary edition of *Water Margin*.

It may help to begin by looking upon Jin Shengtan as filling a role rather different from what we would today call a literary critic. More than a decade before Jin published his first *Work of Genius*, he was known among the literati of Suzhou as a lay teacher who lectured on Buddhist teachings. The poet Xu Zeng knew of Jin in association with Suzhou's lively Buddhist

[25] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, T.33.1716.685b17.

community, in which Xu's poetic mentor Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) was also deeply involved.[26] In this social context, Jin Shengtan seems to have been regarded as something of an unorthodox figure. Xu Zeng recounts:

> From the age of twenty I cursed Shengtan as a demon and continued in this way for many years. In autumn of *Renwu* [1642], I encountered Dharma Master Shengmo, who wanted to take me to see Shengtan. As soon as he said, "Shengtan," I quickly covered my ears and said, "How I dread him! How I dread him!" Afterwards, I met with Shengmo several more times, and gradually came to doubt my previous opinion [of Shengtan].
>
> 二十年人盡罵聖歎為魔，如是者數年。至壬午秋遇聖默法師，欲導余見聖歎，才說聖歎，余急掩耳曰："怕人，怕人！"後遇聖默幾次，漸疑之。[27]

Xu Zeng never explains why he initially held Jin Shengtan in such dubious regard, but his subsequent recollections, dating from 1644 to 1656, describe his gradual acceptance of Jin's teachings by way of the latter man's public lectures.[28] By the last of his recollections, which records a letter addressed to Jin's friend Wang Daoshu 王道樹 (1619–1665), Xu Zeng clearly considers himself Jin's student. Most remarkably, Xu's missive suggests that Jin's status as a Buddhist lay-teacher was integral not only to the appeal of Jin's *Six Works of Genius*, but also to their function.[29] Xu begins the letter by lamenting his recurring physical maladies,[30] reasoning that these are tied to his "afflictive habits" (*jiexi* 結習), the karmic impressions of worldly

[26] Qian Qianyi was a devoted lay disciple of Hanshan Deqing. See Lin Hsüeh-Yi, "Qian Qianyi as a Buddhist in the Ming-Qing Transition:" 75–115.

[27] Xu Zeng, *Song san er sheng jian chang jing zi xu* 送三耳生見唱經子序, in *Jiu gao tang ji*, *juan* 3. Cited in Lu Lin, *Jin Shengtan shishi yanjiu*, 335.

[28] Shengtan lectured at Huiqing Monastery 慧慶寺 outside of Suzhou as well as the two studios associated with Shengtan's publications, Gatha Hall (*Guanhua tang* 貫華堂) and the Hall for Chanting Sutras (*Changjing tang* 唱經堂).

[29] This letter is recorded in Lu Lin's *Jin Shengtan shishi yanjiu* and Wu Guoping, "Xu Zeng yu Jin Shengtan," 54. Also see Lu Lin, "Xu Zeng yu Jin Shengtan jiaoyou xinkao" 徐增與金聖歎交遊新考, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 4 (2016).

[30] Xu Zeng's symptoms were consistent with beriberi, a disease resulting from thiamine deficiency. Lu Lin, *Xu Zeng yu Jin Shengtan jiaoyou xinkao*, 109.

defilements (*fannao* 煩惱, Skt., *kleśa*) that he has been too complacent to overcome through diligent study. Xu worries that he has not advanced alongside his fellow students:

> Therefore I often think that I should gather some money in order to arrange one or two lectures for the sake of examining the *Personal Transcripts* [of Jin Shengtan, such as his *Nirvana Lectures* 涅槃講場私鈔, *Lotus Sutra Lectures* 法華講場私鈔, *Samadhi of the Lotus Sutra* 法華三昧私鈔, and *Samadhi of the Precious Mirror* 寶鏡三昧私鈔, among others]. Yet you take the best parts of the *Personal Transcripts* as having been fully transmitted, such that there is no need to attend lectures [on them]. In your case, you are able to manage this through sustained study, yet I dare not hastily grant myself the same status…. I cannot clear away my afflictive habits, yet will the day that I succeed on this path manifest? I cannot but greatly doubt it. Fool that I am, I am anxious to arrange a lecture that will be conducive to this pursuit. I have not visited the Hall for Chanting Sutras in ten years—like one floating on the vast ocean, I have no sense of direction. May I ask that you soon take two days to instruct me? I have bought the *Sixth Work of Genius* and will provide room and board.
>
> 故輒思無故得數十金，為舉講場一二次，以閱《私鈔》，總不及身題面命之為快，而道樹以為《私鈔》妙處盡傳，不必聽講。在道樹久學能然，而弟則未敢遽以為然也。…… 然則結習不可除，而反於道成之日發露耶？弟不免大疑。愚汲汲欲建講場者，良為此也。弟不到唱經堂十年矣，茫茫大海未知適從。敢請道樹明以教我兩日，買得《第六才子書》，寢食與俱。[31]

This letter invites us to look upon Jin Shengtan's commentaries as works whose implications exceed the literary. Wang Daoshu, who, along with his older brother Wang Zhuoshan 王斲山 (b. c. 1612), is frequently mentioned in Jin's *Water Margin* and *Western Chamber* commentaries, turns out to have been not only a friend, but also a co-teacher or disciple. Moreover, Xu discusses Jin's *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary as a work with which he wishes to engage for the sake of its karmically therapeutic benefits. Jin's commentary on *Romance of the Western Chamber* accommodates such a reading, for his annotations on this work are replete with Buddhist themes, including, perhaps most significantly for Xu, that of the healing power of repentance rituals (*chanmo* 懺摩), for which Jin presents one of the drama's acts as a literary

[31] Lu Lin, *Jin Shengtan shishi yanjiu*, 337.

equivalent.[32] The Buddhist aspects of Jin Shengtan's *Water Margin* commentary are somewhat less explicit, but, given that he describes the author of this work as a bodhisattva whose writing perfectly demonstrates causes and conditions (*yinyuan*), both of Jin's completed *Works of Genius* propose a Buddhist mode of literary engagement.[33]

The archival record of Xu Zeng's acquaintance with Jin Shengtan has been known to scholars for some time but has not yet been brought to bear on literary analyses of his works.[34] The reasons for this are in part disciplinary, as the previous chapter discussed, but this cordoning-off of evidence is also the outcome of a methodological technicality: namely, the fact that established scholarly approaches take his base texts as the primary frames of reference for interpreting his commentary. Consequently, his paratextual contributions have been read through the lens of the categories—the novel, drama, classical poetry—to which those texts belong. A peculiarity of these genre-based frameworks is that they render many details of Jin's biographical experience, as well as many of the more developed or "digressive" sections in his commentary, seemingly off-topic. This explains why even when scholars do examine Jin's use of Buddhist rhetoric, they either treat it as an extraneous intellectual-historical detail or read that rhetoric as operating metaphorically in the service of the genre at hand.[35]

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[32] See chapter three, part one of this dissertation.

[33] Moreover, Jin Shengtan attests to the overall coherence of his commentarial program in his ninth guideline for reading *Romance of the Western Chamber*: "I have planned to have six *Works of Genius*, of which *Romance of the Western Chamber* is but one. But although there are six works in total, they have been read with my one pair of hands and one pair of eyes" 聖歎本有才子書六部，《西廂記》乃是其一。然其實六部書，聖歎只是用一副手眼讀得.33. See "Du Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji fa" 讀第六才子書西廂記法, in *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu*, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:855.

[34] Neither Lu Lin nor Wu Guoping, the two scholars to have examined this relationship in the most detail, draw on the facts of Jin's acquaintanceship with Xu Zeng to reconsider the angle from which Jin's *Works of Genius* should be read.

[35] Two notable exceptions to this trend in literary scholarship are Liao Chao-Heng 廖肇亨, *Yinci yanqu yu fojiao: cong Xixiang ji xiangguan wenben lun qingchu xiqu meixue de fojiao quanshi* 淫辭艷曲與佛教：從《西廂記》相關文本論清初戲曲美學的佛教詮釋 ("Erotica and Buddhism: The Buddhist Dimension of the Commentary of *Xixiang ji*"), Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan 26 (2005): 127–160, http://dx.doi.org/10.6351/BICLP.200503.0127; and Qiancheng Li's *Transmutations of Desire: Literature and Religion in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020).

Asuka Sango has identified an analogous methodological limitation in scholarship on medieval Japanese Buddhist manuscripts, which tends to privilege colophons pertaining either to canonical interpretation or the scribe's material context. She notes that such frames of reference fail to account for the personal aims a scribe might have had when preparing a manuscript. Sango's recent work on the Japanese scholar-monk Sōshō 宗性 (1202–1278) consequently foregrounds what she identifies as the monk's more "expressive" colophons. In keeping with my observations of scholarship on Jin Shengtan's commentaries, Sango's shift of emphasis illuminates how these colophons might defy:

> our assumed distinction between a text and a paratext, or between the main text and its colophon that supplies information about the main text, the author, or the scribe. Sōshō's colophons often exceed these expected functions in their eloquent expression of feelings and wishes that are largely irrelevant to the main text.[36]

In other words, as Sango has succinctly stated elsewhere, the expressive aspect of Sōshō's colophons "challenge[s] our assumptions about text as primary and paratext as secondary."[37] In solidarity with Sango's bold shift of emphasis from text to paratext, this chapter seeks a means of rereading Jin's most famous and influential work, his commentary edition of the vernacular novel *Water Margin*, not as a secondary reflection on the novelistic form, but as an intellectually primary discourse that reshapes the novel into a hybrid, highly original work of Buddhist hermeneutics expressive of Jin's aims as a lay-teacher. The contextual bounds of this analysis coincide not with the pages bound together under the title of *Water Margin*, but with the halls of seventeenth-century Suzhou's temples and private residences, where Jin once discoursed upon Buddhist teachings to a late-Ming audience including literati such as Xu Zeng. In this new

[36] Asuka Sango, "Colophons by the Tōdaiji Monk Sōshō (1202–1278): The Threshold between Text and Paratext," *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 3, no. 1 (2020): 49–50.

[37] Sango, "Buddhist Manuscript as a Way of Worldmaking in Early Medieval Japan" (lecture, Association for Asian Studies Virtual Annual Conference, March 24, 2021).

context, the novel itself is transfigured from historical fiction into a guidebook to understanding the real.

Jin formulated this reframing of the novel in response to the shortcomings he perceived in existing approaches to textually mediated knowledge, ranging from those of Zhu Xi, to Wang Yangming, to Li Zhi—all of whom his prefaces to *Water Margin* subvert, parody, or criticize. My assertion of such a difference in thought among these critics marks a significant departure from most previous interpretations of Jin Shengtan's work, which have broadly construed him as both a "syncretic" Neo-Confucian and an "expressionist" critic—often both at once. In the most comprehensive examination of Jin Shengtan's intellectual-historical context to date, Wu Zhenglan summarizes the scholarly position on Jin Shengtan's thought:

> As can be seen from an overview of the research on Jin Shengtan's thought since the twentieth century, [scholars] have already recognized that Jin's thought advocates for natural and unrestrained human character [such as that expressed in *Zhuangzi*] and esteems the complexity of Confucian ethics; furthermore, they ascribe the former to the influence of Li Zhi and similar [Yangming Neo-Confucian] thinkers, and sum up the latter as being due to the general character of a traditional scholar-official, the dominant concerns of the time, and similar factors.
>
> 綜觀 20 世紀以來有關金聖歎思想的研究狀況可知，人們已經認識到了金氏思想既提倡自然人性又推崇儒家倫理的複雜性，並且將前者歸因於李贄等人的影響，將後者歸結爲傳統士大夫的共性、時代主題的推移等原因。[38]

The previous chapter significantly complicates this overview of Jin Shengtan's thought, firstly by demonstrating that his idea of Genius was poised against Li Zhi (who, the evidence suggests, was not exactly Neo-Confucian); and secondly by revealing a Buddhist rationale for his moral position, one shared by the Tiantai-inclined monk Ouyi Zhixu. The present chapter aims to provide a methodological approach to examining aesthetic criticism that is not guided by such broad categorizations of late-Ming thought. To this end, the next section provides an overview of

[38] Wu Zhenglan, *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 8.

the different approaches Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, Li Zhi, and Jin Shengtan took with respect to aesthetic objects. From here, I offer three methodological adjustments that will allow us to better perceive literary form through the lens of Jin Shengtan's philosophical outlook. These adjustments will pave the way for a new reading of Jin Shengtan's *Works of Genius* in the next chapter.

Reading's Right Object

At the crux of the difference between Jin, his anti-archaist predecessors, and the Neo-Confucian philosophical tradition with which they were all in dialogue was the question of reading's right object—that which lends value to literary practice. Substantial differences notwithstanding, what Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Li Zhi held in common was their respective investment in a substance of value apart from (even if immanent in or expressed by) the writing itself. For Zhu and Wang, this was principle (*li*) or the Way (*dao*) at one with the moral mind; for Li Zhi, the childlike mind. Their respective investments in something other or more than writing led each of these thinkers to regard certain texts or textual traditions with suspicion or disdain in his discussions of reading and writing, a critical stance that is notably lacking in Jin Shengtan's commentaries as well as his annotated anthologies of classical poetry and prose. In the earlier approaches, writing is not to be taken at surface value. The reader must instead work their way into or beyond the words on the page to extract value.

In Jin Shengtan's vision of literature, by contrast, everything is surface, and the literary surface is more than enough. For today's readers, and probably for many in Jin's own time, there is something unintuitive about this vision of the literary medium. Telling in this respect is the fact that so many of Jin's twentieth-century readers have discussed his attention to literary form

as a means of rooting out authorial intent,[39] the seat of literature's moral efficacy in many traditional Chinese approaches to hermeneutics, as expressed by the philosopher Mencius' famous dictum that those who speak of the odes should "use reasoning to trace intent" 以意逆志.[40] To be fair, these understandings of Jin Shengtan's hermeneutics have been partly inspired by the commentator's own words. In his commentaries on both *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber*, he invites the reader to look beyond the words (*wenwai* 文外).[41] Contrary to how this invitation has been read, however, what Jin envisions beyond the writing is fully coextensive with the writing itself. As he pronounces in his prefatory comment on chapter 28 of *Water Margin*, "Where, then, is the intention? In the writing—and nowhere else" 惡乎志？文是已.[42]

From the standpoint of both aesthetics and ethics, this is a remarkable literary innovation. In the process of flattening the relation between form and value, Jin credits written form with its own affective dimension, such that it pulses with a liveliness normally contained by a source that resides elsewhere than in the writing itself. Jin posits that the reader's sustained, wholehearted engagement with this living surface is sufficient to effect a moral transformation, regardless of the fact that the writing in question (in this case a novel about a band of outlaws, some of whom have no qualms about snacking on human flesh) does not feature the most moral content. In

[39] Liangyan Ge provides a summary of such approaches in "Authoring 'Authorial Intention.'" Ge argues that Jin, inspired by Daoism and Chan, attempts to dismantle any notion of a stable authorial identity in his *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary, but "In his [*Water Margin*] commentary he passed off his own thinking as Shi Nai'an's intention, as he was fully aware that authorial intention was by far the most familiar and most effective concept he could borrow from classical exegesis," 22–23.

[40] *Mengzi yinde* 孟子引得 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 35/5A/4. For an overview of the diverse ways this statement has been interpreted in early Chinese hermeneutics, see Zong-Qi Cai, "The Richness of Ambiguity: A Mencian Statement and Interpretive Theory and Practice in Premodern China," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 262–288.

[41] Sally Church describes Jin's use of such rhetoric in "Beyond the Words."

[42] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3: 529. I discuss this feature of Jin's hermeneutics in chapter three, in the section entitled "Surfacing Intent."

other words, literary form bears a transformative quality of its own, a force not imported from elsewhere. This transformative surface appears more clearly when held up alongside earlier hermeneutic conceptions, so let us briefly proceed through the historical articulations of form and value from which Jin intended to diverge, so that we might better orient ourselves to the strange new object that appears under the lens of Jin's commentary.

For Zhu Xi, one of the main architects of the Song-dynasty Confucian revival, the Confucian Classics were textual instantiations of cosmological-moral principle (*li*). Zhu associated principle with the very origin of Chinese script, which was thought to have derived from the hexagrams that the legendary cultural founder Fuxi 伏羲 discovered upon a tablet carried out of the Yellow River by a mythical dragon horse. According to Joseph Adler, "In Zhu Xi's view, Fuxi had first intuited the linkages between the moral order [or principle] (*daoli* 道理) and the natural order (*tianli* 天理) and thereby had first brought the Confucian *dao* (Way) into the world" for the sake of people's moral cultivation.[43] Remarking upon the Confucian classic based on the hexagrams, Zhu exclaims, "How great is the *Changes*! When one fully investigates principle, one's wisdom is exalted like Heaven, and one's virtue is exalted. When one follows principle, ritual propriety makes one humble like Earth, and one's accomplishments are broadened."[44] Drawing on the preface to the *Great Learning* (*Da xue* 大學), Zhu Xi enjoined aspiring sages to "extend [their] knowledge of principle to the utmost" (*zhizhi* 致知) by "examining the principles inherent in all phenomena" (*gewu* 格物). The aim of this undertaking was to apprehend and embody moral principle in one's daily conduct.

[43] Joseph Adler, "Introduction," in Zhu Xi, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*, trans. Joseph Adler (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 15.

[44] Zhu Xi, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, 197.

Importantly, while Zhu Xi's commentary on the *Classic of Changes* emphasizes the possibility of apprehending moral principle through textual examination, he does not take writing's relation to moral principle for granted. Instead, this relation depended on the author's moral starting point. As we saw in the previous chapter's examination of talent, Zhu feared that some writing, such as that of Su Shi or Qu Yuan, might lead readers astray by prizing personal experience or excessive emotion over the moral models of the Confucian canon. In this respect, while Zhu took principle to be immanent in phenomena, he also understood writing itself as a vehicle that could be divorced from the moral value it was meant to convey.

The Ming-dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming proposed a different approach to hermeneutic self-cultivation, but his object—to embody moral principle—was ultimately the same. Wang found Zhu Xi's method of examining phenomena inaccessible to all but the superhuman, insisting (in what was probably a deliberate oversimplification of the former philosopher's teachings) that no ordinary person could possibly muster the contemplative energy required to apprehend the principles inherent in the world's infinite supply of events and things. In an anecdote that emblematizes Wang's point of departure from Zhu Xi, Wang relates his failed attempt at intuiting the *li* of bamboo. He recalls that he and a friend (surnamed Qian 錢) determined to investigate principle by means of a clump of bamboo before a pavilion. After three days of contemplation, Wang's friend fell ill from the effort. Attributing the failure to his companion's weak constitution, Wang set himself to the task:

> From morning till night, I was unable to find the principles of the bamboos. On the seventh day I also became sick because I thought too hard. In consequence [Qian and I] sighed to each other that it was impossible to become a sage or a worthy, for we did not have the tremendous energy to investigate things that they have. After I had lived among the barbarians for [almost] three years, I understood what all this meant and realized that there is really nothing in the things in the world to investigate, that the effort to investigate things is only to be carried out in and with reference to one's body and mind,

> and that if one firmly believes that everyone can become a sage, one will naturally be able to take up the task of investigating things.
>
> 早夜不得其理，到七日，亦以勞思致疾，遂相與嘆聖賢是做不得的他大力量去格物了。及在夷中三年，頗見得此意思，方知天下之物本無可格者；其格物之功，只在身心上做；決然以聖人爲人人可到，便自有擔當了。」[45]

Wang Yangming's anecdote evinces a concern for making sagehood more accessible by de-emphasizing outward sources of moral cultivation—a category that includes canonical texts—and turning toward the mind. His innovations did in fact accomplish this aim, most notably in the case of his renowned disciple Wang Gen, who came from a commoner background and fashioned himself as a latter-day Confucius, complete with archaic costume and carriage.[46] As already discussed at some length in the previous chapter, however, Wang Yangming's shift of emphasis from outward things and events to the mind still upheld a transpersonal, transhistorical notion of moral principle as its object. Wang likewise continued to value the study of canonical works as vehicles of sagely morality. In accord with this adherence to canonical sources of moral authority, the aspiring sage Wang Gen held himself and his disciples to strict forms of orthodox moral conduct. Consequently, while Wang Yangming underscored the differences between his philosophy and Zhu Xi's, Jin Shengtan seems to have regarded the two thinkers as belonging to roughly the same ilk—both classicist scholars in pursuit of a rigid notion of sagely morality as something transmitted in but apart from writing.[47]

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[45] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu*, 3:318. See Chen Rongjie [Chan Wing-tsit] 陳榮捷, *Wang Yangming Chuanxi lu xiangzhu jiping* 王陽明傳習錄詳註集評 (Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju yinhang), 370–371. Translation lightly adapted from Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *Instructions for Practical Living*, 249.

[46] Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 145–207.

[47] This can be seen from Jin Shengtan's first preface to *Water Margin*, which begins by alluding to Zhu Xi's ideas and draws extensively on a dialogue from *Chuanxi lu* only to parody Wang Yangming's concern that writing advance the morality of the sages. To be discussed in chapter three, part two.

By contrast, while Li Zhi is today—with some caveats—widely regarded as a Neo-Confucian innovator, Jin observed a stark contrast between Neo-Confucian thought and Li Zhi's radical individualism, which did away with any notion of a transpersonal morality. In this respect it was Li Zhi, not Wang Yangming or his disciples, who proposed reading's revolutionary new object: individual realization as a moral end unto itself. This theme surfaces throughout Li Zhi's writings, many of which take the form of occasional writings on minor topics, but which reference hermeneutic conventions to subvert Neo-Confucian cultivation practices. In his short essay "On a Scroll Painting of Square Bamboo" 方竹圖卷文, Li Zhi compares the artist (a certain Deng Shiyang 鄧石陽) to Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (d. 388), son of the renowned calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361) and a famous admirer of bamboo. Li reasons that upstanding gentlemen earn bamboo's fondness by showing themselves to possess qualities resembling the object they so admire. In praise of the artist who can discern the bamboo's spirit (*shen* 神) and inspire its affection, Li Zhi proclaims:

> In the space between heaven and earth, all things possess a spirit, so how could anyone suppose that these compliant[48] and upright gentlemen alone are devoid of a spirit! …. The dragon horse bore the Yellow River Chart on its back [for Fuxi]; the Luo turtle revealed an auspicious omen [to Yu the Great 大禹]; the phoenix pranced before [the ancient sage-king] Shun and sang to King Wen; and the unicorn presented itself [to Confucius] to be captured by Lu. All these events occurred because of a thing's love for a person. From antiquity it has been like this, and who can gainsay it?
>
> 且天地之間，凡物皆有神，況以此君虛中直上，而獨不神乎！…… 寧獨是，龍馬負圖，洛龜呈瑞，儀於舜，鳴於文，獲於魯叟，物之愛人，自古而然矣，而其誰能堪之。[49]

[48] *Xuzhong* 虛中, literally "empty-centered," may refer to humility as well as the bamboo's hollow core. My translation aims for a closely analogous pun.

[49] Li Zhi, *Fenshu zhu*, 359–360; *Fenshu*, 131–132. Translation adapted from Thomas Kelly, trans., *A Book to Burn*, 144.

Li Zhi's essay allows a dual reading, as his praise of Wang Huizhi simultaneously affords an ironic critique of Wang Yangming. While Li's essay purportedly takes Deng Shiyang as its topic, Li's discourse focuses on Wang Huizhi (to whom he refers only as Wang) then abruptly extends its hermeneutic rationale from the scene of successful contemplation to the institution of the Confucian Classics, ranging from the dragon horse associated with the *Classic of Changes* to the "unicorn" or *qilin* 麒麟 associated with Confucius' decision to compile the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. By relating the painter's rapport with bamboo to this all-important sequence of textually institutive events, Li Zhi undermines the Neo-Confucian idea that each ancient sage was tapping into the same transpersonal moral principle. Instead, in Li Zhi's version of literary history, every act of sagely composition was inspired by an exclusive relation of mutual recognition initiated by an unusual object's appreciation for the individual sage. Taking this passage against the backdrop of Wang Yangming's writings, Li Zhi's essay offers an implicit critique of the latter-day Wang's failure to apprehend the spirit of the bamboo as his earlier counterpart had done—and done so effortlessly. According to this assessment, Wang Yangming's contemplative shortcoming would not have been due to anything lacking in the bamboo itself, as Wang's turn from external phenomena would suggest, but rather to Wang's inability to inspire the bamboo's love, perhaps due to some deficiency in his own "compliance" and "uprightness"—a reading consistent with Li Zhi's frequent characterizations of Confucian scholars as hypocrites.[50] Like his essay "On the Childlike Mind" and his "Preface to the Loyal and Righteous at the *Water Margin*," Li Zhi's seemingly incidental essay on a painting of bamboo serves his unorthodox individualist agenda.[51]

[50] See, for instance, Pauline C. Lee, *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire*, 38, 59-63; Rivi Handler Spitz, *Symptoms of an Unruly Age: Li Zhi and Cultures of Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 5, 20, 28, 47, 55.

[51] The other two essays in detail have been discussed in the previous chapter.

As daring as Li Zhi's hermeneutic position was, it nonetheless shared something in common with the Neo-Confucian tradition it aimed to subvert: a tendency to regard form as subsidiary to something of greater value, be that moral principle or "spirit" (in the above case a stand-in for the childlike mind).[52] For Jin Shengtan, by contrast, the value lay in the vehicle itself—in the shared capacity of hand, brush, ink, and paper to conjure vivid forms. Jin ruminates on this at length in his commentary on chapter 22 of *Water Margin*, wherein the outlaw Wu Song famously wrestles a tiger while drunk at night on Jingyang Ridge. In one comment, Jin compares the author's craft to painting. His remarks offer a form-based alternative to Li Zhi's spirit-based understanding of aesthetic excellence and offer a preliminary glimpse into his understanding of art as reality:

> It is said that Zhao Songxue (Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫, 1254–1322) was fond of painting horses. Later in life, he achieved an even greater degree of subtlety [in his art]. Whenever he wanted to conceive of a composition, he would undress and crouch on the floor in a private chamber. Only after he had studied how to be a horse would he take up his brush. One day, his wife Guan Daosheng 管道昇 (1262–1319) came [into the chamber], and saw Zhao behaving just like a horse. Now, when Nai'an composed this text, I wonder, did he also remove his clothes, crouch on the ground, and assume the postures of pouncing, springing, and pawing the turf? [Su] Dongpo's poem on [Chen Zhigong's 陳直躬 painting] *Wild Geese* says, "When wild geese catch sight of someone, even before the thought has arisen, they have already undergone a change. Where did you, sir, observe them, to obtain their state in human absence?" [If] I, Shengtan, in the space of three thousand years [of literary history], bequeath [the title of] Genius to this one person only, how could [anyone take] this to be false praise!
>
> 傳聞趙松雪好畫馬，晚更入妙。每欲構思，便于密室解衣踞地，先學為馬，然後命筆。一日管夫人來，見趙宛然馬也。今耐庵為此文，想亦復解衣踞地，作一撲、一掀、一剪勢耶？東坡《畫雁》詩云：「野雁見人時，未起意先改。君從何處看，得此無人態？」我真不知耐庵何處有此副虎食人方法在胸中也。聖歎于三千年中，獨以才子許此一人，豈虛譽哉！[53]

[52] While Li's choice of the word "spirit" is in this case inspired by the *Shishuo xinyu*, his application of this word parallels his discussions of authorial indignation and the childlike mind in his more famous essays.

[53] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3: 421.

Whereas Li Zhi's description of aesthetic attainment is based on a spiritual rapport between the artist and his object, Jin Shengtan describes a miraculous alignment of forms. The Genius demonstrates a full-bodied commitment to extending their knowledge of another by occupying the formal features—gestures, postures, and expressions—that distinguish a living creature's distinctive style of being. According to this account, the artist's formal expertise in bodily performance carries directly into the medium of writing as an extension of those embodied actions. What is of value in either medium is the form of experience itself, which Jin deems fully attainable in physical performance, painting, and writing.

In addition to this emphasis on outward form as opposed to spirit, one of the key ways Jin erases the gap between form and value is by celebrating literary portrayals for their particularity, not for the way their particularity might open onto a universally ordering principle, as in the Neo-Confucian practice of contemplating phenomena. Nor is it the case that the artist is thought to have a special rapport with tigers as a species of thing with a common spirit, as in Li Zhi's discussion of bamboo. In other words, the artist's excellence does not derive from an instance of aesthetically mediated self-recognition. The Genius instead identifies with and embodies that which is distinctly apart from and yet accessible to themself. Jin Shengtan's commentary highlights three separate instances of tiger-fighting, marveling over how very different each one is. He exclaims in the fifty-ninth of his "Reading Guidelines" for *Water Margin*:

> One literary technique is "direct repetition": As when, after Wu Song fights the tiger [in chapter 22], he yet depicts Li Kui's slaying tigers [in chapter 42], and yet again depicts the Jie brothers struggling with a tiger [in chapter 48]. … This is precisely a case of deliberately taking up a topic and repeating it, while yet departing from the original event such that not one dot or stroke is borrowed—the author takes this as a source of delight. This is truly a case of someone who is full to the brim with means.

有正犯法：如武松打虎後，又寫李逵殺虎，又寫二解爭虎。…… 正是要故意把題目犯了，却有本事出落得無一點一畫相借，以為快樂是也。真是渾身都是方法。[54]

Jin Shengtan imagines the author as portraying (and, by extension, embodying) many different tigers differently, such that each tiger manifests as a singular thing, not a category emblematic of particular qualities. If this is a case of spiritual rapport, then the Genius has a rapport with manifold diverse spirits. In this respect, the Genius excels in an embodied and highly particularized approach to "examining phenomena," but as an end unto itself rather than a means of realizing moral principle.

The thorough particularity of forms as Jin perceives them is important to their status as real, rather than secondary representations of a reality that resides elsewhere. By incorporating Su Shi's poetic rumination on geese, Jin suggests that these created creatures are primary in the sense of being utterly themselves, not reflections or apparitions of a more real creature in the world beyond the work of art. Su Shi remarks that such perfect verisimilitude as Chen Zhigong accomplished cannot have derived from firsthand observation, due to the fact that the bearing of geese in human absence differs from that of geese under a human gaze. Accordingly, the Genius's tiger is not exactly a work of representation, in the sense of presenting something already existent in the world or the artist's recollections. Instead, the tiger is singular, native to the literary work. Jin Shengtan is most emphatic on this point. He underscores the two-faceted idea that the creature portrayed is a *living* creature and that the author cannot possibly have seen such a thing firsthand. As he relates in another comment:

> I often think, there are places to see painted tigers, but there is nowhere to see a real tiger; there are places to see a dead real tiger, but there is nowhere to see a *live* real tiger. A live tiger in the midst of walking, perhaps one might yet occasionally catch a glimpse of such a thing; but a live tiger in the midst of pouncing on someone, this is certainly something

[54] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 3, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:35. Also translated by John C.Y. Wang, "How to Read *The Fifth Book of Genius*," 143.

> that one can get a look at under no circumstances. Now Nai'an suddenly employs a game of brush and ink to paint a complete picture of a living tiger pouncing on a person. From this day on, those who want to see a tiger need only come into *Water Margin*, onto Jingyang Ridge, fix their eyes and look their fill, and moreover, need not take fright. This is truly no small favor.
>
> 我常思畫虎有處看，真虎無處看；真虎死有處看，真虎活無處看；活虎正走，或猶偶得一看，活虎正博人，是斷斷必無處看者也。乃今耐庵忽然以筆墨游戲，畫出全副活虎搏人圖來。今而後要看虎者，其盡到《水滸傳》中景陽岡上，定睛飽看，又不吃驚，真乃此恩不小也。[55]

Jin's emphasis on the tiger's living quality effectively blurs the distinction between creation and reality. There is no place that someone might go to see a living tiger pouncing on someone up close (and live to describe it), but the author has placed just such a tiger on this ridge, such that anyone might come and have a look. Jin refers to the fictional ridge as though it were coextensive with the world beyond the page. And, if we look at it a certain way, so it is: the ink on the page, which is guided by the author's carefully honed gestures and of which the tiger and the ridge upon which it pounces are made, *is* coextensive with the reader's reality. The only difference is that this real, living, ink-and-paper tiger can do no harm, though Jin's comments throughout the chapter underscore a sense of peril on the reader's side of the text: a frightening scene" 駭人之景;[56] "it makes the reader terribly anxious" 使讀者急殺了;[57] "it scares the reader to death" 驚死讀者.[58] Though the Genius's tiger is not lethal, the terror it inspires attests to the idea that it has a very real capacity to involve the reader in the aesthetic experience.

Through the strategies outlined above, Jin Shengtan's commentaries deliberately conflate what critics in both his time and ours have often regarded as separate dimensions of the literary

[55] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:421. Also translated in John C.Y. Wang, *Chin Sheng-t'an*, 74–80.

[56] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:420 and 421.

[57] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:421.

[58] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:421.

object: that of the fictional world, of the words on the page, and of the author's lived experience. Jin's identification of fifteen literary forms in his "Reading Guidelines" has occasionally been compared to Roland Barthes's structural analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*.[59] But Barthes's *S/Z*, as a methodology designed to critique of literary institutions, undoes the efficacy of the fictional reality described therein by abstracting structural formulae from the text, thus weakening the work's realistic particularity. To use a term of Barthes's, the imposition of commentary in that case weakens the *effet de réel*, whereas Jin's attention to literary form aims to enhance this "reality effect." In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes also distinguishes between text on the page and the reality of the author's lived experience. The latter leaves its trace in the text as style, which Barthes describes as referring to a reality situated:

> on the level of biology or of the past, rather than of history [as discourse]: it is the 'object' of the writer, his splendor and his prison, it is his solitude ... its secret is a memory buried in the writer's body. … [and] what persists in solidity and depth beneath the style, harshly or tenderly assembled in its figures, are the fragments of a reality absolutely alien to language.[60]

In Barthes's formulation of style, the writer's biological reality, like Li Zhi's conception of spirit, is (like the physical "grain of the voice") a profoundly personal aspect of the work that cannot be accessed through inventorying the formal attributes which the work shares with other works.

For Jin Shengtan, no aspect of reality exceeds writing, and this understanding seems to arise out of his Buddhist conception of literature. In his vision of literary form, the words on the page are suggestive of the kinesthetic and affective force of the author's embodied experience as well as that of Wu Song and the tiger. Jin's commentary in this manner fuses authorial

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[59] Hua Laura Wu, "Jin Shengtan," 141–142, 175–177, 212–237; Ellen Widmer, *Margins of Utopia*, 103–106..

[60] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zero de l'écriture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953), 58-59. Translation from Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 334.

experience, the letter of the text, and the fictional world. This fusion of literary levels, in turn, presents the real *as* (not in, beneath, or beyond) literary form. In his third preface to *Water Margin*, Jin draws a strong parallel between characters' vivid appearances and the author's ability to deploy literary methods in accord with causes and conditions. The picture he evokes here is that of a bodhisattva-like icon posing with the emblems of their enlightenment:

> Fidelity and reciprocity are the measuring bowl that weighs out myriad phenomena; [the understanding that] causes and conditions give rise to all existent phenomena is the blade that cuts through the world. Shi Nai'an in his left hand holds such a measuring bowl and in his right grasps such a blade, and only then does he relate the characters, demeanors, postures, and voices of 108 people—this is yet a small test of his skill. As for his writing, it bears methods of wording, methods of phrasing, methods of sectioning, and the method of the work as a whole—yet what difference is there?
>
> 忠恕，量萬物之斗斛也；因緣生法，裁世界之刀尺也。施耐庵左手握如是斗斛，右手持如是刀尺，而僅乃敘一百八人之性情、氣質、形狀、聲口者，是猶小試其端也。若其文章，字有字法，句有句法，章有章法，部有部法，又何異哉？[61]

While Jin consistently underscores the vivid presence of the fictional world and the author's body, as in the above pronouncement, he also conspicuously tethers this sense of the living and real to literary methods. For instance, Jin famously enumerates repeated words and phrases in the text, and his counting usually aims to underscore the affective force of either a literary figure's or the author's words and gestures (and often both at once). In the work of Genius, the writer's body, the words on the page, and fictional creations fuse into one vivid surface:

> when depicting a tiger, [the Genius] has to depict a living tiger; when depicting a living tiger, he has to depict a tiger in the moment of pouncing upon a person. This is such [a feat] that, even if you gathered a thousand people, set forth a thousand minds, extended a thousand hands, and grasped a thousand brushes, not only would not one word be a tiger, but also, moreover, however long and hard you would have them try, not one word would be a tiger. Only now Nai'an takes up his one person, one mind, one hand, and one brush to fill a square foot of canvas, expending no great amount of ink. He depicts not only a tiger, but also a person; he not only depicts both a tiger and a person, but also, moreover, inserts all manner of wind, sand, trees, and rocks—and the person is an extraordinary

[61] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20.

person, the tiger is a furious tiger, and the wind, sand, trees, and rocks are a real tiger forest.

即如寫虎要寫活虎，寫活虎要寫正搏人時，此即聚千人，運千心，伸于手，執千筆，而無一字是虎，則亦終無一字是虎也。獨今耐庵乃以一人、一心、一手、一筆，而盈尺之幅，費墨無多，不惟寫一虎，兼又寫一人，不惟雙寫一虎一人，且又夾寫許多風沙樹石，而人是神人，虎是怒虎，風沙樹石是真正虎林。[62]

The Genius author engages a diverse array of highly skillful mental, bodily, and literary means to conjure words that *are* tigers—and manifold other real literary phenomena. What effects this consummation of literary realism is the artist's understanding not of something other or more than writing—some universal principle or singular spirit—but a profound attention to writing itself. In this vision of literature, reading's right object is but surface, the realm of forms and apparitions at once fictional and real.

Given that nowhere in the passages just cited does Jin Shengtan mention Buddhist teachings, the reader might fairly ask what Xu Zeng and his fellow students would have been expected to derive from this commentary. Indeed, much of Jin's commentary both here and throughout his annotated editions could simply be read as effusive praise for the author's feats of aesthetic conjuring, though, as we have already seen, this reading fails to account for Jin's moral position as well as how the *Six Works of Genius* figured into the cultivation practices of the instructional community that drew on these works. I propose that Jin's commentaries simultaneously accommodate a twofold reading: on one hand, as works of literary criticism; on the other, as bases for literary-philosophical self-cultivation. Moreover, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, by maintaining the identity of provisional and absolute truth, Tiantai upāya theory allows both aspects to operate simultaneously rather than in turn. Whereas Jin's above discussion of writing's supports—mind, hand, brush, paper, and ink—emphasizes the singularity and

[62] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:412–13.

presence of these objects, in a preface to his *Western Chamber* commentary, he highlights their emptiness while also acknowledging their status as provisional concepts:

> The inkstone—I know not what thing it is, but since it is already deemed an inkstone, I may as well also deem it an inkstone. The ink—I know not what thing it is; the brush—I know not what thing it is; the paper—I know not what thing it is; the hand—I know not what thing it is; thought—I know not what thing it is. But since they likewise are already deemed such, I may as well deem them such, as well.
>
> 硯，我不知其為何物也，既已固謂之硯矣，我亦謂之硯，可也。墨，我不知其為何物也；筆，我不知其為何物也；紙，我不知其為何物也；手，我不知其為何物也；心思，我不知其為何物也。既已同謂之云云矣，我亦謂之云云，可也。[63]

Throughout Jin Shengtan's commentarial Works of Genius, these unusual, recurring emphases on writing's (empty and provisionally existent) supports enables Jin both to bring the text to life and to remind his readers of the ways in which even emotionally compelling and vivid forms do not arise in and of themselves, and in this respect are empty of own-being. Later in this chapter, I will propose that the source of inspiration for this innovative feature of Jin Shengtan's commentary derives from an important passage in Zhiyi's discourse on the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. This source has not previously been associated with Jin Shengtan's work, but it certainly circulated during the late Ming, and the passage in question—a discourse on the inky black word (*heimo zi* 黑墨字)—appears in its entirety in Ouyi Zhixu's short 1640 compilation of excerpts.[64] In Jin's case, threefold truth is integral to the work's reimagined status as a skillful means, a strategy by which a bodhisattva might aim to reveal reality to those captivated with

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[63] "Xu yi yue tongku guren" 序一曰慟哭古人, in *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:850; *JSTQJ* (1985), . Also translated and discussed in Ge, "Authoring 'Authorial Intention,'" 13–14.

[64] In *Jin Shengtan pingzhuan*, 493–500, Wu Zhenglan catalogues Jin Shengtan's references to Buddhist texts but does not list *Fahua xuanyi*. This may be due to the fact that Jin does not cite directly from or refer directly to this source. What I propose is that Jin may nonetheless have been inspired by this source. Although this connection is ultimately impossible to prove beyond a doubt, Jin's ongoing annotative emphasis on brush and ink is (1) highly unusual among fiction, drama, classical prose, and poetry commentaries; (2) strongly supports the parallel he draws between literary methods (*wenfa*) and the idea that causes and conditions give rise to dharmas (*yinyuan shengfa*) in his third preface to *Water Margin*; and (3) varied in a manner that parallels Zhiyi's emphasis on variations in ink.

literary aesthetics and its associated values of morality and individual expression—crucially, not as something apart from literary aesthetics, but as something that was always already there as aesthetic form.

Commentary as Apparatus

To clearly perceive the Buddhist structures of thought that shape Jin's vision of and transformative[65] ambitions for aesthetic objects, it is not sufficient to identify places where he cites Buddhist sutras, references to which may be taken as either instances of figurative speech or philosophically charged statements, according to the individual reader's inclination. To get around the problem of rhetoric, I propose to implement a series of methodological adjustments. The first of these adjustments is straightforwardly technical: If we are treating Jin's paratext as primary, then we should prioritize the meaning each comment produces in the context of his commentarial apparatus rather than in relation to the base text (the foundational status of which is now in question). By referring to Jin's commentary as an "apparatus," I highlight the way each of his annotations functions as one component within a broader framework of meaning-making. This framework is not necessarily systematic in the sense of setting forth and demonstrating rules, but, like Zhu Xi's discourses on the Four Books in the *Categorically Arranged Dialogues of Master Zhu*, it does present a consistent and coherent understanding of how to engage with its sources. This framework's coherence builds through the accretion of comments which are often far removed from one another yet bound together by significant repetitions of wording and

[65] I avoid using the word "soteriological" in reference to Jin Shengtan's aims because for many readers this term may evoke the aims of monotheistic religious discourses in a manner that might not suit Jin Shengtan's syncretic context. While Jin's commentaries certainly evoke what we today might regard as "religious" elements, a more expansive understanding of his work as an approach to moral, spiritual, and practical self-cultivation, neither explicitly "secular" nor "religious," nor at all concerned with distinguishing between the two, seems better suited to his context.

phrasing. Recurring patterns of diction and syntax flag passages of commentary that mutually illuminate one another to assemble a meaningful network of annotations. Reading in this way follows Jin's own approach to discerning significance in literary material, as Jin obsessively tracks repeating words, phrases, and themes across the text.

Attending to such repeating patterns in Jin's writing will impact how we engage with two features of his commentary that initially seem extraneous or superfluous from the standpoint of the base text. The first is his tendency to employ comments that provide apparently straightforward words of praise, what Andrew Plaks, in his study of the Chinese novel, has described as "minimal remarks... [that] generally add nothing to our understanding of the critic's response and may perhaps be viewed simply as a further extension of the practice of 'critical dotting.'"[66] Among the "minimal marks" Plaks lists is *miao* 妙, an apparently empty term which turns out to be important in the context of the current analysis. The second feature we will learn to read differently is Jin's notorious fondness for what David Rolston, in his study of Chinese fiction commentary, describes as a remarkable "prominence of seemingly frivolous and irrelevant remarks in his commentary."[67] The two examples of such remarks that Rolston cites—Jin's description of a ventriloquy performance in his prechapter comments to chapter 65 of *Water Margin* and his list of 33 moments of happiness in his *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary—in fact provide illustrations of Jin's literary-philosophical conceit.68 The risk of dismissing important conceptual themes by evaluating them according to our own standards attests to the need for an alternate approach to reading literary commentary. What allows for revelations of significance where previously there seemed to be none is reading Jin's

[66] Andrew Plaks, "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and David Rolston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 75.

[67] Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, 46.

[68] We will examine these passages at the end of this chapter and chapter three, part one, respectively.

commentary as a coherent apparatus, one which extends across many works and, most likely, the lectures he once gave in person.

Examining Jin's commentary in this way requires that we relinquish a coherent or chronological analysis of the text to which it is appended. Jin's accretive and highly allusive approach to argumentation poses a logistical challenge to literary analysis, as any isolated close reading of a passage inevitably fails to disclose much significance unless it is read alongside another, often textually disparate passage of commentary. In Jin's *Water Margin* commentary, this process of accreting meaning through repetition and mutual illumination begins in his interlocking sequence of three prefaces, but approaching each of these prefaces at its outset or in isolation readily leads interpretation astray, for the key themes of Jin's interpretive framework are enclosed in the folds of each preface, which are only illuminated alongside passages of commentary later in the text. The first half of the first preface, for instance, foregrounds a Neo-Confucian discourse far afield from Jin's own ideological commitments. In that preface, Jin's main point—a preliminary and highly implicit formulation of Genius—only appears toward the middle and is mysteriously elaborated upon at the end. Certain phrases at the end of that preface resurface in Jin's prefatory comments to chapter 41, where he elaborates on Genius yet again, but still allusively, before discoursing on his philosophical position more directly in chapters 42 and 55. We can head off the interpretive challenges presented by the form of Jin's discourse by starting elsewhere in the text and working back toward the key themes of his prefatory discussions. Let us begin with his above comments on chapter 22 of *Water Margin*, which are fully imbricated with the commentarial apparatus he builds alongside the novel as a whole. This analysis will lead us to two further methodological adjustments and that lay the conceptual groundwork for a Tiantai-inspired approach to literary criticism.

In relation to this broader commentarial framework, Jin's emphasis on Genius's grasp of manifold phenomena alongside his reference to the "utmost degree of subtlety" (*ru miao* 入妙) of Zhao Mengfu's painting provides for more than aesthetic praise. In aesthetic criticism, *miao* is usually a nondescript term that simply means "wonderful" or "excellent," a conventional usage that generally applies throughout Jin's commentary. But in several key instances, including his comments on chapter 22, he links this laudatory term specifically to Genius's capacity to conceive of diverse forms, a capacity, the reader may recall, that Jin directly associates with the ideas of one mind (*yi xin*) and dependent co-arising in his third preface to *Water Margin*. Therein, Jin declares that Shi Nai'an "sets forth with one mind, and each of the 108 people [he conjures] attains the utmost degree of subtlety (*ru miao*)." Jin proceeds to describe the author's Genius as being such that "even if [the author] were to employ one brush to portray hundreds upon thousands upon countless multitudes of people, he would of course not take this task to be difficult!"[69] In his prefatory comment to chapter 41, Jin conspicuously describes Genius's imaginative variations in terms of *miao* yet again.[70] We could perhaps take these recurring instances of praise for granted, were it not for one fact: pairing *miao* with a mind capable of conjuring diverse phenomena invokes a Buddhist conception of mind as Buddha nature. What at first seems to be a simple expression of aesthetic praise is also a philosophical term, and what initially seems to be a characterization of creative genius pertains to a profoundly Mahāyāna Buddhist understanding reality. In this manner, Jin's commentary provides for a dual reading, whereby aesthetic excellence is tantamount to a correct apprehension of dependent co-arising.

[69] "Xu san," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20; *JSTQJ* (1985), 1:10.

[70] I discuss this prefatory comment in chapter three, part two. See *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:751–752.

The term *miao* holds an important place in Tiantai discourse. As the reader may already have noted, *miao* is the first word in the *Lotus Sutra*'s Chinese title as translated by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413). It is well known that the *Lotus Sutra* plays an important role in Jin Shengtan's work. He composed two commentaries (no longer extant) on the sutra and mentions it alongside the *Six Works of Genius* in his third preface to *Water Margin*. According to Li Yuanda, Jin references the *Lotus Sutra* directly twenty times across his complete works.[71] Yet more significantly, *miao* is a key organizing concept in Zhiyi's influential discourse on *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. Herein, Zhiyi expounds on *miao* in detail, to the extent that his discussions of this term occupy the greater portion of his discourse.[72] In this context, *miao* (which I hereafter translate as "subtle") describes the truth of emptiness. The first preface to the *Profound Meaning* begins by stating, "With respect to that which is said to be 'subtle,' 'subtle' refers to the inconceivable" 所言「妙」者，「妙」名不可思議也. [73] In other words, subtlety refers to the Buddhist understanding of dependent co-arising. In association with this philosophically charged reading of *miao*, Jin's recurring emphasis on the singular author's capacity to convey manifold, potentially infinite diverse forms of being evokes the "trichiliocosm in a single instant of thought" (*yi nian san qian* 一念三千). Brook Ziporyn explains this concept as:

> [T]he notion that the self is intersubjective from the beginning… [which] is not surprising in light of the general [Buddhist] theory of dependent origination. This is nothing more

[71] Li Yuanda 李遠達, "Jin Shengtan wenxue piping zhong de foxue sixiang zhuanguan: yi qi dui *Shuihu zhuan Xixiang ji* de pingdian wei lie" 金聖歎文學批評中的佛學思想轉關：以其對《水滸傳》《西廂記》的評點為例, *Beijing shehui kexue* 北京社會科學 8 (2017), 98. Li claims that Jin's *Water Margin* commentary attests to a stronger Tiantai influence whereas his commentary on *Romance of the Western Chamber* is more Chan. While the later work certainly does exhibit a strong Chan influence, Li overlooks the fact that Chan can be construed from a Tiantai perspective, which, I would argue, Jin Shengtan maintains throughout his works. Unfortunately, Li does not integrate his observation of the importance of Buddhist teachings in Jin's works with Jin's literary aesthetics.

[72] Paul Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-tai Philosophy*, 15. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* mentions this term 1,353 times.

[73] "Xu wang" 序王, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 1, T.33.1716.681.

> than an exfoliation of the Tiantai doctrine that all things are inherently included in each other from the very beginning (*huju*, *xingju* 互具，性具). We are not only ourselves as opposed to others; others inherently and constitutively include us, and we inherently and constitutively include others from the beginning. We are, besides being ourselves, also others.[74]

Taking these intertextual associations into account, Jin has framed Zhao Mengfu's painting practice and the Genius author's portrayal of a tiger as exercises in contemplating emptiness. And this emptiness, in turn, corresponds to a conception of Genius as a bodhisattva who, by means of their understanding of threefold truth, perceives self as intersubjective. The Genius does not simply portray the tiger but also engages their own body and mind *as* the tiger's. They are able to do so because, as Jin explains in his third preface (and as we saw in the previous chapter), the Genius has a perfect grasp of causes and conditions. By embodying dependent co-arising in their writing, the Genius conjures phenomena with perfect fidelity (*zhong* 忠) to their respective natures. Even as Jin was providing us with passages of aesthetic criticism, he was also conveying a Buddhist conception of reality all along, though we will need to implement a few more adjustments before we can fully appreciate how this is so.

Rethinking Art as Upāya

Our second methodological adjustment invites a reflection on the relationship between literature and the Buddhist notion of emptiness. Initially, it may seem counterintuitive that a work made up of concepts could convey the subtlety of that which is beyond conception. Jin's attribution of subtlety is perhaps all the more surprising with respect to *Water Margin*, which is widely celebrated for its vivid, straightforward depictions of speech and action. In the case of chapter 22, for instance, drunk and sweating profusely, Wu Song ends up killing the tiger with his bare

[74] Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 202.

hands, a martial scene that the text describes in careful detail. Consider the battle at its climax, which Jin implicitly compares to the mysterious liveliness of Chen Zhigong's wild geese (Jin's commentary in bold):

> **How did Nai'an come to know that someone kicking a tiger would necessarily kick it in the eye? And how did he come to know that a tiger, upon being kicked by a man, would straightaway climb upon a mound of earth? All of this is writing that need not necessarily be thus, yet events that must necessarily be thus—incomparably marvelous and subtle!** Wu Song grabbed that beast by the mouth and straightaway shoved in [some] earth, **the man**. Suffering Wu Song's [attack], whence could that beast gather any more strength? **The tiger**. With his left fist, Wu Song tightly grasped the striped fur on the crown [of the tiger's head]. He stealthily extended his right hand, gathering it into a fist roughly the right size for wielding an iron hammer and, expelling all his living energy, attended only to pounding [his enemy]. **The man**. By the time he had pummeled it between fifty and seventy rounds, fresh blood sputtered forth from the beast's eyes, mouth, nose, and ears. [The tiger] no longer stirred, all that remained was a breath of air that yet wheezed from its mouth. **The tiger**.
>
> **耐庵何由得知踢虎者，必踢其眼；又何由得知虎被人踢，便爬起一個泥坑？皆未必然之文，又必定然之事，奇絕妙絕。**武松把那大蟲嘴直接下黃泥坑裏去，人。那大蟲吃武松奈何得沒了些氣力。虎。武松把左手緊緊地揪住頂花皮，偷出右手來，提起鐵錘般大小拳頭，盡平生之力，只顧打。人。打到五七十拳，那大蟲眼裏、口裏鼻子裏、耳朵裏都迸出鮮血來，更動撣不得，只剩口裏兀自氣喘。虎。[75]

Literary scholarship is disinclined to associate such descriptive detail with Buddhist thought. For instance, as Meir Shahar has observed in relation to another beloved work of Chinese fiction, painstaking attention to representational detail would seem to "belie the Buddhist ideal of detachment" that accompanies the idea of emptiness, as, "From a Buddhist perspective, the writing of thousands of pages of fiction would be a waste of time, for art is ultimately tangential to spiritual liberation."[76] Such generalizations neglect to acknowledge that Buddhist archives are replete not only with sutras and collections of detached Chan poetry, but also an abundance of

[75] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 27, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:423.

[76] Meir Shahar, "Religion in *The Story of the Stone*," in *Approaches to Teaching* Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber), ed. Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2012), 143.

narrative literature describing the lives and adventures of eminent monks, often in earthy and highly entertaining terms which, like *Water Margin*, mix historical fact with legend.[77] That said, the present passage's violent content, which is liable to inspire either the fighter's bloodlust or the animal-lover's outrage, seems unlikely fodder for moral self-cultivation. In the margins and between the lines of this chapter's violent drama, however, Jin associates subtlety with the Genius's capacity to portray lively figures in a manner that echoes his third preface. Counterintuitive though this association seems to be, Jin's commentarial apparatus invites us to pursue this line of inquiry.

The readiest way to resolve this quandary would be to take *Water Margin* as a case of skillful means or upāya. But here, too, we encounter an obstacle, for the common understanding of art as upāya emphasizes art's capacity to abnegate the reality of its own aesthetic portrayals by underscoring its own illusoriness—precisely the opposite of what Jin's commentary does with Wu Song's tiger fight. The fact that the relationship between art and Buddhist truth is traditionally conceived in this way may account for the fact that so many scholars have read Jin Shengtan's innovative definition of Genius—as a bodhisattva who examines phenomena from the standpoint of dependent co-arising—as a metaphor for something akin to "objective analysis." Such readings attest to the extent to which present-day conceptions of literary realism are beholden to a notion of rational individualism—the idea that a sole agent has, firstly, their own unique identity or inborn character and, secondly, access to objective reality by means of their own perception and reason.[78] In this light, Jin Shengtan's emphasis on the Genius's capacity

[77] Consider, for instance, the hagiographies recorded in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, some of which contain narrative features strikingly reminiscent of strange tales (*zhiguai* 志怪). See John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

[78] The classic analysis to discuss the realist novel from this standpoint is Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardon, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

to "examine phenomena" invites reading him as something of an individualist. And this is exactly how Jin's use of Genius has been understood. Zhong Xinan, for instance, construes Jin as adopting a Buddhist understanding of phenomenal reality to establish an objective respect for individual personhood:

> This is precisely Jin Shengtan's theory of human nature, which sets forth from Buddhism and Wang Yangming Neo-Confucianism, then returns to emphasize [the idea] that habits acquired by negative influence are the same. His treatment of individual personality also sets forth from a subjective viewpoint and proceeds toward objective analysis. The important link between these [perspectives] is [the idea that] "causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena." Buddhists originally just used this [idea] to explain that phenomena do not possess any stable essence and, in turn, are illusory and unreal. Jin Shengtan, accordingly, uses [this idea] to explain that, even though people have their own individuality and their own ways of thinking, the factors that constitute people are fundamentally similar, it is just that the dynamics of [these factors'] convergence are different in each case. Consequently, one need only be true to oneself, acknowledging that one also possesses the "seven emotions and six desires," and one will then be able to extend one's thought into countless other variations [of being].
>
> 这正是金氏的人性论，是从佛学和王学出发，而归向于重视习染所造成的变化一样，他对人的个性也是从主观出发而走向客观的分析。这里重要的中间环节就是"因缘生法"。佛教徒本是用它来说明事物无定质，因而虚幻不实的。金圣叹则是用来说明：人尽管各有其面貌，各有其思想性格，但构成人的因素则基本相同，只是和合的变态有异。因而只要自己忠诚，认识到自己也有七情六欲，就可以推想出千万种变态来。[79]

There is an interesting tension between Zhong Xinan's understanding of emptiness and the attention to intersubjectivity he perceives in Jin Shengtan's commentary. While, as Zhong states, it is certainly true that Buddhists used the idea of dependent co-arising "to explain that phenomena do not possess any stable essence and, in turn, are illusory and unreal," to stop here would be to abandon one half of Mahāyāna Buddhist truth—the discarded point being that the idea of emptiness is also empty, not some essence to be pursued beyond provisional reality. In fact, what Zhong characterizes as a non-Buddhist interpretation of dependent co-arising comes

[79] Zhong Xinan, *Jin Shengtan wenxue piping lilun yanjiu*, 70. Emphasis added.

close to describing an understanding of intersubjectivity based in threefold truth. To translate Zhong's description into terms that avoid reifying identity: according to dependent co-arising, while each person (provisionally speaking) bears a distinctive identity, all identities are, at the very height of their singularity, equally conditioned. As the monk Ouyi Zhixu explained in the previous chapter, one need only bear fidelity and sincerity to one's own causally dependent identity, and one will understand that *all* beings are equally thus. Jin Shengtan's attention to the compelling reality of individual personalities and how they take shape is in this manner fully coincident with his appreciation of emptiness. I propose that Jin, by commenting on the author's capacity to perceive diverse worldly objects in this way, aimed to "open the provisional to reveal the real"—to present literary form as emptiness.

Jin's description of the Genius as a bodhisattva implies someone whose understanding of the phenomenal world (including the self) as dependently co-arisen precludes an understanding of the individual self as the knowing subject ascertaining a world of objects. Moreover, Jin posits Genius directly against Li Zhi's celebration of the individualized childlike mind as the basis for moral and aesthetic knowledge. Jin's Genius is in this respect not an early modern Chinese instantiation of the individualist author, but rather an antidote aimed at remedying the perceived moral shortcomings of a mode of hermeneutics that came relatively close to being so.

Jin Shengtan's creative synthesis of literature and Buddhist philosophy did not occur in historical isolation, but it does present a significant development in imagining the relationship between art and Buddhist truth. The late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries were host to a remarkable range of literary-philosophical experiments, many of which were informed by Buddhism. One of the most important innovators in this respect was the prominent Chan cleric Hanshan Deqing, who turned to a particularly worldly mode of poetry for soteriological purpose.

Whereas Chan was traditionally associated with a "cool and detached" style of poetry appropriate to one who has disentangled themselves from worldly attachments, Corey Bell explains that, during a period of exile in southern China, Hanshan developed a unique approach to Buddhist poetics that drew on provisional reality's infernal quality to awaken to emptiness:

> Hanshan felt that by capturing the 'hellish nightmare' that is exile, poetry could, like one's memories of an unpleasant dream, prompt one to reflect on the idea that subjective consciousness and the objects that have been perceived are of one substance—that they are all mind-only. Poetry of this type could hence lead to the intuitive verification of the 'unadulterated genuine mind,' which represented for Hanshan the un-bifurcated ideal substratum of all mental and perceptual reality—the *tathagatagarbha*, or the Buddha nature.[80]

In this case, art is deemed useful precisely for its capacity to reveal its own reality as a delusion, a delusion that, once realized, reveals the real. Hanshan understands this awakening to truth as resulting from an immersive experience, a thorough engagement with the provisional rather than an attempt to disengage from it. Given Hanshan's prominence, this innovative synthesis will have set an important precedent for later literary experiments.

One such experiment was undertaken by a close acquaintance of Hanshan Deqing's during the early seventeenth century in the vicinity of Suzhou and in the form of fiction. This was Dong Sizhang's novella *Supplement to Journey to the West*, an intercalary dream narrative that takes place between chapters 61 and 62 of its parent novel *Journey to the West*. The narrative's dreamer is the monkey king Sun Wukong, to whom Dong's novella refers as Pilgrim (*xingzhe* 行者) whose desire ensnares him in a sequence of dreamtime adventures that defy conventional spatial, temporal, and corporeal logic—all literary suggestions of provisional reality's emptiness. The novella's central feature, the axis from which all of Pilgrim's topsy-turvy adventures set forth, is a tower of myriad mirrors—a figural representation of the

[80] Bell, "Genuine Anguish, Genuine Mind," 45.

aforementioned "trichiliocosm in a single instant of thought." The novella itself is a structural analogue to the tower, as its disorienting adventures ensue out of Pilgrim's entering the mirrors to explore diverse realms, where he ends up inhabiting the body of a famous historical beauty; rolls through a gate into the world of the future; tries a Song-dynasty traitor in a Tang-dynasty setting; and is eventually disentangled from the threads of desire by his older self. Upon awakening, Pilgrim is able to slay the personification of his desire and awaken to the fact of his previous defilement.[81]

Hanshan Deqing's and Dong Sizhang's endeavors both conceive literary works as forms inextricable from and structured by the truth of dependent co-arising. In this respect, they participate in a larger transregional tradition of literary work shaped by a Mahāyāna Buddhist conception of truth. Dong Sizhang's experimental fiction evinces what Francisca Cho has described as a narrative pattern of recession in the Korean writer Kim Manjung's 김만중 (金萬重, 1637–92) famous novel (originally composed in literary Chinese) *The Dream of Nine Clouds* *Kuunmong* 九雲夢. The core narrative of Kim's novel, like Dong's, is a dream, in this case one undergone by a young monk who, in a single evening, experiences a lifetime replete with desires fulfilled, only to abruptly awaken. In the space of the narrative, one reality constantly gives way to another, either as illusory as or more real than the one that came before. Cho observes:

> What these frameworks represent are receding and ever-elusive categories of reality whose spectral quality is explicitly brought to bear on [the monk's] final enlightenment. The momentum of the novel's recessive motion cannot be defused before landing in the lap of the reader—the final frontier of reality—and thereby forcing the question as to whether or not one can verify oneself to be the final dreamer…. By implicating the reader in the metaphysical consideration of truth and illusion, the novel implicates itself—in its status as illusory fiction—as the vehicle by which the reader is personally confronted

[81] Elsewhere I have proposed that the figure of Pilgrim is inspired by Hanshan Deqing, in particular a dream recorded in the cleric's autobiography. See Alia Goehr, "A Journey Through Myriad Realms of Desire, with Nothing Wanting," review of Yue Dong and Sizhang Dong, *Further Adventures on the Journey to the West*, trans. Qiancheng Li and Robert Hegel, H-Buddhism, May 2021.

> with the ontology of illusion. The novel's status as fictional form is the necessary ingredient for querying the nature of truth.[82]

As Cho's philosophically engaged analysis reveals, this pattern of recession or destabilization demonstrates how Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy informs the structure of a literary work. Cho and Korean scholars have identified a strong parallel between the discursive structure of the *Diamond Sutra* and narrative structure of *Dream of Nine Clouds*. Cho notes that the *Diamond Sutra*, like all Mahāyāna teachings, is sensitive to the way language poses an obstacle to imparting Buddhist truth: By asserting the emptiness of provisional reality, one risks reifying the idea of emptiness itself. The sutra evades this reification through such seemingly paradoxical formulations as "What is said to be all dharmas is not all dharmas. Therefore it is called all dharmas." Cho explains that in these formulations:

> The loop back to form, or language, does not upgrade its metaphysical status but rather reinstalls it into the metaphysically egalitarian world of emptiness. In this sense, the reinvestment of language doesn't imply a change in its own status [to a newly elevated position] as much as a breakthrough in the wisdom of its user.[83]

And in Kim's novel:

> Through the medium of language, a journey is undertaken that does not lead to a new ontic place but rather reveals a whole new vista on where one originally began…. [T]he young novice's journey from reality to dream to reality in [*Nine Clouds*] plots his spiritual awakening from the belief in the reality of appearances to realize the futility of distinctions between illusion and reality.[84]

This futility is realized through the literary work's recurring destabilizations, both those framing the dream and those within the dream, which invite the reader to transcend their attachment to reality as well as to the idea of a higher reality, for the idea of emptiness, as an idea, is also but a provisional truth.

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[82] Bantly, *Embracing Illusion*, 174
[83] Bantly, *Embracing Illusion*, 159.
[84] Bantly, *Embracing Illusion*, 161.

Jin Shengtan develops the relationship between Buddhist and literary discourses somewhat differently. On one hand, Jin's two completed *Works of Genius* evince Cho's narrative pattern of recession; on the other hand, this narrative structure only explains half of Jin's literary adaptation of Buddhist truth. In a path-breaking study of literature and religion in late imperial China, Qiancheng Li touches upon what we might deem the first half of this conception by examining the doctrinal implications of Jin Shengtan's explicitly Buddhist prefatory comment on what he deems the penultimate act of *Romance of the Western Chamber*.[85] Jin asserts that the drama should end not with the young lovers' joyful reunion, but with a distressing dream the male protagonist Zhang Sheng experiences at a roadside inn en route to the imperial examination. In Jin's prefatory comment to this scene, he pens an imitation of a Mahāyāna scripture, which presents a dialogue between Buddha and his love-addled half-brother Sundananda. Jin's playful forgery underscores the importance of overcoming the attachment to self and other as well as the distinction between the two. As Li notes, these worldly attachments attain their zenith in desire (*qing* 情),[86] which Li identifies as an important theme in many of Jin's writings, explaining that "What [Jin] sees, or what moves him [about *Romance of the Western Chamber*] to such a degree, is the cosmic quality of *qing*. It is strong, all pervasive, but it may also vanish without any trace, a point which can be corroborated by his poems"[87] in a manner that accords with the narrative pattern of recession, at least with respect to its approach to an ending. According to the logic of dependent co-arising, Li identifies an interrelation between this fictional drama of desire and the truth of Buddhist teachings:

[85] Wang Shifu's version of the play features twenty scenes divided into five books, each containing four acts. Jin insists that the play ends with the fourth book and that the fifth was but an undesirable sequel someone had appended. His edition nonetheless includes the last four acts of the original work (labelled as "sequel" *xu* 續 scenes), and provides them with an unfavorable commentary.

[86] Li, *Transmutations of Desire*, 138.

[87] Li, *Transmutations of Desire*, 141.

> By writing the [*imitatio*], Jin Shengtan might be hinting that truth can be substantiated, at least illustrated, by, and in, fiction—certainly a manifestation of expedient means [*fangbian* 方便, Skt. *upāya*]. Moreover, the play, read in this way, should be included in the Tripitaka (*ruzang* 入藏), the entire Buddhist collection of sūtras…. In the final analysis, perhaps the generic boundaries are never stable; they are never meant to be. Rather, they are there only to collapse, as the boundaries between or among all dharmas will be erased in the end.[88]

By identifying the *Western Chamber* as a literary instance of upāya, Li suggests that the recessive logic of Jin's ending for the play allows for a realization of emptiness in a manner that parallels the examples discussed above.

Importantly, however, Jin's commentaries attempt to illuminate emptiness not only through narrative recession, but also through narrative itself—that is, not only when he highlights fiction's instability or facticity, but also in those moments when he calls attention to fiction's compelling reality. In this respect, Jin Shengtan's literary-philosophical synthesis stands somewhat apart from those of Hanshan Deqing, Dong Sizhang, and Kim Manjung, all of whom draw attention to literature's emptiness by highlighting its hellishness, unreliability, and transience.

Reading Jin's commentary as an assertion of phenomena's emptiness is somewhat at odds with his consistent elevation of literary form. Indeed, one of the most transformational moments in Jin's commentary on the *Western Chamber*, on the act in which the maid Hongniang admits the lovers' trysts to an outraged matriarch, emphasizes the vivid reality and emotionality of this scene every bit as much as does Jin's commentary on Wu Song and the tiger—precisely as an antidote to the defilement of desire.[89] Just as readers have identified a moral contradiction in Jin Shengtan's evident celebration of *Water Margin*'s characters, whose unlawful behavior is

[88] Li, *Transmutations of Desire*, 145. Li's suggestion that *Romance of the Western Chamber* be included in the Tripitaka echoes a similar claim Francisca Cho has set forth for *Journey to the West*.

[89] This is book four, act two. As I propose in the next chapter, Jin Shengtan reads this scene as a dramatically mediated repentance ritual (*chanmo* 懺摩) from which the reader might vicariously benefit.

hardly brought to justice by their abrupt and uncertain dream execution, a seeming paradox of values inheres in the inefficacy with which Jin's editorial assertions of emptiness compensate for his ongoing valorization of literary form.

This contradiction may also, however, be read as an elegant literary counterpoise. Jin's attention to form is set in relief by his concluding (but not altogether conclusive) suggestions of emptiness; and these closing gestures toward emptiness are not strong enough to elevate emptiness beyond the force of form's gravity. Form and emptiness thus oppose one another, but neither stands forth as more real.

I propose that this key feature of Jin Shengtan's literary-critical adaptation of emptiness arises out of a distinctly Tiantai conception of upāya. This understanding is already suggested by the *Lotus Sutra* itself, which contains an especially famous section on skillful means, but is systematically articulated by Zhiyi in the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. This text circulated in various formats during the late Ming. It was included in the Jiaxing Tripitaka, so it was at least held among private collections during this period.[90] Given that Jin Shengtan composed two commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* and was an active member of Suzhou's Buddhist community, frequently lecturing at temples and fraternizing with monks, it is possible he may have consulted a copy of the entire text at some point. Another possibility is that he drew on one of two late-Ming condensations of the Sui-dynasty text. In addition to lecturing on the *Profound Meaning*, the monk Youxi Chuandeng compiled an abbreviated overview of its teachings.[91] Jin also could have come across Ouyi Zhixu's 2 *juan* compilation of key passages

[90] The Jiaxing Tripitaka project was undertaken by a network of monks and literati during the late Ming, over the course of nearly a century, from 1579 to 1677. For a study of the logistic and fiscal planning that went into this project, see Lianbin Dai, "The Economics of the Jiaxing Edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka," *T'oung Pao* 94, no. 4/5 (2008): 306–359.

[91] Chuandeng, *Fahua jing xuanyi jilüe* 法華經玄義輯略 (1 *juan*), X 28.590

from Zhiyi's discourse, entitled *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi jieyao* 妙法蓮華經玄義節要, with a colophon dated 1640.

Jin's philosophically allusive use of *miao* is a useful starting point for explaining Zhiyi's notion of upāya. As mentioned above, Zhiyi discusses "subtlety" at length in the *Profound Meaning*. In the context of this discussion, he deploys two conceptions of subtlety, one relative (*xiangdai miao* 相待妙) and one absolute (*juedai miao* 絕代妙). The former plays an important role in Zhiyi's famous classification of Buddhist teachings. These are, in ascending order, the Tripitaka (*sanzang* 三藏, associated with the oft-disparaged śravakas), the Shared or Common teaching (*tongjiao* 通教), the Separate teaching (*biejiao* 別教, which the Song-dynasty Tiantai patriarch Zhili associates with Huayan doctrine),[92] and the Perfect or Integrated teaching (*yuanjiao* 圓教) of the *Lotus Sutra*.[93] In relation to these four doctrines, Zhiyi articulates a linked chain of seven different understandings of the relation between emptiness and the provisional. Every teaching other than that of the *Lotus Sutra* he describes as partial, merely a skillful means, which he repeatedly describes in terms of subtlety's very opposite: coarseness (*cu* 麤). By describing upāya as coarse, Zhiyi applies a hierarchical valuation of the teachings, all of which he contrasts with "The *Lotus Sutra* [which] only includes the one perfect two truths and not the six [skillful] means [of other Buddhist teachings]; it is only subtle and not crude. It has 'subtle' in its title, and that captures the meaning."[94] From the standpoint of Zhiyi's discourse, then, by describing *Water Margin* as subtle, Jin is comparing the work not to upāya, but to the *Lotus Sutra* itself—that is, not to a provisional truth, but to absolute truth.

[92] Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 123 and 131.
[93] Ng, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*, 1.
[94] Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 247–248.

But, also from a Tiantai standpoint, whether one regards a work of fiction as upāya or sutra is simply a matter of perspective. While Zhiyi classifies the schools in terms of their relative subtlety, he draws on the *Lotus Sutra* to develop the idea of absolute subtlety, according to which all teachings, including those which are but skillful means, are subtle.[95] This is because upāyic teachings are, according to the aforementioned Tiantai idea of inherent inclusion (*huju*, *xingju*), also identical to the truth of emptiness. This leads to a radically expansive take on the soteriological potential of language, writing, and, for that matter, any other object of perception—but only for those who have grasped threefold truth. Zhiyi explains that for such individuals:

> The six fields of sensory perception *are* reality.[96] In substance, [the sensory fields] are themselves sutras, [but for] those who are not possessed of a capacity for enlightenment, only taking up an expedient means suffices to serve as a sutra.
>
> 六塵是法界，體自是經，非根利取方乃是經。[97]

Zhiyi's statement articulates two perspectives on perceptual objects. Those of limited perspective, who adhere to relative thinking, can only perceive skillful means or partial teachings as sutras. There's an amusing irony in this: Those who would distinguish between the coarse and the subtle, between upāya and sutra, are in fact mistaking partial truths (what Zhiyi calls "half-word doctrines," *banzi famen* 半字法門) for the whole truth (*manzi famen* 滿字法門).[98] For those who perceive sensory objects from the standpoint of absolute truth, on the other hand, everything (including upāya) is a sutra. In this light, Jin Shengtan is not distinguishing *Water*

[95] Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 199–200.

[96] The six fields of sensory perception include the five sensory fields and the field of thought. These are known as the field of form 色塵, field of sound 聲塵, field of odor 香塵, gustatory field 味塵, tactile field 觸塵, and conceptual field 法塵.

[97] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 8, T 33.1716.777. Also excerpted in Ouyi Zhixu, *Fahua jing xuanyi jieyao* 法華經玄義節要, *juan* 2, X 28.589.

[98] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 2, T 33.1716.703.

Margin's methods (or those of the *Lotus Sutra*) as subtle relative to other works but is inviting the reader to see that which is relatively coarse (*xiangdai cu*) as absolutely subtle (*juedai miao*). This, I suggest, would be to take up the perspective of the Genius.

Adopting this perspective entails a particular approach to reading *Water Margin*'s morally inflammatory content. In his analysis of Zhiyi's conception of a "text" (*wenben* 文本), the present-day scholar Guo Chaoshun 郭朝順 elaborates on how to engage such a shift of approaches with respect to sutras. His discussion offers a suggestive description of what it might mean to "open the provisional to reveal the real" (*kai quan xian shi*) in the context of literary hermeneutics. What Guo describes involves a move from examining sutras for their inscribed content to considering sutras with respect to their substance (*ti* 體) or nature, which, in the Tiantai context, is threefold truth and the attendant conception of inherent inclusion. Accordingly,

> A Buddhist sutra is not just some manmade work used to record the intrinsic apprehension of the awakened ones (i.e., the buddhas) and which exists by means of forms such as language and writing. What is yet more important is that what the awakened ones intrinsically apprehend is not a product of their individual reasoning but is [that which] pervades all phenomena in existence, such that, within any single phenomenon, everything is already complete. For this reason, the sutras that portray the awakened ones' awakening can of course employ language and writing to express [awakening]; [but] they can also use any other natural or manmade object to express [awakening]. Only because all Buddhist sutras in worldly existence fall into the category of events and things of worldly form and materiality do they suffice to serve as objects of the six modes of perceptual understanding. Sutras' genuine basic substance is therefore sufficient to entail all phenomena and, at the same time, is nothing more than the real form of any single phenomenon.
>
> 佛經並不只是一種人為的作品，用以記載覺悟者(佛陀)心靈內在之體悟，而以語言文字等形式而存在；更重要的是，覺悟者之所體悟，也並非由其個人之理智所創造，而是遍在一切諸法，且於任何一法之中便已具足；因此，表示覺悟者所覺悟之佛經，固然可以使用語言文字來表示，也可以使用其餘任何自然存在或者人為創造之事物來表示；但一切存在於世的佛經文本都是屬於塵色物質性的事物，是能夠作

> 為六根所認知的對象，佛經之真正本體則是能夠具足一切諸法而又不外於任一諸法之實相。[99]

Guo underscores that it is precisely *because* of objects' worldly form and materiality that they can serve as objects of perception and give way to a realization of emptiness. His explanation is consistent with Zhiyi's assertion that "There is no explanation of the meaning of liberation which is not verbal. Truly the essence of that which can be conceptualized is identical with that which is beyond conceptualization... ."[100] Sutras' "genuine basic substance" is in fact identical to that of any other object of perception: dependently co-arisen, at once provisionally existent and empty of own being. Guo's point is that reflecting on this feature of any object of perception can give rise to an apprehension of truth. It is my contention that this is exactly what Jin's commentary aims to do, to guide the reader in contemplating *Water Margin* and all its attendant features from the standpoint of dependent co-arising—their reality and provisionality. But exactly how does one communicate emptiness as and by means of the provisional, rather than as something elusive that perpetually recedes from the realm of forms?

Literary Form as Rūpa

For Jin Shengtan, the answer lies in literary phenomena's capacity to reveal themselves as dependently co-arisen and consequently inherently inclusive (*huju*, *xingju*) of other phenomena. In his third and most forthrightly Buddhist preface to *Water Margin*, upon which the present section will draw at length, Jin asserts that "*Water Margin* itself turns out to contain the methods

[99] Guo Chaoshun 郭朝順, *Lun Tiantai Zhiyi de "wenben" gainian* 論天台智顗的「文本」概念, *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲學與文化 30, no. 3 (2003): 61–76.

[100] Adapted from Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 224–25.

for reading all the world's books" 《水滸》固自為讀一切書之法—but only if read properly.[101] And for Jin, reading properly entails attending literary methods.

Just what this involves, however, has been somewhat occluded by latter-day understandings of what literary methods are. It is clear enough that Jin wants readers to stop reading works for content. His most prominent attempt to reorient the reader's attention in this respect occurs in his forty-ninth guideline for reading *Water Margin*, where he complains that most young readers "don't understand the writing, but only take note of a few deeds [as related by the works they read] and figure they've read the book" 不理會文字，只記得若干事迹，便算讀過一部書了.[102] He thereupon proceeds to identify fifteen literary "methods" (*fa* 法) to be found in *Water Margin*. Each method describes a set of relations among different moments in the text in a manner that attends to each literary phenomenon's particularity—he is not concerned with abstracting overarching structures that would reduce these forms to mere formulae.

I propose that we read Jin Shengtan's shift from content to method in line with the shift Guo Chaoshun describes for taking any sensory object as a sūtra. Accordingly, as I suggested in the last chapter, we should read *fa* not as "method" but as "dharma" or "dependently co-arisen phenomenon." In this case, we are dealing with form (*se* 色, Skt. *rūpa*), the category of dharmas that includes the visible and visible and material, and an idea that might allow us to bridge the conventional understanding of an identifiable "literary method" (in the form of words on a page) with the idea of dependently co-arisen phenomena—precisely the parallel Jin Shengtan himself suggests in his third preface to *Water Margin*.[103] To examine literary features in this light is not

[101] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008) 3:22.
[102] "Du Diwu caizi shu fa," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 3, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:34.
[103] In Buddhist discourse, form is one of the five skandhas or "aggregates" (*yun* 蘊, the elements that compose existence). The other four skandhas are sensation (*shouyun* 受蘊), perception (*xiangyun* 想蘊), impulse or intention (*xingyun* 行蘊), and consciousness or discrimination (*shiyun* 識蘊).

to neglect content. Indeed, despite Jin's insistence upon reading for method as opposed to incident, all of the fifteen literary forms he enumerates are but compilations of incidents, one of which is Wu Song's fight with the tiger. As we saw above, Jin's commentary on this moment in the plot attends to the incident with great care, as he remarks enthusiastically on each turn of events and revels in the battling duo's vivacity. In this case, Jin Shengtan's invitation to attend to the "method of direct repetition," the literary category to which this fight scene belongs, is an invitation to study the striking differences among all the novel's tiger fights, to fully appreciate the skillful variations that serve as the basis for singular and compelling literary figures and situations.

This attention to nuanced variations is key to reading literary form as rūpa. For, as Jin explains in his third preface to *Water Margin*, precisely what give rise to these subtle but striking variations, the distinguishing features that make things appear as real and really themselves, are causes and conditions. He explains:

> If one does not understand that causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena, then one does not understand fidelity. If one does not understand fidelity, then how can one understand reciprocity? Such a person is [the sort who] has two sons and yet cannot tell them apart. He turns to his wife and says, "One son's brow resembles the other's, one's eyes resemble the other's, and one's nose and mouth resemble the other's, and yet how is it that the elder is not the younger, and the younger is not the elder?" But he does not realize that in actuality he and his wife made things thus themselves. The husband does not understand about his sons, so he asks his wife. The cause and condition of husband and wife are what give rise to the sons. Among all [cases of] fidelity on Earth, nothing exceeds this affair between husband and wife; among all [cases of] fidelity on Earth, nothing exceeds these sons' faces. If one carefully understands this principle and observes the faces of every person on Earth and examines the affairs of every husband and wife on Earth, then, if among countless faces none are similar, how could this be anything but entirely appropriate!
>
> 不知因緣生法，則不知忠。不知忠，烏知恕哉？是人生二子而不能自解也。謂其妻曰：眉猶眉也，目猶目也，鼻猶鼻，口猶口，而大兒非小兒，小兒非大兒者，何故？而不自知實與其妻親造作之也。夫不知子，問之妻。夫妻因緣，是生其子。天

> 下之忠，無有過於夫妻之事者；天下之忠，無有過於其子之面者。審知其理，而睹天下人之面，察天下夫妻之事，彼萬面不同，豈不甚宜哉！[104]

As Jin Shengtan relates shortly before this passage (and as we saw in the last chapter), *yinyuan* (causes and conditions) are what render all phenomena equally possessed of fidelity, by which Jin seems to refer to identity. From the perspective of dependent co-arising, all things are the same, equally dependently co-arisen and thus empty of own-being. At the same time, causes and conditions also provide for the variations among phenomena which we perceive, provisionally, as really themselves. Jin Shengtan's commentaries seek to impart this twofold understanding of things for the sake of a morally transformational aim, which he describes throughout his preface in terms of the Confucian idea of "reciprocity" (*shu*), the basis for compassionate conduct. Ouyi Zhixu's brief exposition on fidelity and reciprocity in the last chapter suggested that viewing all things as empty of own-being guarantees compassionate conduct by eliminating the basis for selfish action (i.e., the self). For the bodhisattva, however, perceiving provisional distinctions is every bit as important for the sake of liberating others. Jin's reflections suggest that attending to literary form as rūpa—as born out of causes and conditions—allows for this dual insight, by means of which he aimed to reconcile the ethical conflict between transpersonal and individual morality.

Tiantai Zhiyi established a crucial precedent for Jin Shengtan's hermeneutic intervention. In an elaboration on his above statement that the six fields of perception are reality and any sensory object might serve as a sutra, Zhiyi ruminates at length on written forms as rūpa to offer a very worldly illustration of inherent inclusion, the idea that all dharmas are reducible to (*yiqie fa qu* 一切法趣) any single dharma. Ouyi Zhixu's brief volume of selected passages from the

[104] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20.

Profound Meaning, only two folios in length (as compared to the source text's ten), attests to the importance—or, perhaps, the appealing utility—of this extended passage by citing it in full. Zhiyi's discussion employs an evocative set of themes that also serve as among the most distinctive features of Jin Shengtan's commentaries. These themes include written forms—word, phrase, and work—as well as the objects that give rise to those forms—ink, paper, brush, mind, and hand. Importantly for our analysis, this passage also clarifies how reading literary form as rūpa might clear away the problem of *Water Margin*'s morally unacceptable content. I cite the passage below in part, starting from the beginning:

> The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: "All dharmas are reducible to form; this form is not surpassed." This form can mark out all dharmas. It is like the form of black ink: one stroke marks out one 一; two strokes, two 二; three strokes, three 三; vertically adding one stroke then differentiates "king" 王; filling it out with a stroke on the right, [the earthly branch] "chou" 丑; filling it out with a stroke to the left, "field" 田; extending it above differentiates "from" 由; extending it below, the first of the ten Heavenly Stems 甲. Cycling through such transmutations, such differentiations are inexhaustible. It may be that one word differentiates countless dharmas, or that countless words differentiate one dharma, or that countless words differentiate countless dharmas, or that one word differentiates one dharma. On the basis of a black inkspot that ever so slightly twists and turns, marking amounts to vast distinctions: turning to the left, it marks out evil; turning to the right, good; a dot above marks out nonbeing and nirvana; a dot below, the being and mortality; killing and living, giving and stealing, blame and honor, sadness and joy all reside in this drop of ink. And there is no single dharma that exceeds this ink. Black ink begins as a single dot and goes on to an infinity of dots; goes from a dot to a word; from a word to a sentence; from a sentence to a gāthā; from a gāthā to a scroll; from a scroll to a volume.
>
> 何者?《大品》云:「一切法趣色，是趣不過。」此色能詮一切法。如黑墨色：一畫詮一，二畫詮二，三畫詮三，竪一畫則詮王，足右畫則詮丑，足左畫則詮田，出上詮由，出下詮申，如是迴轉，詮不可盡。或一字詮無量法，無量字共詮一法，無量字詮無量法，一字詮一法，於一黑墨小小迴轉，詮量大異，左迴詮惡，右迴詮善，上點詮無漏，下點詮有漏，殺活與奪、毀譽苦樂，皆在墨中，更無一法出此墨外。……黑墨從初一點至無量點，從點至字，從字至句，從句至偈，從偈至卷，從卷至部。[105]

[105] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 8, T 33.1716.777. Also excerpted in Ouyi Zhixu, *Fahua jing xuanyi jieyao*, *juan* 2, X 28.589. The quote with which Zhiyi begins this exposition is from *Dazhi du lun* 大智度論 (Skt., *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), *juan* 71, T 25.1509.560.

As he explains how the field of rūpa is reality, Zhiyi shifts his audience's attention from the concepts that words convey to the minute variations of written form that mark out the way to vastly different concepts. The resulting change in perspective reveals relations that would otherwise be obscured by the words' semantic content. While the concept of "king" seems quite unrelated to "field," once one considers these two written words from the standpoint of their interrelation as forms, "king" readily includes the form "field," and vice versa. So too does the form "one" inherently include either one of these and both, and vice versa. Not one of these forms exists entirely apart from any of the others. They are mutually inclusive. A parallel logic applies to the distinctions among words, phrases, gāthās, scrolls, and volumes, as well as to the relation between a single dot or stroke of ink and an entire work. A single dot includes the eventual arising of an entire work, and a work includes a great number of dots of ink. These forms, though distinct from one another, are also inseparable from one another. Crucially for the moral concerns raised at the beginning of this chapter, examining phenomena from this angle equalizes a wide range of morally charged forms, including good and evil, samsara and nirvana. Zhiyi's metaphorical reduction of good and evil to inky forms offers a basis for Youxi Chuandeng's later charge that Neo-Confucian thinkers had confused talent and sentiment (both dharmas) with nature (which is but the threefold truth of these dharmas' existence as dependently co-arisen, provisionally existent, and both at once). In ink, as in other provisional contexts, all values and anti-values are but phenomena that arise out of subtle, interdependent variations amongst themselves.

Zhiyi furthers this perspective on forms' capacity to reveal reality by examining what gives rise to these formal variations. The insights gleaned from this examination correspond to the three forms of wisdom proper to a bodhisattva: [106]

> If one understands that the inky word is comprised of the unity of paper, brush, mind, and hand, [such that] advancing through one word after another, one does not obtain a single word, and advancing through one dot after another, one also does not obtain a single word, then there is no object to be obtained, and mind and hand do not obtain [the status of] subject. If there is no subject and no object, who is aware of subject and object? This is the basis for knowing [the individual aspects of] all phenomena. Although the word is not a word, it is not a word and yet is a word. A dot follows from the mind, and from a dot a word comes into being; from a word, a phrase; from a phrase, a gāthā; from a gāthā, a row of text; from a row, a scroll; from a scroll, a covered volume; from a volume, a work; from a work, a collection; and from a collection all manner of distinctions come into being. This is the basis for the wisdom that adopts all the diverse means for liberating others. [The word] is not a word and is not not a word, yet [its being] a word and not a word [are in this manner] both illumined. This is the basis for perceiving the distinctions among all phenomena.
>
> 若知墨字，從紙、筆、心、手，和合而成，一一字推不得一字，一一點推亦不得字，則無所不得，心手即不得能，無能無所，知能所誰？是一切智本。字雖非字，非字而字，從心故有點，從點有字，從字有句，從句有偈，從偈有行，從行有卷，從卷有帙，從帙有部，從部有藏，從藏有種種分別，是道種智本。雖非字非非字，而雙照字非字，是為一切種智本。[107]

The diverse forms that arise in ink are, like all phenomena, assemblages of other phenomena. The words on the page are concatenations of papery surface, shifting bristles, passing thoughts, manual gestures, and ink. And a written word can *only* exist as a concurrence of such phenomena. Zhiyi's concrete metaphor makes for a visually evocative illustration of mutual entailment: one can look at the word (provisionally) as a word, or as equal to all other words in

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[106] These three forms of wisdom (*san zhi* 三智) derive from the *Dazhi du lun*. They are: omniscience (*yi qie zhi* 一切智), the wisdom that adopts all means to save all beings (*dao zhong zhi* 道種智), and the wisdom that knows all things and perceives the distinctions among all phenomena (*yi qie zhong zhi* 一切種智). Here I read Zhiyi's demonstration of these three forms of wisdom (which may be variously construed in different contexts) according to the succession of Threefold Truth: emptiness, provisionality, and the mean. See *Dazhi du lun*, *juan* 84, T 25.1509.646.

[107] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 8, T 33.1716.777. Also excerpted in Ouyi Zhixu, *Fahua jing xuanyi jieyao*, *juan* 2, X 28.589.

its dependent arising, or as entailing (and thus as) another word, or as mind, as hand, as brush, as paper.

This examination of forms gives rise to three forms of wisdom that parallel threefold truth. Looking at the word as a form inextricable from (and in a sense identical with) other forms, it becomes harder to distinguish clearly between the mind or hand that wields the brush and the word itself, as the word in fact *is*, in a manner of speaking, both mind and hand—it simply cannot arise without the others, and, when pondering the written word, one knows about mind and hand only by means of this inky black form. One single inky black word (say, 虎 or tiger) in this sense necessarily entails an infinite range of diverse forms, including other tigers, Wu Song, the surrounding rocks and trees, Jingyang Ridge, and the writer's mind and body. This hastening of manifold things into one form is a great equalizer. As Zhiyi says, no dharma exceeds this ink. For Zhiyi, perceiving in this way all dependently co-arisen dharmas as hastening equally into ink is the basis for omniscience: To perceive a single form as born out of causes and conditions is to perceive all forms as such. Upon having perceived this fundamental equality of all things, however, the aspiring bodhisattva must apprehend the next two forms of wisdom, as well. The first of these is a full grasp of provisional reality, whereby all manner of distinctions among phenomena still pertain. While the bodhisattva knows a word is not a word, the bodhisattva also sees that what does not exist independently as a word is also necessarily provisionally existent as a word, one which may be skillfully deployed to awaken an unenlightened being. To see both these aspects of the word simultaneously, and to allow them to mutually illuminate one another, is to comprehend the word from the standpoint of Threefold Truth, to be possessed of an omniscience (based on emptiness) that also allows for infinite

variety (of the provisional), not a reduction to some otherworldly notion of emptiness that exists only beyond language.

As this chapter contends, this is precisely the philosophical basis for Jin Shengtan's conception of Genius. Jin's third preface encourages the reader to adjust their perspective on the author in a manner that parallels Zhiyi's shift from thinking of forms as standalone entities to viewing them as distinctive entities that entail an infinitude of others. His third preface discusses the literary value of this dual perspective both with respect to the author's capacity to compose diverse literary forms and with respect to the reader's ability to negotiate diverse textual forms. In both cases, realizing the inherent equivalence of all phenomena gives way to a potentially infinite omniscience, a sort of synecdochic comprehension whereby one can extend one's mind into diverse variations by examining only one instantiation of form from the standpoint of its emptiness. In the following passage from Jin's third preface, his references to Buddhist discourse suddenly dissipate, but his hermeneutic vision retains its Tiantai shape:

> It is not that I have the methods for reading *Water Margin*, but rather that *Water Margin* itself turns out to contain the methods for reading all the world's books. Long ago, I heard someone say, "Zhuangzi's writing is wild, and the writing of the *Historical Records* is noble." At first, I also took this to be the case, [but] after further reflection I suddenly laugh at that person. People from ancient times to the present are but fools explaining things to fools—truly ignoramuses able only to perplex the young [e.g., their pupils]! As for Zhuangzi's writing, how is it wild? And [as for] the *Historical Records*, how is it noble? It's only that these people don't understand what Zhuangzi said. Instead, they just see that one moment he's talking about a shapeshifting fish and the next moment he's talking about carving up an ox. They don't investigate these passages to the [point of] obtaining their [underlying] reasons, so they take the writing to be wild. They only observe that what the *Historical Records* records is nothing but incidents pertaining to struggle between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu. The rest doesn't amount to much more than [stories about people who] avenge themselves with murder and think lightly of money but much of honor, so [these readers] take its writing to be noble. If we sincerely employ the method by which I read *Water Margin* to read these works, then it could truly be said that Zhuangzi's writing is meticulous and so too is that of the *Historical Records*. Not only these works alone, but among all the world's works that one sincerely desires to store among the archives of great works and transmit to people of later times, none are not meticulous. Why call them meticulous? [Because] their words have forms of

> wording, their phrases have forms of phrasing, their passages have forms of passages, and the works have the forms of works.
>
> 非吾有讀《水滸》之法，若《水滸》固自為讀一切書之法矣。吾舊聞有人言：莊生之文放浪，《史記》之文雄奇。始亦以之為然，至是忽啞然其笑。古今之人，以瞽語瞽，真可謂一無所知，徒令小兒腸痛耳！夫莊生之文，何嘗放浪？《史記》之文，何嘗雄奇？彼殆不知莊生之所云，而徒見其忽言化魚，忽言解牛，尋之不得其端，則以為放浪；徒見《史記》所記皆劉項爭鬥之事，其他又不出於殺人報仇、捐金重義為多，則以為雄奇也。若誠以吾讀《水滸》之法讀之，正可謂莊生之文精嚴，《史記》之文亦精嚴。不寧惟是而已，蓋天下之書，誠欲藏之名山，傳之後人，即無有不精嚴者。何謂之精嚴？字有字法，句有句法，章有章法，部有部法是也。[108]

Jin's reflection begins with those readers who mistake the provisional for the real, construing Zhuangzi and Sima Qian as identifiable according to the forms of ethos that appear in their writing. Jin jolts the reader toward a realization of writing's emptiness: in fact, all great writers' works feature literary rūpa, forms that accord with causes and conditions, and by attending to this, Jin's ideal reader will perceive that all great writers are the same, simply following the force of dependent co-arising with their minds, brushes, words, and so on.

As in Zhiyi's exposition on the inky black word, to perceive literary phenomena as empty is not to do away with their provisional distinctions but to examine their formal variations so minutely that their dependently co-arisen interrelations are revealed. Jin Shengtan maintains a clear view of authors' differences even as he sees them as identical to the point of being interchangeable. In this case, the particular distinction he takes up as his example is certainly not accidental:

> If one takes Zhuangzi's writing and places it alongside the *Historical Records*, it does not resemble the *Historical Records* and if one places the *Historical Records* alongside Zhuangzi's writing, they do not resemble Zhuangzi's writing, is just that Zhuangzi wanted to express the Way of the sages, and the *Historical Records* contemplates resentment. Their intentions are different, and there's nothing surprising about this. But if you set aside the discourses they contain and directly extract the heart of their writing,

[108] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:21.

> then only Zhuangzi could have written the *Historical Records*, and only Sima Qian could have written the *Zhuangzi*. How do I know this? I know it from reading *Water Margin*.
>
> 夫以莊生之文雜之《史記》，不似《史記》，以《史記》之文雜之莊生，不似莊生者，莊生意思欲言聖人之道，《史記》攄其怨憤而已。其志不同，不相為謀，有固然者，毋足怪也。若複置其中之所論，而直取其文心，則惟莊生能作《史記》，惟子長能作《莊子》。吾惡乎知之？吾讀《水滸》而知之矣。[109]

With this remarkably brief and chatty aside, Jin Shengtan takes a sly swipe at the two dominant hermeneutic approaches of his day: that which pursues the Way of the sages (in this case, Zhuangzi serves as a sneaky Daoist substitute for the Confucian sages), and that of Li Zhi and the Gong'an school, who valorize outbursts of personal feeling. Jin's assertion that such differences are only natural strikes a clear parallel with his discussion of the father's two sons. One should attend to differences, but only because examining such distinct phenomena (*gewu*) provides the opportunity to extend one's knowledge (*zhi zhi*) of dependent co-arising. With this swift rhetorical gestures, Jin Shengtan renders intent but one more category of surface phenomena. What this implies, of course, is that literature's transformative efficacy resides neither with the Way (of any sage) nor with personal indignation, but with a carefully developed understanding of the simultaneous equality of and difference between the two.

Jin Shengtan's commentaries aim to accomplish this shift in his reader's perspective not only in theory but also in practice. The concrete annotative mechanisms he develops in pursuit of this aim—which take supreme advantage of provisional forms' potential to reveal emptiness—are the most remarkable feature of his commentarial method and will occupy the bulk of this dissertation's remaining two chapters of analysis. Zhiyi's passage cited above seems to have provided the basic foundation for Jin Shengtan's attention to formal variations. Just as Zhiyi walks his audience through stroke-by-stroke variations in written forms, so Jin Shengtan

[109] "Xu san," *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:21.

continues this strategy on the level of the word, phrase, and passage. Jin's commentary also draws the reader's attention to a (sometimes inky) brush which, as described in his annotations, moves across the page with gestures corresponding to the affects expressed in the fictional work. This attention to the living body, one compelling form among many, is Jin Shengtan's innovation. Jin's attention to gesture and affect extends simultaneously to the authorial hand and the figures in the text. In the process, he renders both as surface phenomena—dependently co-arisen forms of lived experience—in a manner that elevates these forms as expedient means of revealing causes and conditions.

Jin's commentaries in this manner track literary instantiations of karma, the manifestation of causes and conditions in psychological and physical phenomena. Scholars have already observed that some of Jin Shengtan's literary techniques observe the sequential logic of karmic cause and effect. As we will consider in the next chapter of this analysis, Jin Shengtan's commentarial illumination of karma goes much further than this, focusing on not only cause and consequence (*yinguo* 因果), but also karma as the three modes of activity (*sanye* 三業), namely, speech (*kou* 口), thought (*yi* 意), and bodily action (*shen* 身). The somatic and affective emphasis of Jin Shengtan's commentaries invites us to reflect upon the idea that writing as rūpa—one of the five categories of aggregates (*yun* 蘊, Skt. *skandha*, lit. "accumulation") that constitute experience—inherently includes the other four: sensation, perception, impulse, and discrimination. By attending to writing as a perceptually multi-faceted medium of karma, Jin's commentary illustrates—and simulates an experience of—the mutual inclusion of phenomena. An illustration is ready at hand in Jin Shengtan's discussion of how Shi Nai'an embodies the tiger on Jingyang Ridge, such that the same forms of experience entangle two seemingly separate creatures' bodies. Though the tiger on Jingyang Ridge is "really" a tiger, and a singular one at

that, Jin aims to show that the tiger's singularity entails the author's bodily action, and vice versa. Encouraged by Jin Shengtan's carefully engineered annotations, the reader might also experience this mutual entailment, such that the bounds between the reader and Wu Song, Wu Song and the author, the author and the tiger, the tiger and the reader, occasionally blur, even as the tiger is a real tiger, Wu Song is a superior person, and the author is an unparalleled Genius—a bodhisattva conjuring apparitions for the sake of the reader's awakening to their own identity with this endless expanse of diverse forms.

In his prefatory comments to chapter 65 of *Water Margin*, Jin Shengtan relates an extended anecdote about a ventriloquy performance his friend Zhuoshan once attended in Beijing. The story purportedly relates Zhuoshan's experience, but Jin Shengtan tells it with such care that the experience might as well have been his own. His narration of the performance is replete with compelling descriptive details regarding the performance's affective impact on the audience. The literary quality of this passage has won it a place in China's present-day middle school literary examination curriculum, in which context it has been attributed to Lin Sihuan 林嗣環 (1607–1662, *jinshi* 1649).[110] While the anecdote's proper attribution has been debated, it is almost certainly the work of Jin Shengtan, for it offers an allegorical illustration of the Tiantai conceits underpinning Jin Shengtan's commentarial introduction to the *Works of Genius*. And, like the bulk of Jin's commentary on *Water Margin*, the anecdote elaborates on these conceits in a most upāyic manner, presenting Buddhist structures of thought without making direct reference to Buddhist ideas.

[110] For a discussion of this passage's place in modern Chinese literary education as well as the problem of to whom it should be attributed, see Lan Hongbo 籃洪波, "Kouji zuozhe jiujing shi shei?——Jianlun Jin Shengtan yu Lin Sihuan de yi chang gong'an" 《口技》作者究竟是誰？——兼論金聖歎與林嗣環的一場公案, *Yuwen xuexi* 語文學習 (April 2014): 58–61.

The ventriloquy performance that Zhuoshan relates to Shengtan describes an aesthetically incited realization. The performance takes place in a hall "equipped with an eight-paneled screen, a table, a chair, a fan, a clapper, and that was it. Once the audience members were settled, all that could be heard was two strikes of the clapper from behind the screen [where the ventriloquist was positioned]. The entire hall was silent—no one dared make a murmur." The performance begins quietly, with the sound of a dog barking far down a lane, then, a moment later, with the sound of a woman at home counting coins. Gradually, a quotidian domestic scene arises, featuring mother, father, and children. Sometime after the family has gone to bed, the scene escalates, as "suddenly someone cries out, the father wakes up and cries out, the wife also awakens and cries out, and their two children both start crying. Then one hundred thousand people cry out, a hundred thousand children cry, and a hundred thousand dogs bark," for a widespread conflagration has broken out. The sounds of physical struggle that ensue are simultaneously distinct and without a single origin, "Although the people have hundreds of hands, and their hands have hundreds of fingers, it is impossible to distinguish a single one; the people have hundreds of mouths, and their mouths have hundreds of tongues, yet it is impossible to locate a single one." The conflagration that initially incited a single cry has given way to a world of suffering. Drowning in this deluge of panic, the audience members rise and ready to take flight, only for the performance to come to an abrupt end—at which point, all is as it began: "Looking behind the screen, they saw but a person, a table, a chair, a fan, and a clapper as before. Some time passed, and still the entire hall was silent—no one among the audience dared be the first to murmur." But this silence is not like the one that came before.[111]

[111] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 70, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:1165–1166.

The ventriloquy performance is also, of course, a work of Genius. Herein, the writer has become a ventriloquist, swapping out brush, ink, and paper for a screen, fan, and clapper. The anecdote features a tripartite structure, a before, during, and after, evocative of a famous Buddhist trope that Jin mentions in his commentary to chapter five of *Water Margin*, wherein the outlaw Lu Zhishen 魯智深 burns down Waguan Temple (*waguan si* 瓦官寺, incidentally, where Zhiyi discoursed on the *Lotus Sutra*). Jin comments at length on the author's remarkable capacity to make the temple appear (by means of narrative description) and disappear (by having Lu Zhishen burn it down) before the reader's eyes. He remarks:

spreading this text upon the desk, one leans on the desk to read, and the space between one's face and the desk roughly cannot occupy more than a foot. In this space of no more than a foot, moreover, everything dissolves into this emptiness—on what basis does one suddenly deem that there is a Waguan Temple? On what basis does one suddenly deem, moreover, that Waguan Temple has burnt down? This topsy-turvy conception is, after all, but emptiness. Are mountains and rivers not yet like a dream? .... As for Nai'an, how could one yet dispute that he is a fiction writer; how could one yet dispute that he is a bodhisattva manifesting as a fiction writer?

> 又攤書于几上，人憑几而讀，其間面與書之相去，蓋未能以一尺也。此未能一尺之間，又蕩然其虛空，何據而忽然謂有瓦官，何據而忽然又謂燒盡，顛倒畢竟虛空，山河不又如夢也?[112]

By asking on what basis the text's fictional figures rise and fall, Jin invites the reader to reflect simultaneously on writing's props—brush and ink—and its dependent co-arising, from which perspective writing is not distinguishable from that which brings it about. Jin refers here to the classic trope of mountains and waters, which appears in the *Supplementary Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (*Xu chuandeng lu* 續傳燈錄). In the *Supplementary Record*, Dharma Master Qingyuan Weixin relates three stages of understanding dharmas, explaining that before he took up Chan, he saw that mountains were mountains and rivers were rivers. After taking up Chan, he saw that mountains were not mountains and rivers were not rivers. Finally, he realized

[112] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 10, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:146.

that mountains were after all mountains and rivers were after all rivers.[113] In the case of the ventriloquy performance, the audience initially observes the ventriloquist's props from the standpoint of the conventional existence, taking the props—and themselves—for granted as what they appear to be. At the height of the ventriloquy performance's climax, all such provisional distinctions are forgotten. As the audience members lose track of their own hands and mouths alongside the fictional drama the ventriloquist has conjured (by means of his own hands and mouths), all identities fuse into an intersubjective field. This is but an aesthetically simulated experience of emptiness. At the end of the performance, distinctions reappear, but now, perhaps, the audience can perceive these distinctions from a multifaceted standpoint, as simultaneously empty of own-being and provisionally existent.

In a stroke of brilliance, by combining this threefold anecdotal structure with a hellish inferno, Jin Shengtan equates emptiness with samsara, absolute truth with provisional truth. His emphasis on these delusory flames also clearly alludes to what is perhaps the most famous chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, on skillful means (*fangbian*).[114] Herein, the Buddha is compared to a loving father, who, desperate to persuade his children to leave the burning house in which they are heedlessly at play, promises to present them with exquisite toys, if they will only come outside. What the children actually receive are beautiful carriages, allegorical figures for the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha consequently deploys a fiction to bring deluded beings to truth, but the fiction is not a lie—it is a skillful means. In the case of the ventriloquy performance, samsara, skillful means, and emptiness are perfectly simultaneous. The height of the conflagration is also the fictional conjuring's climax and is also the point at which the audience

[113] *Xu chuandeng lu* 續傳登錄, *juan* 9, T 51.2077.518.

[114] "Fangbian pin di er" 方便品第二, in *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, *juan* 1, T 9.262.5–10. For a helpful chapter-by-chapter examination of the *Lotus Sutra*, see Donald S. Lopez, Jr. and Jacqueline I. Stone, *Two Buddhas Seated Side by Side: A Guide to the Lotus Sutra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

is immersed in a full-bodied experience of emptiness as mutual inclusion (*huju*), the feature that makes this allegory distinctively Tiantai. This consummate aesthetic conflation of samsara, skillful means, and emptiness is also an aesthetically mediated expression of mutual inclusion, an elegant illustration of threefold truth. I propose that Jin Shengtan would have us look upon his Works of Genius as the same. As Jin (ventriloquizing through the imagined voice of the author) exclaims at the end of a Buddhist rumination in chapter 5, "As you perceive the writing, you should contemplate the mind; those who perceive the writing without perceiving the mind have not read my work" 如文心亦爾，見文當關心；見文不見心，莫讀我此傳.[115] The ventriloquy performance suggests just what mind that is: One Mind.

[115] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 10, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:157.

CHAPTER THREE

REREADING GENIUS AS ONE MIND

In fact, man, as a person, cannot be added to man; soul cannot mix with soul; each individual stands apart, or loses his individuality by addition.
—Lord Acton

Would it not be more appropriate to allow for the possibility that in literature there might exist, outside the European tradition, fields for which the western experience does not provide the appropriate vocabulary, and the study of which might also shed light on our literature…?
—Wilt Idema

Jin Shengtan's *Works of Genius* are designed to train readers in the commentator's unique interpretative method. This dissertation has attempted to elicit that method by mapping out new contextual and methodological frames of reference for reading Jin's work: the intellectual backdrop of late-Ming moral-philosophical debates; an annotative apparatus that weaves physically disparate moments of commentarial discourse into a coherent system of thought; and a Tiantai-inspired conception of art as upāya that considers how Buddhist thought might inform a more diverse range of literary structures than previously considered. Reading along these lines, the most striking feature that arises out of Jin Shengtan's commentarial program is an understanding of Genius as One Mind. This conception of Genius is most elegantly illustrated by the allegory of the ventriloquy performance discussed at the end of the last chapter: In the very instant that "the people have hundreds of hands, and their hands have hundreds of fingers, yet it is impossible to distinguish a single one; the people have hundreds of mouths, and their mouths have hundreds of tongues, yet it is impossible to locate a single one" the aesthetic experience has fulfilled Jin's ideal of Genius as One Mind. This is a figure that perceives themself as dependently co-arisen, at once empty of own-being and provisionally existent as a distinct identity.

In fact, scholars have already perceived this figure in Jin Shengtan's work but have not recognized the philosophical basis for its role in Jin's commentarial method. In this respect, the present chapter fills in the outlines of a distinctive feature of Jin's commentaries that has already fascinated theoretically engaged readers. Liangyan Ge, for instance, recognizes that one of Jin's commentarial aims is "dismantling the intending subjectivity:"

> As he argues, the person that he called "I" (*wo* 我) was no more than an accidental product of heaven and earth with no inevitable cause, and for that reason that "I" may not boast any unimpeachable subjectivity of his own. What Jin Shengtan presents here is almost a field of intersubjectivity, where each person's self has to be determined and conditioned by those of others.[1]

Ge identifies *Zhuangzi*, Chan Buddhism, and the weight of the Chinese literary tradition, as possible sources of inspiration for this "field of intersubjectivity," but ultimately reads this feature as a distinctively literary notion that informs Jin Shengtan's conception of authorial intention. Ge consequently foregrounds the role of language and writing in shaping authorial consciousness:

> Jin Shengtan's view of language was indeed amazingly ahead of his time. He might have agreed that, instead of the writer writing in a language, it is language that writes through the writer. Language is not merely an instrument for communication; it is, first and foremost, a shaping force in one's consciousness.[2]

Ge's reading of the relationship between writing and writer that plays out in Jin's commentary recalls Zhiyi's discussion of the inky black word:

> If one understands that the inky word is comprised of the unity of paper, brush, mind, and hand, [such that] advancing through one word after another, one does not obtain a single word, and advancing through one dot after another, one also does not obtain a single word, *then there is no object to be obtained, and mind and hand do not obtain [the status of] subject. If there is no subject and no object, who is aware of subject and object?* This is the basis for knowing [the individual aspects of] all phenomena.[3]

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[1] Ge, "Authoring 'Authorial Intention,'" 12.
[2] Ge, "Authoring 'Authorial Intention,'" 14.
[3] Cited in chapter two.

What we miss out on by divorcing this conception of intersubjectivity from its Buddhist sources is, firstly, how "losing oneself" in the contemplation of diverse variations among literary techniques and literary characters might contribute to this sense of intersubjectivity; and, secondly, how this mode of literary engagement might be understood as contributing to a moral transformation by inculcating a bodhisattva-like wisdom.

Ge understands writing along conventional lines, but Jin perceives a metaphysical potential in the literary medium that, from a present-day literary standpoint, imbues text with a rich affective and somatic dimension. As I proposed in the previous chapter, this might be because, in the context of a Tiantai-inspired discourse, reading literary form as rūpa or dharma is to perceive it as inherently including infinite other phenomena—not only inky black words on the page. This multifaceted vision of writing is hard at work in the recurring figurations of authorial brush and ink we observed in the introduction to this dissertation. This mode of annotation, perhaps the most distinctive feature of Jin Shengtan's commentaries, imbues writing with a strong sense of action and affect, such that the woodblock-printed text is re-envisioned as an extension of the author's emotionally charged, bodily gestures. The same unusual emphasis on brush and ink, which the editors of *Guwen guanzhi* systematically excised, also appears frequently in both Jin's *Water Margin* and *Western Chamber* commentaries. This commentarial technique is one among several strategies Jin Shengtan employed to reimagine literature as a gateway to an embodied understanding of reality.

By highlighting the importance of the body in Jin Shengtan's hermeneutics, my understanding of his work parallels a recent study by Xiaoqiao Ling, but with one significant difference. Ling proposes that by "transforming the reading experience into a bodily experience" 使閱讀體驗成為身體體驗 in *Romance of the Western Chamber*, Jin aims to establish a

collective subjectivity of "geniuses with brocade-like minds" (*jinxiu caizi* 錦繡才子) based in aesthetic practice, for broadly literary ends:

> A literary inspiration that surges throughout the universe, the body, and marvelous works of literature breaks free from the causal and successive [modes of] relation between authorial innovation and reading, and [instead] fuses author, reader, commentator, and other identities and subjectivities into a single body—this is precisely where Jin Shengtan's commentary on *Romance of the Western Chamber* breaks fresh ground in discussions of the history of reading.
>
> 激盪在天地、身體、妙文之間的文學靈感，打破了創作與閱讀的因果、傳承關係，將作者、讀者、評者等身份、主觀意識融為一體——這正是金聖歎批《西廂記》在閱讀史論述中別開生面之所在。[4]

Ling's methodological attention to embodied subjectivity has developed alongside her analyses of the feeling body's role in a diverse array of seventeenth-century writings that negotiate the trauma of the Ming dynasty collapse.[5] While Ling's close readings of the *Sixth Work of Genius* go a long way toward revealing the thematic nuances of Jin's work, by favoring the literary over (and emphatically against) the philosophical, the effect of her interpretations is to shortchange the moral dimensions of Jin's project. This methodological distinction is evident in Ling's recurring insistence that we should read Jin's Buddhist discourse as purely figurative rhetoric operating in the service of explicitly literary aims: to produce an elite community of excellent readers and writers.[6] The intersubjective "single body" that Ling extracts from Jin Shengtan's

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[4] Ling Xiaoqiao, "'Jinxiu caizi:'" 211–212.

[5] See Xiaoqiao Ling, *Feeling the Past in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[6] Ling is emphatic on this point in *"Jinxiu caizi,"* 207–208. See also her discussion on pages 192–193 of the same article. Ling's treatment of Jin's Buddhist discourse is consistent with that of other scholars, including Chen Hong, Lu Lin, and Zhong Xinan, though she explains in more detail why we should not read too much into Jin's recurring deployment of Buddhist discourse in the *Sixth Work of Genius*. Ling cites three reasons: (1) Buddhist (especially Chan) rhetoric was common parlance among Ming literati but often held no real religious or philosophical meaning for them; (2) After one of Jin's extended ruminations on Buddhist themes and figures (in act three, scene two of *Western Chamber*), his friend Zhuoshan comments, "Jin speaks of literature, he is not speaking of Chan;" (3) Jin states that "I have studied Buddhism since my youth, yet I have always been like [the erstwhile monk and Southern Song poet] Tang Huixiu, unable to do away with beautiful words." The first of these reasons is substantially weakened by Jennifer Eichman's examinations of sixteenth-century lay-Buddhist communities, which I have already cited, as well as the fact that Xu Zeng took the *Sixth Work of Genius* as a text for Buddhist

Water Margin commentary, however, is but an aestheticized reflection of One Mind—a Buddhist conception that Ling's analysis divests of its philosophical and moral aims.

Jin Shengtan's commentaries provide literary criticism with remarkable theorizations of Buddhist thought. Jin invites readers into an experience of the intersubjective "single body" without overt emphasis on the philosophical reasoning behind this conception. In this respect, his commentaries operate as consummate forms of upāya, imparting an understanding of Buddhist teachings by means of a most worldly medium. The outcome of Jin's innovation is a literary theorization of Buddhist ideas—that is, a system of literary thought based in Buddhism, yet somewhat abstracted from the more explicitly "religious" modes of discourse with which many associate Buddhist thought. In this respect, Jin realized centuries in advance a possibility that Michael Radich has only recently (and ambitiously) broached in the context of modern scholarship: a theorization of the Mahāyana Buddhist ideal of embodiment that might allow this conception to enter into dialogue with, and perhaps intervene in, contemporary theories of the body.[7] Radich observes that contemporary understandings of the body are broadly bound to "materialist" and "descriptivist" understandings of the biophysical human body. Even in the politically radical theories of Foucault, Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, Radich surmises, "one particular body—the ordinary living human body—runs like a relentless *idée fixe*, and, we might say, the outlines of the ordinary human body demarcate the limits beyond which all such theories will not or cannot think."[8] Radich formulates an alternative through a preliminary theorization of

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advancement. Secondly, Zhuoshan's statement, is widely open to interpretation: rather than reading this as a negation of Chan for literature as something apart from Chan, this could mean that, though Jin seems to be talking about Chan, he is actually talking about literature *as* a mode of Buddhist discourse. Finally, the third reason hardly qualifies as a justification for demarcating Buddhist and literary conceits. Jin was not a monk, but this does not undo the fact that he certainly was a Buddhist lay-teacher.

[7] Michael Radich, "Perfected Embodiment: A Buddhist-Inspired Challenge to Contemporary Theories of the Body," in *Refiguring the Body: Embodiment in South Asian Religions*, ed. Barbara A. Holdrege and Karen Pechilis (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 17–57.

[8] Radich, "Perfected Embodiment," 20.

dharmakāya (Ch. *fashen* 法身, lit. "truth-body"). This is an understanding of the Buddha's body as emptiness or one mind, according to which:

> [T]he liberated being is *embodied in* the self-identity of perfect gnosis with what it knows. The "body" of the liberated being—its being-in-the-world and vehicle of being for the world—*is* its perfect, self-aware "mind," which in turn *is* all reality, as knower and not just known.[9]

Jin Shengtan's innovative take on Genius and the extensive commentarial apparatus he deploys across literary works to substantiate this conception offers a marvelous illustration of just this theory of embodiment. His commentaries reveal Genius as not one brilliant author's omniscience, but an assembly of dependently co-arisen identities recognizing itself as such. Jin's theorization is advantageous to the kind of interdiscursive comparison Radich envisions because it manifests in literary discourse, which tends to divest itself of the sort of technical terminology that might make those not competent in Buddhist thought run for the hills. Instead, Jin combines occasional, often playful references to dependent co-arising and emptiness of own-being with an extensive array of observations lodged in a comfortably "literary" discourse.

Attending to Genius as an innovative literary concept based in Buddhist philosophy expands the aesthetic and ethical possibilities that notion of consciousness as intersubjective embodiment has to offer literary criticism. The two analyses that follow recover this intersubjective body to Jin Shengtan's commentaries on *Romance of the Western Chamber* and *Water Margin*. Part one provides a close reading of Jin's commentarial reworking of one act from *Western Chamber* that provides a vivid illustration of how Jin imagines writing as a vehicle for inspiring this morally directed mode of knowing as intersubjective embodying. Part two covers more literary ground, examining Jin's three prefaces to *Water Margin* and affiliated

[9] Radich, "Perfected Embodiment," 36.

passages of commentary to show how Jin presented his innovative hermeneutics as a form-based alternative to the value-based philosophies of his day.

Part 1: Rereading the *Sixth Work of Genius*

Revisiting Jin Shengtan's Thirty-Three Happy Moments

The most famous and widely circulated example of Jin's attention to the senses comes from his prefatory comments to book four, act two of *Romance of the Western Chamber*. Jin begins his prefatory comments by recalling that he and his friend Zhuoshan once whiled away ten days of rainy weather at a roadside inn and entertained themselves by taking turns describing joyful moments, enumerating thirty-three in all. The resulting list is known as a standalone piece under the title "Thirty-Three Happy Moments" (commonly known in Chinese as *bu yi kuai zai sanshisan ze* 不亦快哉三十三則). The moments Jin proceeds to describe are widely admired for their finely wrought somatic details and affective relatability, to the extent that they presently circulate online in both Chinese and English. In 2011, an English version of Jin's list was honored with its own tumblr page.[10] More recently, the UK-based Idler, "a company devoted to helping people lead more fulfilled lives," ran an online feature of the list, posting one item at a time up until April 2021.[11] The list was first introduced to the English-speaking world by Lin Yutang's 林語堂 (1895–1976) 1937 book *The Importance of Living*, which Lin describes as "A Lyrical Philosophy."[12] Lin develops his personal philosophy of living through the kaleidoscopic lens of literary and philosophical sources drawn from both western and Chinese traditions. In

[10] "Jin Shengtan's List of 33 Happy Moments," accessed July 29, 2021, https://33moments.tumblr.com.

[11] "A Sudden Rainstorm: Ah, Is This Not Happiness?," Idler, accessed July 29, 2021, https://www.idler.co.uk/article/ah-is-this-not-happiness/.

[12] Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), vii. Published in Chinese as *Shenghuo de yishu* 生活的藝術 (Xianggang: Sanmin shudian, 1953). And again more recently, *Shenghuo de yishu* (Beijing: Beijing lianhe chuban gongsi, 2012).

Jin's list, Lin observes an invitation to celebrate the sensing body as a source of wisdom unto itself and an opportunity to develop a practical philosophy of living:

> Is it not plain from the above [list of moments] that the world is truly a feast of life spread out for us to enjoy—merely through the senses, and a type of culture which recognizes these sensual pleasures therefore makes it possible for us frankly to admit them? My suspicion is, the reason why we shut our eyes willfully to this gorgeous world, vibrating with its own sensuality, is that the spiritualists have made us plain scared of them. A nobler type of philosophy should re-establish our confidence in this fine receptive organ of ours, which we call the body, and drive away first the contempt and then the fear of our senses. Unless these philosophers can actually sublimate matter and etherealize our body into a soul without nerves, without taste, without smell, and without sense of color and motion and touch, and unless we are ready to go the whole way with the Hindu mortifiers of the flesh, let us face ourselves bravely as we are.[13]

As a bilingual scholar invested in demonstrating what Chinese traditions had to contribute to cosmopolitan intellectualism, Lin Yutang probably would have been pleased to learn that Mahāyana Buddhism, especially as it developed in East Asia, provided the philosophical basis for Jin's literary attention to the body. This philosophical underpinning is not immediately evident from the contents of Jin's list, nor is it necessary to engage with this intellectual basis to enjoy the sensuous and psychological detail of Jin's writing. But the philosophy of the senses that Lin perceives develops into a more developed argument in favor of "this fine receptive organ of ours" once its Buddhist nuances are teased out.

While the content of Jin's thirty-three moments does not readily suggest a Buddhist significance, the form of this list invites a question. Throughout roughly the first half, each moment features such specific sensory details such that it seems to be a recollection of a firsthand experience, though Jin notes that as he transcribes this list twenty years after his exchange with Zhuoshan, he can no longer recall which moment was whose contribution. As the list progresses, however, the moments gradually, if somewhat unevenly, become less specific.

[13] Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 136.

For instance, consider items five, ten, eleven, and twenty-four as translated by Lin Yutang below:

> I am drinking with some romantic friends on a spring night and am just half intoxicated, finding it difficult to stop drinking and equally difficult to go on. An understanding boy servant at the side suddenly brings in a package of firecrackers, about a dozen in number, and I rise from the table and go and fire them off. The smell of sulphur assails my nostrils and enters my brain and I feel comfortable all over my body. Isn't this joyful?
>
> 春夜與諸豪士快飲至半醉，住本難住，進則難進。旁一解意童子忽送大紙炮可十餘枚，便自起身出席，趣火放之。硫黃之香，自鼻入腦，通身怡然，不亦快哉！[14]
>
> It is a summer day. I go bareheaded and barefooted, holding a parasol to watch young people sing Soochow folk songs while treading the water wheel. The water comes up gushing over the wheel like molten silver or melting snow. Ah, isn't this happiness?
>
> 夏月科頭赤腳，自持涼散遮日，看壯夫唱吳歌，踏桔槔。水一時溢湧而上，譬如翻銀滾雪，不亦快哉！[15]
>
> I wake up in the morning and seem to hear someone in the house sighing and saying that last night someone died. I immediately ask to find out who it is, and learn that it is the sharpest, most calculating fellow in town. Ah, is this not happiness?
>
> 朝眠出覺，似聞家人歎息之聲，言某人夜來已死。急呼而訊之，正是一城中第一絕有心計人，不亦快哉！[16]
>
> A traveler returns home after a long journey, and he sees the old city gate and hears the women and children on both banks of the river talking in his own dialect. Ah, is this not happiness?
>
> 久客得歸，望見郭門，兩岸童婦，皆作故鄉之聲，不亦快哉！[17]

The descriptive particularity of the moments that occupy the greater portion of this list form a stark contrast with the last several moments recorded in this copilation. In the last seven items of

[14] "Kaoyan" 拷艷, in *Guanhuatang Diliu caizi shu*, *juan* 7, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1054. Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 133.
[15] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1054. Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 133.
[16] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1054–55. Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 133.
[17] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008) 2:1056. Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 135.

Jin's list, including items twenty-seven through thirty-three, the somatic specificity abruptly recedes:

> Watching someone inscribe large characters for a wooden placard. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> Opening a paper window to let out a wasp. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> When one serves as a district magistrate, the moment every day when the drum sounds to adjourn court. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> Seeing someone's kite string break. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> Watching a wildfire. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> Repaying a debt. Ah, isn't this happiness!
> Reading the *Tale of the Curly-Bearded Knight*. Ah, isn't this happiness!
>
> 看人作擘窠大書。不亦快哉！
> 推紙窗放蜂出去。不亦快哉！
> 作縣官，每日打鼓退堂時。不亦快哉！
> 看人風箏斷。不亦快哉！
> 看野燒。不亦快哉！
> 還債畢。不亦快哉！
> 讀《虯髯客專》。不亦快哉！[18]

Were there nothing more to frame our reading of this list, we might presume that the room-bound traveling companions tired of their game, or that Shengtan, recollecting this list twenty years on, grew weary of scouring his memory. But there is reason to consider this abrupt shift in form more deeply: The twenty-sixth moment immediately preceding this series of sensuously abbreviated experiences refers to the Buddhist theme of repentance (*chanhui* 懺悔, Skt. *kṣama*), Repentance stands out here because the dramatic act at hand centers on a confession, upon which Jin's in-text commentary and heavy-handed editorial reworkings focus extensively. While the aesthetic appeal of Jin's thirty-three moments of happiness certainly justifies savoring the list as a standalone artifact, Jin's commentarial apparatus consequently disallows taking this extended passage as merely a fanciful digression.

[18] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1056. Translation my own.

Jin Shengtan's mention of repentance invites us to rethink the nature of the "happiness" to which this list refers. At the same time, he uses this brief reference to repentance to subtly set the stage for his reading of act four, scene two of the *Western Chamber*:

> I am not a holy person—how could I be without fault? In the evening I unthinkingly commit a misdeed in private, and upon rising in the morning I am anxious, truly uneasy with myself. Suddenly it occurs to me that in Buddhism there is the method of the repentance ceremony (*poṣadha*), [according to which] to not conceal [one's misdeeds] qualifies as repentance (*kṣama*). Consequently, the next day I face an audience of strangers and familiars and joyfully set forth this error. Ah, is this not happiness!
>
> 身非聖人，安能無過。夜來不覺私作一事，早起怦怦，實不自安。忽然想到佛家有布薩之法，不自覆藏，便成懺悔，因明對生熟眾客，快然自陳其失。不亦快哉！[19]

From a day-to-day standpoint, confessing to one's errors may certainly bring relief, but Buddhist repentance is understood as inciting a rather different sort of joy. In this context, repentance may involve "confessing" to moral shortcomings, but it also entails repenting of the ontological errors that allow for moral missteps, such as attachment to the six senses, not recognizing that phenomena are empty of own-being, and upholding the distinction between self and other. The Sui-dynasty (585–600) *Repentance Sutra for Those in the Three Classes of Mahāyana* 大乘三聚懺悔經, which circulated among late-Ming readers, describes at length the joy that comes with laying bare one's karmic impediments (*yezhang* 業障) that obscure a clear view of reality and consequently inhibit ethical conduct.[20] In this light, Jin's twenty-sixth happy moment reframes the preceding twenty-five items (which evince attachments to the six senses as well as conceptions of self and other) as confessions. The joy of each sensuous moment in this manner coincides with the joy of revealing one's karmic deficiencies. The final seven moments retreat

[19] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1056. Translation my own.

[20] *Dasheng sanju chanhui jing* 大乘三聚懺悔經, T 24.1493.1091. Ouyi Zhixu's *Yuezang zhijin*, *juan*1, J 31.B271.156 verifies that he read this work. The *Repentance Sutra* was also listed in the projected program for the Jiaxing edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka organized by Zibo Zhenke and Hanshan Deqing, among others. See Dai, "Economics of the Jiaxing Edition," 306–359.

somewhat from the confessors' previous immersion in sensual pleasures and accompanying fantasies of the ego, suggesting, perhaps, that the confessors' attachments to senses and self have abated.

Setting a Literary Scene of Repentance

Jin's thirty-three moments provide an unexpected thematic frame for his reworking of book four, act two of *Western Chamber*: Jin selects six lyrics from the act as excellent additions to his and Zhuoshan's list of moments, but what he intends by this is initially rather unclear, for most of the lyrics in question, all sung by the clever maidservant Hongniang, are not exactly "happy" ones. The act focuses on an emotionally climactic moment, when Hongniang is compelled to confess her young mistress Yingying's sexual dalliances with Student Zhang to Yingying's outraged mother. In her first three arias, Hongniang, having just been called to report to Madame Cui, anticipates her punishment for enabling the lovers' physical union. The bulk of the scene concentrates on her confession, which unfolds gradually over the course of the following six arias. By cannily pointing out that Madame Cui is also partly to blame for how the romance has transpired, Hongniang eventually turns a tense situation into a joyous occasion, securing Yingying's betrothal to Student Zhang. At the scene's close, Madame Cui prepares to send Student Zhang off to take the imperial examinations, promising him her daughter's hand in marriage upon his successful return.[21] While the act as a whole, then, ends in a manner that might justify its status as a "happy moment," the individual lyrics Jin highlights all correspond to

[21] In the complete version of the play Jin adapted for his commentary edition, this is act two (of four) of the penultimate book, but Jin insists the play's fifth and last act is a an ill-advised add-on, not the work of Genius. Jin's editorial reworking consequently transforms this episode into the beginning of the drama's climax, which proceeds to the lovers' heartrending separation in book four, act three and Student Zhang's distressed dream at a roadside inn in book four, act four, which Jin presents as the proper (if jarring) conclusion to the romance.

tense moments of the lusty affair's revelation, *not* the scene's resolution. What seems at first to be an odd comparison of happy and tense moments further serves to reframe worldly pleasures as sources of karmic anxiety and exposing one's errors as a joyful act of healing.

Jin presents these therapeutic literary moments as opportunities for the reader to heal, as well—a feature of this commentary that must certainly have appealed to Xu Zeng, who, as we learned in the last chapter, hoped to study this work with Zhuoshan's brother precisely for the sake of his own karmic (and most likely physical) betterment. In his prefatory remarks, Jin compares Hongniang's words to classical Chinese works renowned for their curative efficacy: the rhapsody on "Seven Stimuli" (*qifa* 七發) attributed to Mei Cheng 枚乘 (d. circa 140 BCE) and the formal denunciation whereby the literary talent Chen Lin 陳琳 (189–217 CE) once cured Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) migraine. At the end of his prefatory comment, Jin Shengtan seems to draw on the well-worn literary trope associated with such texts when he asserts, "Literature truly has the power to transform one's disposition" 文章真有移換性情之力.[22] Jin's in-text comments further this promise of healing by describing the text's physical impact upon the reader's body: "How joyfully she lets it all loose, with no obstacle whatsoever. If someone has a chest illness, they need only chant this scene ten times. [Their chest] will easily become clear and expansive, and never will anything lodge in it" 快然瀉出，更無留難。人若胸膈有疾，只須朗吟《拷艷》十過，便當開豁清利，永無宿物.[23] "When I read this, a slight ache rose from the soles of my feet to the top of my head. For roughly ten days I was unable to relieve myself of it" 我讀之，一點酸直從脚底透至頂心，蓋十數日不可自解也.[24] And, at the very end of the

[22] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1057.
[23] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1063.
[24] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1065.

scene: “Without yet proceeding to read the next scene, already my entire body is numb and tingling, unable to move” 不必讀至後篇，而遍身麻木，不得動撣矣.[25] Even without undertaking a confession of their own, the reader is in this manner bodily and karmically implicated in the repentance that takes place upon the page. Perceiving this is key to understanding how Jin Shengtan employs commentary to reconceive writing—not only *Western Chamber*, but all writing of Genius—as a medium of transformative embodiment.

Jin reimagines the literary medium as such by interpreting writing itself as an embodiment of causes and conditions. For Jin, *Romance of the Western Chamber*, like *Water Margin*, is a demonstration of causes and conditions, but in the context of his commentary on the drama Jin is more explicit about how this is so. In the “Romantic Inquisition,” Jin inscribes a lengthy explanatory comment after Hongniang’s very first aria, which in Jin’s edition of the play takes the form of an apostrophic rebuke to Yingying for having taken her romantic inclinations too far.[26] In his commentary, Jin transforms Hongniang’s lyrical reprimand into an amusing examination of cause and effect:

> The above [constitutes] the first passage [of this scene]. Although these words retrospectively blame Yingying, every time *Romance of the Western Chamber* depicts an event, without exception it hits upon the crux of the matter. How so? When it comes to the affairs of worldly men and women, there is of course what we call “going by night and returning by light.” If there is such an occasion as “going by night and return returning by light,” then one must cautiously look out for “going between moonrise and starset;” if one is particularly careful about “going between moonrise and starset,” then although it may come to “[vows] lasting as long as heaven and earth,” why would one yet need to bother with “keeping one’s heart in one’s mouth”? It’s only unfortunate that the deluded[27] men and women of the world, who in their hearts also clearly understand that when it comes to this matter of “going by night and returning by light,” they must attend carefully to [the danger of] “going between moonrise and starset,” yet always come to this point; and then, unwittingly, they all naturally come to the point of “sleeping there all through the night.” And how could it merely come to the point of “sleeping there all

[25] “Kaoyan,” *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1067.

[26] In Wang Shifu’s version of the play, Yingying is present and Hongniang’s aria is addressed directly to her.

[27] In Buddhist discourse, “deluded” (*chi* 癡) often refers to those who mistake the worldly for the real.

> through the night"? They will even go so far as to unwittingly and naturally deviate to the point of "clutching the rain and transporting the clouds" in front of people [as Yingying and Student Zhang did in front of Hongniang]! Alas! With but these six simple phrases, all the world's deluded men and women, mentally perverted[28] by wild lust, are exhaustively described. Can there be any question that the person who wrote *Romance of the Western Chamber* is most certainly a bodhisattva of the eighth abode?
>
> 右第一節。雖為追怨鶯鶯之辭，然《西廂記》每寫一事，必中其中竅會。何則？如世間男女之事，固所謂「夜去明來」之事也。「夜去明來」之事，則必須分外加意「帶月披星」；如果分外加意「帶月披星」則雖至於「天長地久」，亦豈復勞「提心在口」也哉。獨無奈世之癡男癡女，其心亦明知此為「夜去明來」之事，必當分外加意「帶月披星」而往往至於其間，則不覺不知，自然都必至於「停眠整宿」焉。豈惟至於其聞之「停眠整宿」而已，乃至不覺不知自然偏向人面前「握雨携雲」焉。嗚呼！只此平平六句，而一切癡男癡女，狂淫顛倒，無不寫盡。作《西廟記》人，定是第八童真住菩薩豈顧問哉？[29]

As we may recall from Jin's guidelines for reading *Water Margin*, Jin invites his readers to attend to the text not simply for its events (*shiji* 事迹), but for its events as forms (*fa* 法) that arise out of the author's understanding of causes and conditions. Here, Jin translates a sequence of romantic events into causally arisen phenomena, explaining that one deviation toward a romantic entanglement will necessarily lead to another, yet those who are too spiritually dense to perceive these associations among events-as-dependently-co-arisen will wonder at their own stories' unravelling. By illuminating such associations, the Genius not only displays their own understanding of reality, but also imparts this wisdom to the attentive reader.

In the context of contemporaneous Buddhist practices, such all-knowing bodhisattvas play an important role in repentance rituals, which Jin's contemporary Ouyi Zhixu regarded as necessary precisely because causes and conditions are difficult for people to fathom. As Zhixu

[28] What I have glossed here as "perverted" (*diandao* 顛倒) likewise often refers to taking false or provisional appearances for reality.

[29] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1058. Translated lyrics (phrases in quotation marks) from Shih-fu Wang, *The Story of the Western Wing*, trans. Stephen H. West and Wilt Idema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 232–233.

explains in his ritual manual *Method of Practicing the Sutra on the Divination of Good and Bad Karmic Retribution* 占察善惡業報經行法:

> Buddhas and bodhisattvas pity those who are lost, even more than a mother cherishes her son. They thus use various kinds of expedient means to teach them how to escape *samsara*. But sentient beings do not understand the causes and conditions (*yinyuan*) of karmic retribution…. We earnestly entreat the World-Honored One to condescend to mercifully save us.[30]

Many works of Chinese vernacular fiction evince a karmic logic of moral retribution (*yinguo baoying*) that scholarship has often perceived as serving a didactic moral function that authors may choose to either deploy or subvert, depending on the moral message they want to convey.[31] What has been less frequently observed in vernacular fiction scholarship writ large—but frequently noted in scholarship on Jin Shengtan—is that the concept of causes and conditions informs not only a sequential logic of cause and effect (*yinguo*), but also something akin to characterization. While discussions of this theme in Jin's work do not discuss characterization in terms of the three karmic aspects (*sanye*) of speech (*kou*), bodily action (*shen*), and thought (*yi*), Jin's commentary often attends to these features of characterization in a manner that underscores the Genius's understanding of diverse individuals' karma (*ye*). He grants a similar attention to the writing in his prose anthology in a manner suggestive of karma as style. This point is important because the moral lesson to be gleaned from karma is not necessarily straightforward.

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[30] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 72. & original source. See also Beverly Foulks McGuire, "Seeing Suchness: Emotional and Material Means of Perceiving Reality in Chinese Buddhist Divination Rituals," in *Historicizing Emotions: Practices and Objects in India, China, and Japan*, ed. Barbara Schuler (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 261–296; "Divining Karma in Chinese Buddhism," *Religion Compass* 7 (2013):413–422.

[31] See, for instance, Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Yenna Wu "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* XLVII, no. 2 (1988): 363–382; and Andrew Plaks, who describes this narrative logic as a "simplistic didactic scheme" (though the reader should note that this simplicity should certainly not be assumed of all works in which karmic structures of retribution are operative), "After the Fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XLIV, no. 2 (1985): 552. For a nuanced treatment of this structural principle, see Xiaoqiao Ling, "Law, Deities, and Beyond: From the 'Sanyan' Stories to 'Xingshi yinyuan zhuan,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 74, no. 1 (2014): 1–42.

For late-Ming thinkers such as Ouyi Zhixu, causes and conditions are possessed of a subtle logic that the ordinary person cannot intuit. For this reason, worldly practitioners hoping to alleviate their karmic shortcomings are instructed to call on the aid of a bodhisattva. Jin Shengtan's literary theorization of causes and conditions underscores the mystery, excitement, and anxiety of the rationale operating in great literary works and uses this conception to reflect on the mysterious ways both lived and literary experience unfold—something only a Genius can fully comprehend.

By treating both lived and literary experience as imbued with karmic potential, Jin Shengtan presents both categories of phenomenal experience, though provisional, as inextricable from the real and therefore worthy of mindful engagement. The theme of repentance will have offered Jin a useful opportunity to underscore this point, for in the context of Buddhist practice, repentance negotiates the complex intersection of conventional reality and emptiness and the ways in which this intersection poses a danger to the unenlightened. Beverley Foulks McGuire has pointed out that ignorance of causes and conditions could play out in two ways: in one case, a deluded person might simply ignore causes and conditions; in another, one might erroneously presume that, because phenomenal experience is empty, karmic retribution is inoperative.[32] But provisional reality is where the Buddhist practitioner's understanding of emptiness manifests: a bodhisattva will effortlessly conduct themself ethically because, once emptiness is attained, there is no longer any basis for the kind of selfish thinking that inhibits ethical conduct. By contrast, if one assumes that, because all is empty, it is fine to steal or kill, then one has already revealed an investment in personal advantage that is at odds with the truth of emptiness. The aim of repentance, then, is not to do away with reality, but to atone for one's inability to look upon

[32] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 72.

reality clearly.[33] In an earlier repentance text, the Korean Buddhist philosopher Wŏnhyo 원효 (元曉, 617–686) explains that what matters is not whether one's misdeed is real or not, but whether it resulted from an attachment to the senses and the conception of ego:

> If practitioners can contemplate reality in this way with a repentant attitude, /It is not possible to commit the four grave offenses and the five heinous acts, just as empty space cannot be burnt by fire. / However, if you are not mindful, lack remorse and shame, and are not able to know the true nature of the actions, / even though transgressions lack the true nature (*svabhava*) of criminality, you will still go to hell, just like a magical tiger who in turn swallows up the magician who conjures him.
>
> 行者若能數數思惟如是實相而懺悔者，四重五逆無所能為，猶如虛空不為火燒。如其放逸無慚無愧。不能思惟業實相者，雖無罪性將入泥梨，猶如幻虎還吞幻師。[34]

While it is unlikely that Jin Shengtan ever read Wŏnhyo's repentance text,[35] their shared investment in Mahāyana thought allows for a meaningful reflection on how a literary work might possess the same karmic peril and promise as the rest of phenomenal experience. Wŏnhyo's tiger, like the literary tiger we examined in the last chapter, is not real, but is nonetheless something to be wary of, for if one mistakes the tiger for real rather than perceiving its dependently co-arisen nature, then one might get caught up in this delusion.[36] If one sees the tiger for what it is, a conjuring of brush and ink, at once affectively compelling and no different

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[33] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 74–75; Eun-Su Cho, "Repentance as a Bodhisattva Practice: Wŏnhyo on Guilt and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 1 (January 2013): 43.

[34] *Dasheng liuqing chanhui* 大乘六情懺悔, *juan* 1, T 45.1908.921. Translation from Eun-Su Cho, "Repentance as a Bodhisattva Practice," 45. Also see Eun-Su Cho, "Towards a Buddhist Ethics of Emptiness: Wŏnhyo on Transgression and Repentance in 'The Mahāyana Repentance of the Six Senses,'" *Journal of Korean Religions* 8, no. 1 (2017): 31–46.

[35] While Wŏnhyo's prolific commentaries on the sutras were widely read by Chinese Buddhist thinkers from the Tang dynasty onward, this particular text does not seem to have circulated in China until the modern period. According to Ouyi Zhixu's catalogue of Buddhist readings *Yuezang zhijin* 閱藏知津, *juan* 35, J 32.B271.51, Zhixu read Wŏnhyo's *Commentary on the Amitabha Sutra* (*Foshuo amituo jing shu* 佛說阿彌陀經疏). For a discussion of Wŏnhyo's synthesis of Mahāyāna doctrine and an overview of his influence on the development of Chinese Buddhism, including Tiantai, see Charles Muller, "The Meaning of the Explicit and Inexplicit Approaches in Wŏnhyo's 'System of the Two Hindrances' (Ijang ui 二障義)," *Journal of Korean Religions* 8, no. 1 (April 2017): 63–91; for a discussion of the Buddhist commentarial tradition and Wŏnhyo's position of importance therein, see Robert E. Buswell Jr., "Wŏnhyo: Buddhist Commentator "Par Excellence," *Journal of Korean Religions* 8, no. 1 (April 2017): 131–160.

[36] Eun-Su Cho elaborates on this point. See "Repentance as a Bodhisattva Practice," 50.

from any other inkily co-arisen literary phenomenon, then the reader not only escapes the negative consequences of deluded attachment, but also exercises the kind of bodhisattva-like wisdom that leads to liberation. Jin Shengtan's commentaries aim to lead readers toward the latter perspective—which, again, is not to throw the tiger out with the bathwater of delusion, but to see the tiger, in all its somatically and affectively compelling liveliness, more clearly.

In practice, however, Buddhist thinkers attest to the difficulty of maintaining a clear view of emptiness while looking upon reality. By repenting, practitioners aim to stimulate a bodhisattva's compassionate response (*ganying* 感應) to clear away karmic obstacles unintelligible to ordinary people. In Zhixu's case, this involves weeping and expressions of shame that might stimulate a bodhisattva's compassionate response.[37] So too in the case of the literary scene of repentance Jin Shengtan orchestrates by means of his commentary and editorial interventions, which emphasize both the affect of repentance and the act of weeping.[38] Immediately after the first of the six arias Jin identifies as a "moment of happiness," Jin underscores the excellence of Hongniang's repentance and her readiness to confess to Madame Cui. He uses the moment highlight the scene's main topic. Hongniang thinks anxiously to herself:[39]

> I reckon that soon, when I get to Madam, she'll surely ask, "You little hussy!"
> [To the tune of *Jin jiao ye*] I ordered you to guard and observe her wherever she went or stayed!
> Who told you to lead her on to mischief and to let her wander astray?"
> If she questions me on this point, how can I explain?
>
> **The above [constitutes] the fourth section [of this scene]. First she assesses [the situation] once over. Truly such a capable person!**

[37] McGuire, *Living Karma*, 60 and 62.

[38] The fact that Jin Shengtan's prefatory material to *Romance of the Western Chamber* also emphasizes the theme of lamentation suggests that this theme may be integral to the commentarial apparatus he develops alongside this work. See "Xu yi yue tongku guren," *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu*, *juan* 1, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:850.

[39] In the following translation, I have approximated the formatting of *JSTQJ* (2008): Lyrics are left-justified, spoken lines are indented, and Jin Shengtan's comments are presented in bold font.

I'll only say: "Madam is my superior, from my youth, I have not dared harbor any ill intention."

Then I'll relate the details of the crime to her.

The above [constitutes] the fifth section [of this scene]. This is but the topic upon which the following bulk of the scene is firmly focused. If she should ever so slightly shirk blame, it would dull [the scene]. From beginning to end, *Romance of the Western Chamber* is careful not to admit so much as a single dull stroke of the brush.

It's just that I'm thinking of how to respond. **Most subtle! There is truly such an affair, truly such a sentiment, and truly such a principle. If great, then one can establish a dynasty; if small, then one can make a home. Upon facing one's mortality, looking back and thinking to oneself, one truly turns to sobbing.**

我算將來，我到夫人那裏，夫人必問到：「兀那賤人！【金蕉葉】我着你但去處行監坐守，誰教你迤逗他胡行亂走？」這般問，如何訴休？

右第四節。先擬一遍，真是可兒。

我便只道：「夫人在上，紅娘自幼不敢欺心。」便與他個知情的犯由。

右第五節。此即下去一篇大文認定之題目也。稍復推諉，便成鈍置。《西廂記》從前至後，誓不肯作一筆鈍置也。

只是我圖着什麼來？**妙妙！真有此事，真有此情，真有此理。大則立朝，小則做家，至臨命時，回首自思，真成一哭耳！**[40]

Jin Shengtan heavily reworks the source text for this passage to present Hongniang as a repentant confessor. In earlier editions, Hongniang and Yingying are together when Hongniang is called to report to Madame Cui, and Yingying pleads with her maidservant to take care in speaking with her mother. Here, Hongniang is alone, so her anxious anticipation of Madame Cui's reaction (the first lyric Jin proposes to add to his list of happy moments) no longer adds to her rebuke of Yingying, but takes on a sense of remorse and personal responsibility. Whereas Wang Shifu's version of the play emphasizes Hongniang's bravery and cunning as she prepares to face the madam, in Jin Shengtan's version of the play Hongniang steels herself to openly admit to what has happened. Jin's comments proceed to underscore the aesthetic excitement and anxiety of this

[40] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1059.

moment, which he pronounces utterly "real" (*zhen*)—like the tiger on Jingyang ridge, a literary conjuring worth attending to. By the end of Hongniang's first few arias, Jin Shengtan has set the stage for a scene of literary repentance.

Recovering a Haptic Poetics

To my knowledge, the "Romantic Inquisition" is the only literary passage that Jin Shengtan transforms into a scene of repentance, but the commentarial techniques he employs to turn this piece of literary work into a transformative text are consistent with the techniques he uses throughout his commentaries. I describe Jin Shengtan's theory of literary form as haptic for the way his commentaries consistently aim to enhance the somatic and affective elements embedded in writing, which, I propose, was his approach to uncovering the operation of causes and conditions in the literary medium. Most readers will be familiar with haptics in the context of handling electronic objects that stimulate the sense of touch through targeted vibrations. Such haptic feedback makes virtual objects feel real and gives surface a sense of depth, to the extent that we might forget that the "button" on a screen is, in fact, merely a transient array of digital pixels, or overlook the fact that the trackpad we "click" with a press of the finger has not actually shifted. Jin Shengtan's annotations effect an analogous experience of the virtual as real by attending to the rhythms embedded in aesthetic objects: the flying to and fro of Li Ling's brush; the pounce, spring, and swipe of Wu Song's tiger; the panicked hands, fingers, mouths, and tongues of those caught in a conflagration. Causes and conditions, reimagined as literary rhythms such as these, are what make an aesthetic identity (literary character or authorial persona) or experience distinct and compelling. At the same time, Jin points to the emptiness of these distinctions by showing how these inscribed rhythms traverse minds, media, and bodies to

suggest an intersubjective consciousness: Ge's "field of intersubjectivity;" "the "single body" Ling Xiaoqiao describes as gathering together "author, reader, commentator, and other identities and subjectivities;" or, as Radich would call it, *dharmakaya* (*fashen*); for Jin, Genius. The haptic is thus the means by which Jin provides a literary demonstration of provisional and absolute truths simultaneously: the more convincing and lively any individual character or event is, the more likely it is that the reader will forget themselves and be swept up in the drama of someone else's experience, gradually thinking themselves into an endless expanse of dependently co-arisen phenomena.

As the "Romantic Inquisition" proceeds, Jin Shengtan brings karma—both as cause and effect (*yinguo*) and as embodied in speech, action, and intention (*kou*, *shen*, *yi*)—into clear focus by spotlighting the rhythms and relations that inhere in (or which he has added into) the text. At the beginning of Hongniang's confession (which Jin describes using the secular term *zhaocheng* 招承), Jin attends to the particular rhythm of Hongniang's speech, marveling over how she ever so gradually relates the young lovers' affair over the course of three consecutive arias, lyrics which Jin praises as potential "happy moments." Over the course of these lines, as elsewhere in his commentaries, Jin Shengtan emphasizes the simultaneity of fiction's veracity and the writing that conjures this false reality, as when he exclaims, "She only lightly [attempts to] evade [blame]; she does not forcefully attempt to do so. If she evaded too forcefully, it would dull the scene, and then how would she still be the character Hongniang, how would this still be the writing of *Romance of the Western Chamber*!" 只略推耳， 不力推也。力推便成鈍置，豈復是紅娘人物，豈復是《西廂》筆法.[41] In a more extended reflection, he observes:

> Hongniang's confession is effective, but when her confession reaches this point [of mentioning that Yingying entered Student Zhang's study to ask after him], then how is it

[41] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1060.

> to be put it in words? She suddenly just proceeds according to the one sentence that comes out of Madam's mouth: "What did he say?" And ever so lightly, [Hongniang] draws out [a series of] three "he saids," and the matter is thereupon already crystal clear. Even if [we were to call this author] an immortal incarnate, riding upon clouds and wind, this would not be a sufficient metaphor [by which to describe the author].
>
> 紅娘之招承可也，但紅娘招承至於此際，則將如何措辭？忽然只就夫人口中「他說甚麼」之一句，輕輕接出三個「他說」，而其事遂已宛然。此雖天仙化人，乘雲御風，不足為喻。[42]

In this case, Jin is commenting on one of his own revisions of Wang Shifu's text. In Wang's version, Hongniang answers Madame Cui's question with one "He spoke, saying…" 他說來，道 and one more "He said…" 他道.[43] Jin transforms the structure of Hongniang's response to a far more rhythmic, "He said…. He said…. He said…" 他說.[44] This change is unnecessary with respect to the content of Hongniang's lines, thought it does add subtle affective nuance to the moment in the form of a rhythmic weight that parallels Hongniang's confession as a whole. The result of this minute adjustment is a clearer sense of Hongniang's intention (as Jin imagines it)—to set forth her confession clearly but gradually—and Hongniang's intelligent and forthright character. I proffer that Jin Shengtan attends to and editorially enhances such rhythmic elements in the text to transform writing into a karmically charged medium. In light of this, it makes sense that he concludes the above comment by referring to the author—for the first of three times in this act—as an "immortal incarnate," for the author's status as a bodhisattva-like figure explains their capacity to write in perfect accord with causes and conditions.

In a manner of speaking, Jin Shengtan manipulates characters' speech, gestures, and thoughts to transform literary beings into karmically endowed figures whose affective

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[42] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1061

[43] Wang Shifu 王實甫, *Xixiang ji* 西廂記, ed. Wang Jisi 王季思 (Shanghai: Xin wenyi chubanshe, 1954), 151.

[44] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1061.

experiences are intertwined. In the "Romantic Inquisition," he employs this haptic technique to turn Hongniang's personal confession into a collective scene of karmic repentance, one that eventually involves the commentator and the reader, as well. Here, too, Jin Shengtan has made significant changes to Wang Shifu's text. At one key point, after Hongniang has persuaded Madame Cui that she too bears some of the responsibility for the young lovers' secret liaison, Yingying comes onstage to confront her fate. In the Wang edition, Madame Cui confronts her daughter with, "[Yingying], how have I raised you that you would commit such an act now? It must be my bad karma. Who is to blame?" 鶯鶯，我怎生擡舉你來，今日做這等的勾當，則是我的孽障，待怨誰的是！[45] Jin Shengtan's version delays this verbal confrontation with a scene of shared feeling and action, to which his annotations further direct the reader's attention:

> (Yingying acts out seeing her mother) (Madam speaks) My own young one… **she only manages four words.** (Madam acts out crying) (Yingying acts out crying) (Hongniang acts out crying) **The text also describes Hongniang as crying, fully depicting her as having the disposition of a daughter. Supremely subtle!**
>
> （鶯鶯見夫人科）（夫人云）我的孩兒……**只得四字。**（夫人哭科）（鶯鶯哭科）（紅娘哭科）**寫紅娘亦哭，便寫盡女兒心性也。妙絕，妙絕！**[46]

Hongniang's repentance thus becomes the shared repentance of a small collective of agents, all of whose actions are characterized by an incorrect understanding of causes and conditions. Jin's commentary goes to great lengths to ensure his readers do not overlook this collective crying. "The subtlety of *Romance of the Western Chamber*'s stage directions is as excellent as this, vulgar editions [of the play] all omit them. Isn't this detestable!" 《西廂記》科白之妙至于如

[45] Wang Shifu, *Xixiang ji*, 153. Translation from Shih-fu Wang, *Story of the Western Wing*, trans. West and Idema, 236.

[46] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1064.

此，俗本皆失，一何可恨！[47] Jin's annotations underscore not only the act of crying, but also the collective nature of this act. In an upper-margin comment, he relates:

> I recall that when young I once came across a song to the tune of the "Date Harvesting Pole," that contained the lyrics: "Sending off a dear one, following them as far as Danyang Street, you cry, I cry, the donkey driver also starts to cry. Donkey driver, why are you crying? The one going is unwilling to go, the ones crying only attend to crying. With you two sentimentally dallying over there, my donkey is suffering." This is among the most estimable works on earth!
>
> 記幼時曾見一《打棗竿歌》云：「送情人直送到丹陽路，你也哭，我也哭，趕腳的也來哭。趕腳的你哭是因何故？去的不肯去，哭的只管哭。你兩下裏調情也，我的驢兒受了苦。」此天地間至文也。[48]

While, on their surface, these lyrics might seem to digress from the scene at hand, Jin's recollection humorously foregrounds an idea that runs throughout his commentaries: that gestures, feelings, and even styles of speech and writing may traverse bodies—and the texts those bodies compose. If we read such embodied phenomena as manifestations of causes and conditions, then the message seems to be that karma is contagious—though, in this case, the donkey driver and the parting couple are almost certainly not crying for the same reason. While from a provisional, perhaps "materialist" or "descriptivist," standpoint bodies seem to be separate, from the standpoint of dependent co-arising, they are always already entangled.

Extending this reasoning, guilt for an action cannot be clearly assigned to just one person's moral failure, for such failures are also consequences of the causes and conditions that implicate multiple inherently and mutually inclusive (*xingju*, *huju*) bodies. Hongniang's ability to extend responsibility for the situation at hand to Madame Cui certainly evinces the maid's cunning, but Jin's comments also attribute this extension of responsibility with a capacity to effect healing, as it is here that he pronounces, "How joyfully it flows, such that it is without

[47] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1064.
[48] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1064.

obstacle. If someone has a chest illness, they need only chant this scene ten times. [Their chest] will easily become clear and expansive, and never will anything lodge in it." Jin's understanding of the play's main conflict as the natural outcome of "deluded men's and women's" inability to understand causes and conditions absolves Yingying of the former play's framing as something of a romantic subverter of traditional morality. At the same time, Jin lends nobility to Hongniang's cunning attempt to get out of trouble into an explanation that holds philosophical weight. In this case, it is not that Yingying is somehow by nature morally intransigent, but rather that, like everyone around her, she is susceptible to sensual impressions and worldly attachments. Jin consequently softens Madame Cui's scolding words:

> (Madam speaks) My own young one, you were taken advantage of by someone **The four words [at the beginning of this line] are most marvelous!** to commit such an act now. This is all [due to] my karmic impediments, who is to blame?
>
> （夫人云）我的孩兒，你今日被人欺負**四字奇奇妙妙！**做下這等事。都是我的業障，待怨誰來？[49]

Jin also makes a subtle but meaningful adjustment to the end of Madame Cui's line for the sake of transforming this moment's sentiment. In Wang Shifu's version, Yingying's mother chocks a bad situation up to her "bad karma," using the vernacular expression *niezhang* 孽障. Jin develops this causal rationale into a more deliberate assumption of shared karmic responsibility: "This is *all* (*dou* 都) due to my karmic impediments (*yezhang* 業障)," abandoning the more colloquial *niezhang* in favor of a term associated with classical Buddhist discourse. Unlike *nie*, which has strong derogatory and negative connotations, including retribution for evil deeds, *ye*, by contrast, refers to the impact of past acts on one's speech, actions, and intentions—embodied karma. In Jin's version, then, Madame Cui takes this incident not as a straightforward punishment for an

[49] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1065.

evil deed she committed in a past life, but as her karmic responsibility, and Jin's reading of this moment suggests that taking such responsibility might have therapeutic benefit, one which might, moreover, extend to the reader.

As this emotionally climactic act draws to a close, Jin makes a striking change to Hongniang's penultimate aria (to the tune of *dong yuan lai*) to extend the repentant affect—and, by extension, its karmic benefit—to the reader by adding a sentence of just three emotionally charged words. Hongniang sings, and Jin comments:

> Who is capable! **Just three words are yet equal to [Tao Yuanming's] great piece, the "Rhapsody on the Feeling Scholar's Disappointment."**
> **The above [passage constitutes] the twenty-fourth section. The author uses only three words to constitute an entire piece, and, moreover, moves people to sigh endlessly. This is just like I, Jin Shengtan, who am certainly not "capable."**
>
> 誰能彀！只三個字，便抵一大篇《感士不遇賦》
> 右第二十四節。只用三個字作一篇，却動人無限感慨。只如聖歎，便是不「能彀」也。[50]

Jin's comment on his own addition to the lyric transforms, in one sweeping annotative gesture, Tao Qian's famous work associated with the tradition of personal indignation into another literary act of repentance. Whereas Li Zhi personally identified with the indignation of past writers who failed to find understanding companions among their contemporaries, here Jin Shengtan models a less personal, more collective mode of sharing in an existential dilemma. In an upper-margin comment, Jin adds:

> How could it be that only I am not capable? Student Zhang and Yingying, but a moment ago, were also not capable. Once sorrow has settled, we contemplate sorrow; once peril has passed, we contemplate peril. Just three words unleash the unending tears of anyone with a heart.
>
> 何獨聖歎不能彀，即張生、雙文、少前一刻，亦便不能彀也。痛定思痛，險過思險，只三個字，灑落有心人無限眼淚。[51]

[50] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1066.
[51] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1066.

Jin's opening comment regarding the plight of "deluded men and women" in this manner extends to include himself and all other readers, whom he invites to engage in a collective act of weeping, to repent, along with practitioners such as Ouyi Zhixu, that one has been "obstructed by the six sense faculties as well as the three karmic activities of body, speech, and thought, that one has not seen Buddhas nor known how to escape the world but instead has continued in the realm of *samsara*, not knowing the 'wondrous principle' (*miaoli*)."[52] Such deluded individuals "have false perceptions about the world, give rise to thoughts of attachment, and wrongly distinguish between subject and object."[53] But in this act of repentance, I propose, the reader, along with Jin Shengtan, Yingying, Hongniang, and Madame Cui, momentarily sets aside the provisional distinction between subject and object to focus on emptiness even in the realm of *samsara*—just like those who forgot themselves at the ventriloquy performance. In the case of Madame Cui, at least, the shift in perspective that her repentance effects, whereby she is no better than the wayward youths at her mercy, naturally inspires her compassion. Jin underscores this compassion by adding yet more material to the end of the scene: upon receiving Madame Cui's mercy, Student Zhang speechlessly kneels before her, and Hongniang exclaims "Thank Heaven, thank Earth, and thank Madame Cui"（張生無語，跪拜科）（紅云）謝天謝地！謝我夫人！[54]

If the aim of repentance is to stimulate the compassionate mercy of a bodhisattva, then Jin Shengtan's commentary suggests that book four, act two of *Western Chamber* succeeds in this aim, for as soon as this act comes to a close, his prefatory comments to the next act invoke

[52] McGuire, 74–75.
[53] McGuire, 75.
[54] "Kaoyan," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:1066.

the words of none other than the Buddha. This is the extended excerpt from the "pseudo-sutra" or *imitatio* examined by Qiancheng Li in the previous chapter of this dissertation. Here, the Buddha's pronouncements do away with the provisional distinction between self and other that has led our dramatis personae astray. In this respect, the movement from book four, act one of the play, in which Student Zhang and Yingying indulge their lust, to the scene of repentance in act two, to the abrupt recession of romantic delusion in act three, parallels the form of Jin Shengtan's thirty-three moments of happiness, which also passes from sensual indulgence, to repentance, to recession.

Jin's commentaries aim to impart a lesson on the emptiness of own-being not only by means of recession, but also through moments of deep engagement with form. The act of repentance—which is also but provisional—reframes sensuous indulgence as another opportunity to practice observing emptiness of own-being. While the bulk of Jin's thirty-three moments seem to exhibit unbridled attachment to the six senses and the distinction between self and other, there is a detail here that we might have overlooked: as specific and detailed as many of these experiences are, to the extent that they seem to be someone's personal recollection, Jin states at the outset that he can no longer recall which sentences were Zhuoshan's and which his own. In retrospect, as the reader immerses themselves in the somatic and affective reimagining of these moments alongside Jin's and Zhuoshan's blurred subjectivities, the reader was engaging with emptiness all along.

Jin's haptic poetics—informed by a vision of writing as a dependently co-arisen, karmically endowed medium—transforms the literary work into a rhythmically charged surface. Jin imagines that by wholeheartedly engaging with this surfacescape of forms rather than attempting to extract some deeper value from the words on the page, the reader might escape the

moral perils of hierarchies of value, the kind of moral abstraction that nearly caused Madame Cui to beat Hongniang to death. Instead, Jin invites readers to experience others as equal to themselves with respect to their dependently co-arisen nature and anticipates fidelity and reciprocity as the natural outcome of this insight. For readers of Jin's day, this would have offered an innovative conception of the literary as a medium. Now that we have a clearer sense of what this medium looks and feels like, let us proceed to consider how Jin introduces it to a historical audience anxiously debating the relative value of individual and transpersonal conceptions of moral value.

Part 2: Rereading the *Fifth Work of Genius*

In chapter one, I proposed that rather than continuing to ask what Jin Shengtan did for vernacular fiction as a genre, we should instead ask what this work in particular did for his program of literary commentary. Jin's program included six works, and the sequential title he applied to *Water Margin* suggests that this was to be read as neither the first nor the last volume of his projected sextet. So why did he introduce his new system of literary hermeneutics with this novel, as opposed to any other work of Genius—or, for that matter, any other novel?

In light of the above analysis, *Water Margin*'s content would have afforded Jin Shengtan a special opportunity to demonstrate the surprising moral value of immersing oneself in the sensuous appeal of worldly defilements (albeit with the right perspective). Coincidentally, the number of outlaws that *Water Margin* itself so prominently features, and upon which Jin Shengtan repeatedly remarks—108—corresponds exactly to the number of beads on a Buddhist rosary (*baiba shuzhu* 百八數珠), which may represent either the 108 afflictions (*kleśa*) or all of

phenomenal existence.[55] Given this association, it is most appropriate that at the very beginning of the novel, the spirits that later incarnate as the outlaws are accidentally released from beneath a large talismanic stele concealed at a Buddhist temple. Whereas Buddhist rosary practices normally involve reciting a mantra or the name of the Buddha 108 times, *Water Margin* invites the reader to concentrate on the 108 names of these troublesome cosmic spirits—like a rosary from hell—before venturing forth into the main narrative. Even before Jin Shengtan reworked *Water Margin*, then, the novel subversively suggested both the havoc that afflictions could work upon society and the delight to be found in giving way to the senses while reading a work of fiction. Jin's edition draws special attention to this chapter, which is labelled as chapter one in earlier editions, by labelling it as a "wedge" (*xiezi* 楔子), a term usually used to identify the prologue scene prior to the main plot of a drama. Jin's re-labelling subtly shifts this passage's role to that of a conceptual or thematic frame, perhaps an ongoing reminder to the reader to keep in mind what these outlaws "really" are. The possible parallel between the outlaws and the kleśas makes instances of bandit-driven chaos all the more amusing, as when Lu Zhishen barely manages to take the tonsure (to escape arrest) but, after a period of restraining himself according to the precepts, gives way to drunkenness, gluttony, and a violent outburst that seriously damages the temple where he is residing. Or, in another instance, when he burns down a dilapidated and corrupt Waguan Temple. In such scene, allegorized afflictions run amok among monks and Buddhist sanctuaries, encountering no one who can restrain them. By means of commentary and judicious editing, Jin turns these scenes of worldly defilement into

[55] For the list of the outlaws' cosmic titles alongside their worldly names, see "Xiezi" 楔子, in *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 5, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:53–57. According to the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, Buddhist teachings break phenomenal existence down into: "the eighteen elements, viz., the six sense bases, six sense objects, and six sensory consciousnesses, in all of the six states of existence (18 × 6 = 108)." See entry for "Japamālā," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. J. Buswell and Donald S. J. Lopez (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

opportunities to experience even the most gratuitously sacrilegious phenomena as opportunities to perceive emptiness.

A similar literary exercise in maintaining a view of emptiness operates alongside the contents of Jin Shengtan's classical prose anthology. In this case, however, it is the reader who delves into the diverse array of human experiences gathered within the anthology who serves as Genius, not the individual authors gathered therein. While Jin bestows the label of "Genius" upon this work, only two of his prefatory comments to the 358 passages he selects refer to an individual writer as such—an absence that forms a remarkable contrast with his ongoing emphasis on Genius in his *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentaries. But there is also a striking difference between the vernacular fiction and drama authors who, by virtue of the forms in which they compose, imagine themselves into other beings' embodied experiences, and the classical prose author who generally thinks only of their own. Jin's commentaries attend carefully to the affective and formal features of each prose piece, as well as its formation by brush and ink, to present the reader with a historical array of distinctive authorial personae. Jin's emphasis on the writer's embodied feeling in his compendia of prose and poetry resembles expressionist criticism, which accounts for James J. Y. Liu's influential assertion that Jin was Li Zhi's "spiritual heir."[56] But Jin's particular mode of attention to literary form and his theorization of Genius subsume these outbursts of personal feeling under the category of dependently co-arisen phenomena.[57] He intends for the reader to identify with such feelings not in relation to their own personal background of experience, but impersonally, as one

[56] James J. Y. Liu, 78–82.

[57] This is especially evident in the case of the Tang poetry anthology that Jin Shengtan's son assembled. The prefatory material appended to this publication includes a comprehensive assortment of remarks Jin made on poetry in his writings and in epistolary exchanges with friends. These remarks focus predominantly on poetic form, which Jin often discusses in explicitly Buddhist terms. See "Yuting wen guan" 魚庭聞貫, in *Guanhuatang xuanpi Tang caizi shi jia ji qiyan lü* 貫華堂選批唐才子詩甲集七言律, *juan* 2, *JSTQJ* (2008), 1:95–127.

who grasps dependent co-arising. In the case of the prose anthology, Jin's sustained attention to various figurations of brush and ink remind the reader that the diverse range of experiences and affects appearing on the pages before them are also all ink on paper. By attending to affects and personalities as phenomena born out of causes and conditions, the reader who engages with such diverse personalities through writing strives to attain the perspective of Genius. In the context of this hermeneutic agenda, *Water Margin*, as a work by a single author that features over a hundred characters, models the kind of Genius Jin would have his classical prose readers become.

Breaking with the Past

Water Margin's allegorical and structural features certainly lend themselves to Jin Shengtan's a conception of Genius as intersubjective consciousness. But, judging from Jin's prefaces to *Water Margin*, the most likely reason he launched his literary program with this novel was probably this work's position at the intersection of two competing moral perspectives, one upholding Neo-Confucian moral orthodoxy, the other promoting personal indignation. Jin's three prefaces to *Water Margin* orchestrate a literary-philosophical departure from both discourses, but this only becomes clear when these prefaces are read as interlocking components of his commentarial apparatus. The present section will consider them as such.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, *Water Margin* was imperially censored in 1642, just one year after Jin inscribed his first preface to the work. At the same time, Li Zhi's valorization of the novel as a work of righteous indignation framed late-Ming editions (and readings) of this work. Jin's first and second prefaces to *Water Margin* seem to resonate with these historical circumstances. The first preface introduces Jin's conception of Genius alongside and extended

parody of the Neo-Confucian moral rationale for censorship, whereas the second preface condemns those who would call violent brigands loyal and righteous on the basis of a tradition of authorial indignation.[58] The targets of these two critical prefaces are further suggested by the form each essay takes: the first employs rhetorical conventions associated with the late imperial examination essay (though in a much longer format); the second, by contrast, sets forth a vigorous but brief expression of personal opinion, the form of which might fit in among the occasional writings or "minor pieces" (*xiaopin* 小品) for which Li Zhi was famous. Jin's third preface, which sets forth the key themes of his own hermeneutic approach, takes the relatively intimate form of an address to his young son, a form appropriate to Jin Shengtan's stated aim to transform future generations of readers by means of his work.

Previous readings of Jin Shengtan's *Water Margin* prefaces have recognized the first two framing essays as negotiating fiction's morally tenuous position in late-Ming culture but have not developed this observation with attention to Jin's commentarial apparatus. As the present study has already observed, scholarship tends to regard Jin's second preface with suspicion, taking this essay more as evidence of his anxiety over Li Zhi's outsized influence on the novel's reception than as a sincere testament to Jin's own position. As the first chapter demonstrated at length, however, the way Jin sets his conception of Genius in opposition to Zhang Nai's valorization of personal indignation attests to the sincerity of Jin's opposition to expressionist criticism.

Overlooking the key role Genius plays in Jin Shengtan's interpretive framework has also led scholars to construe his first preface in a way that probably runs counter to Jin Shengtan's

[58] Regardless of whether Jin could have anticipated that the novel would be censored at the time he composed his prefaces, he would likely have been aware of the moralists who thought this book should not be read. It is also possible that his implicit critique of Neo-Confucian censorship reflects on the fact that Li Zhi's work was censored (and burned) and that Li Zhi ended up dying (albeit, at least to our knowledge, by his own hand) in prison.

intention. Because the theme of Genius only appears at the halfway point of the lengthy preface, many studies of Jin's work have focused on the ideas in the essay's first half—all themes drawn from Neo-Confucian discourse—to reason that Jin Shengtan is something of a moralist, or is at least employing Neo-Confucian rationale to set himself apart from his predecessors.[59] Martin Huang reads Jin as taking the stance of a Neo-Confucian moralist by attending more carefully to the first half of Jin's first preface, where Jin remarks gratuitously on the necessity of book burning, than to the second half, where Jin discourses at length on a metaphysically endowed conception of Genius that (unlike the theme of book burning) appears elsewhere in his commentary.[60] Naifei Ding reads these exaggerated references to the Qin emperor's infamous book burning activities as indicative of Jin's savvy self-promotion on the hypercompetitive late-Ming book market: "Qin book burning becomes nothing less (or more) than an extended metaphor, figuring the manner in which one talented commoner's book (Jin Shengtan's [*Water Margin*]) will outshine and outsell, by its ethical and aesthetic merits, all other books on the market."[61] Ding further reasons that such competition explains the length and care with which Jin composed his prefaces to *Water Margin*:

> I propose that it is Jin Shengtan's inhabiting a position (commoner or *shuren*), place (Suzhou), and time (Chongzhen era) when bookmaking could be and certainly was for others like him at once an "obsession" and a livelihood, a means of symbolic distinction and work—in short, a cultural practice with an evolving built-in sense of a market in books—that partially explains what some have considered a "megalomanic" prefatorial style.[62]

[59] Ding accidentally construes morality (*de*), not Genius, as the basis for Jin's claim to literary authority. See Naifei Ding, "The Manic Preface: Jin Shengtan's (1608–1661) *Shuihu zhuan*," in *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in* Jin Ping Mei (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 71–72.

[60] Martin Huang, "Author(ity) and Reader in Traditional Chinese Xiaoshuo Commentary," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 16 (1994): 44.

[61] Ding, "The Manic Preface," 72.

[62] Ding, "The Manic Preface," 73.

Indeed, the late-Ming Jiangnan book market only "partially explains" what Ding describes as Jin's "writing in the attenuated forms of prefacing, editing, and commentating," but Ding does not delve into what more might account for his work's most outstanding features. Ding's selective analysis of Jin's prefaces goes too far in conflating economic opportunity with intellectual motivation. The late-Ming book market enabled Jin Shengtan to make a living off of his ideas in ways that might not previously have been possible; it did not straightforwardly motivate the ideological content of his work.

Jin's ideological motivations come forth more clearly when his first preface is read according to the rhetorical conventions of the eight-legged essay (*bagu wen* 八股文). At over 3,000 words in length, his preface is more than five times as long the late-imperial examination essays (ranging from three hundred to six hundred words in length) that exemplified this structure, and is so tightly packed with the sections of parallel prose that characterize this genre of writing that it might be futile to attempt to map the "eight-legged" structure onto his preface with any degree of precision. While the eight-legged form allows for a certain degree of structural variation, according to Ching-i Tu, such essays consist of eight sections, of which sections four through seven consist—again, allowing for some variation—of paired arrangements of parallel clauses (the so-called "eight legs").[63] While this compositional form has historically been derided for stifling creativity, both during the late imperial period for its association with examination culture and during the modern period for its association with "feudal" regimes, the lapidary rhythms that develop out of these arrangements of parallel prose

[63] Ching-i Tu, "The Chinese Examination Essay: Some Literary Considerations," *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974–1975): 398–399. Tu also offers a brief history of the "eight-legged" form, the origins of which, according to Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), were already somewhat obscure in the Ming-dynasty. For an overview of the cultural role of the examination system, see Benjamin A. Elman, "Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991): 7–28.

allow for brilliant demonstrations of solemnity, concern, hope, and scathingly funny wit—all of which Jin's preface exploits to the full.[64]

From the standpoint of the modern reader, what is most striking about these eight-legged essays, beyond the uneven rhythms of their layered parallel structures, is the fact that the writer's main idea does not appear anywhere near the beginning of the composition. Indeed, to present one's opinion too forthrightly would be considered bad form in this genre. Instead, the first three sections, respectively termed "broaching the topic" (*poti* 破題),[65] "carrying forth the topic" (*chengti* 承題), and "beginning the discourse" (*qijiang* 起講), aim to unfold the main point gradually, first by suggesting the examinee's knowledge of the topic's classical source; then elaborating to the point of providing the reason for the sagely speaker's words; then, finally, just beginning to present one's own ideas. It is not until section six, however, that the examinee presents the ideas that form the crux of their essay.[66]

What gives Jin Shengtan's preface away as a distended adaptation of the eight-legged structure is precisely the same feature that gives his adaptation of Neo-Confucian discourse momentum: the fact that he begins by "speaking in the voice of the sage" (*dai shengren liyan* 代聖人立言).[67] In the examination setting, candidates were presented with short excerpts (usually

[64] In 1657, the same year the *Sixth Work of Genius* was published, Jin Shengtan composed the preface to his collection of Ming-dynasty examination essays. In this anthology, he employs all the strategies he normally applies to works of Genius. Around the same time, Jin's acquaintance You Tong wrote a playful eight-legged essay on *Romance of the Western Chamber*, after which numerous other writers composed eight-legged essays on another song-drama, *Tale of the Lute*, and on *Romance of the Western Chamber*. For a study of this phenomenon, see Yinghui Wu, "Constructing a Playful Space: Eight-Legged Essays on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*," *T'oung Pao* 102, no. 4 (2016): 503–545.

[65] According to Ching-i Tu, broaching the topic too abruptly is referred to as (*mati* 罵題), "abusing the topic." See Tu, "The Chinese Examination Essay," 398.

[66] For a more detailed summary of the examination essay's eight sections, see Tu, "The Chinese Examination Essay," 398–399.

[67] This is a compositional performance of the sagely role to which the examinee aspires. According to Tu, Ming and Qing thinkers associated this feature of the examination essay with drama, see "The Chinese Examination Essay," 405. For an elaboration on this intersection of media, see Yinghui Wu, "Constructing a Playful Space."

just a few words) from the Confucian classics and were expected to recognize and expound on the source of the excerpt from memory. In this case, Jin Shengtan has selected his own topic: Confucius' famous declaration from the *Analects* that he had "transmitted [the Classics] without composing [anything of his own]" (*shu er bu zuo* 述而不作).[68] True to the compositional form at hand, Jin starts out by keeping his discussion at a remove from the main point, to develop a sense of thematic tension before. Through indirection, however, Jin hits straight at the heart of Neo-Confucian hermeneutics, breaking the topic with words drawn from both Confucius and Zhu Xi.

> Originally, inscribed works were the means by which the ancient sage kings unified the people's minds and implemented good governance. [As the "Appended Remarks" in the *Classic of Changes* explains,] this [practice] originated in knotted cord and, upon maturing, resulted in the Six Classics. [The sage kings'] reason for grasping the bamboo slips and wielding the brush lay entirely [in the fact that] they bore the status of sage kings and, moreover, possessed sagely morality. Because they bore kingly status, they held their authority; because they possessed sagely morality, they understood their purpose. Holding their authority and understanding their purpose, they consequently obtained the opportunity to compose and composed; moreover, they could not but obtain the authority to compose and compose.
>
> 原夫書契之作，昔者聖人所以同民心而出治道也。其端肇于結繩，而其盛肴而為六經。其秉簡載筆者，則皆在聖人之位而又有其德者也。在聖人之位，則有其權；有聖人之德，則知其故。有其權而知其故，則得作而作，亦不得不得作而作也。[69]

The preface begins by invoking the "Treatise on the Appended Remarks" (*Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳, also known as the "Great Treatise"), an early discussion of the *Classic of Changes* incorporated into the Classic as an appendix and traditionally attributed to Confucius. This appendix played a foundational role in the development of Zhu Xi's principle-based hermeneutics and the Song-dynasty revival of Confucianism.[70] Zhu Xi regarded the Treatise as Confucius' explanation of

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[68] *Lunyu* 論語 7:1. Jin does not reference this line directly in his preface, but the preface speaks directly to the problem of authority Confucius' statement involves. Martin Huang also discusses this trope in detail in "Author(ity) and Reader," 43–44, but, as mentioned above, reads Jin Shengtan's opening statements as expressing the commentator's own opinion.

[69] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2002), 3:11.

[70] For a discussion and complete translation of the "Appended Remarks" and Zhu Xi's commentary on this text, see Joseph Adler, trans., *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, 261–302.

the "Appended Remarks"—the textual accompaniment, traditionally attributed to the sagely rulers King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, to the hexagrams gathered in the *Classic of Changes*. In a sense, then, Jin begins his commentary with Confucius' (supposed) commentary on a Classic.[71]

Almost as soon as he starts citing classical sources, however, Jin starts twisting them to develop his own message. The Treatise is not overtly concerned with defining the bounds of textual authority, but Jin Shengtan treats it as a means of initiating a discussion of this topic. The Treatise states, "In high antiquity [rulers] governed by means of knotted cord. In later ages, the sage kings developed [this practice] into written script" 上古結繩而治，後世聖人易之以書契.[72] Jin identifies the authority upon which the sage kings governed with writing by incorporating Zhu Xi's words, not from Zhu's influential commentary on the Treatise, but from his recorded dialogues on the *Analects*. In a remark on a line from the *Analects* in which Confucius describes the incredible difficulty of implementing humane governance, Zhu states, "To universally implement [a mode of governance that] comes to the people's aid, one must possess the morality of a sage and the status of a king; only then will one be able to serve in the manner of [the sage kings] Yao and Shun" 博施濟眾必有聖人之德、有天子之位，而後可以當此堯舜恁地.[73] Jin draws on Zhu's statement to articulate the sage kings' authority in terms of their morality as sages (*shengren zhi de* 聖人之德) and their status as kings (*tianzi zhi wei* 天子之位).[74] In his commentary on the Treatise, however, Zhu clearly assigns the sages authority on the basis of their spontaneous apprehension of principle stating, "they apprehended principle

[71] According to Joseph Adler, the "Treatise" is a highly syncretic text that discusses how to use the *Yijing* for divination, not a commentary on the "Appended Remarks."

[72] "Xici xia" 繫辭下, *Zhouyi* 周易.

[73] Zhu Xi, "Lunyu shiwu Yong ye pian si" 論語十五 雍也篇四, *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 33, 3:843.

[74] At the opening of his first preface, Jin Shengtan refers to the sages' (*shengren*) morality and status, but shortly hereafter he articulates this dual authority in terms of sagely morality (*shengren zhi de*) and kingly authority (*tianzi zhi wei*) in a manner that more closely parallels Zhu Xi's remark on the *Analects*.

without recourse to things."[75] Notably, nowhere in this preface does Jin Shengtan cite an understanding of moral principle (*li*, which, in Buddhist discourse, refers to emptiness), as a source of authority, thus rendering the source of Neo-Confucian authority more worldly. At the same time, this combination of references presents a tricky twist on Zhu Xi's reading of the Treatise. For throughout his commentary on this text, Zhu Xi emphasizes the *possibility*, not the difficulty, of attaining sagely conduct through an understanding of principle.[76] By contrast, the dual authority of sagely morality and kingly status sets the bar for textual authority so high that not even Confucius, who was not a ruler, could attain it.

Jin's subtle misrepresentation is a setup, both for Jin Shengtan's later turn to Genius and for the target of his imminent parody: Wang Yangming. At the beginning of the last third of his preface (where, in an eight-legged essay, the writer would articulate their position with full force), Jin presents an alternative to Confucian moral authority in two lines of parallel prose:

> In this case, the morality of a sage is truly not something of which an ordinary person is capable. If it is not something of which an ordinary person is capable, then it is not something a small person such as I today dare reach for.
> By contrast, the talent [or Genius] of the past people is something of which an ordinary person might yet be capable. If it might be something of which an ordinary person is capable, then perhaps it is that which a small person such as I may venture to attain.
>
> 然聖人之德實非夫人之能事。非夫人之能事，則非予小子今日之所敢及也。
> 彼古人之才或猶夫人之能事。猶夫人之能事，則庶幾予小子不揣之所得及也。

Jin's statement comes across as a humorous response to Wang Yangming, who, upon falling ill after fruitlessly examining a clump of bamboo for principle three days on end, "sighed over the impossibility of attaining sagehood" 嘆聖賢是做不得.[77] Indeed, much of Jin Shengtan's preface

[75] Zhu Xi, *Original Meaning of the Yijing*, trans. Adler, 280.
[76] Near the end of the Treatise, Zhu Xi remarks, "[T]he sages created the *Yi* to actualize their merit. In this way, 'with the counsel of men and the counsel of ghosts,' even the dullest of ordinary people can share in its potential," *Original Meaning*, 300. See also pages 295, 297, and 299.
[77] *Chuanxi lu*, 3:318.

seems to present a parodic response to Wang Yangming's *Instructions for Practical Living*, the text that records Wang's reflection on his ill-fated encounter with bamboo, but this parody focuses on an earlier entry in the text, detailing a lengthy exchange between Wang and his disciple Xu Ai on the subject of literary production.

Jin develops the topic (*chengti* 承題) of his preface as an exaggeration of the already strict standard of moral authority Wang Yangming's dialogue sets forth. As explained in the first chapter of this dissertation, while literary historians often attribute the Ming-dynasty rise of vernacular fiction to the spread of Wang's Study of Mind, Wang Yangming himself evinces firmly conservative moral and literary positions. The gist of Wang Yangming's teaching in this conversation is the well-worn Confucian trope, dating back to Mencius, that unrestrained discourse leads to society to chaos. In defense against the charge of being "fond of disputation" (*haobian* 好辯), Mencius described history as a cycle of moral decay and sagely rectification. By means of this narrative, he positioned himself as a latter-day Confucius. Just as Mencius felt compelled to argue over the sages' teachings, he characterized Confucius as one who was compelled to "compose" (*zuo* 作) the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in order to combat the "deviant speech and violent acts" (*xieshuo baoxing* 邪說暴行) of a morally wayward period. Mencius relates that:

> Confucius was alarmed [by the period of decay in which he lived] and created the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The *Annals* are the affairs of kings. For this reason, Confucius said, "Those who understand me will only do so because of the *Annals*! Those who condemn me will only do so because of the *Annals*!" [Now] sage kings no longer arise, vassal lords indulge themselves, idle scholars engage in reckless discourse…. I am alarmed by [all] this, and guard the teachings of the former sages, keep away from [the teachings of] Yang and Mo, and dispel perverse words so that deviant speech does not arise.

> 孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：「知我者其惟春秋乎！罪我者其惟春秋乎！」聖王不作，諸侯放恣，處士橫議……吾為此懼，閑先聖之道，距楊墨，放淫辭，邪說者不得作。[78]

Mencius positions the Confucian scholar as a cultural retainer, one who only expresses ideas for the sake of recentering discourse at large. Wang Yangming extends this cycle of moral decay and discursive rectification to his own time but makes two adjustments proper to his particular philosophical outlook. Firstly, as a Neo-Confucian, he repeatedly describes the scholar's task as one of returning to principle (*li*) and places far greater emphasis on Confucius' Treatise on the *Classic of Changes* than on the Sage's supposed authorship of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (which Wang Yangming dismisses out of hand).[79] Secondly, as a philosopher who advocated against an overreliance on texts and other outward phenomena, Wang describes Confucian discourse as an exercise in extreme textual minimalism, insisting that Confucius "did not add a word to the books of *History*, *Odes*, *Rites*, and *Music*…. Thus what he did was to reduce but not to add" 書詩禮樂中，孔子何嘗加一語？……是有簡無增.80

But Wang Yangming is perhaps a little too swept up in the flow of his own rhetorical posturing when he develops his moralizing emphasis on literary restraint into a justification for book burning, to the extent that he even compares Confucius to one of Chinese history's greatest villains:

> After the Chunqiu period superfluous writing became more abundant and the world became more chaotic. The First Emperor of Qin burned the books and has been condemned because he did so from a selfish motive, and he should not have burned the Six Classics. Had his intention been to illuminate the doctrine, and to burn all those

[78] "Teng wen gong xia" 滕文公下, *Mengzi* 孟子, 3B/9. Jin Shengtan's first preface is probably alluding to Mencius by repeatedly describing wayward speech as "reckless discourse" (*hengyi* 橫議).

[79] Wang Yangming describes Confucius' work in transmitting the *Changes* at some length. By contrast, in a brief sentence, Wang dismisses the idea that Confucius played any role in authoring the *Annals*, which Wang insists is "the original text of the history of [Confucius' native state of] Lu," Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu* 3:11; *Instructions for Practical Living*, trans. Chan, 18–19. Wang Yangming mention principle several times throughout his exchange with Xu Ai.

[80] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu* 3:11; *Instructions for Practical Living*, trans. Chan, 18–19.

> books opposed to the Classics and violating principle, it would have conformed, by implication, to Confucius' intention of editing and transmitting the Classics.
>
> 春秋以後，繁文益盛，天下益亂。始皇焚書得罪，是出於私意。又不合焚六經。若當時志在明道，其諸反經叛理之說，悉取而焚之，亦正暗合刪述之意。[81]

Wang Yangming further identifies his own moment as one when superfluous writings of the sort that he feels might inspire despotism abound:

> The reason the world is not in order is because superficial writing is growing and concrete practice is declining. People advance their own opinions, valuing what is novel and strange, in order to mislead the common folks and gain fame. They merely confuse people's intelligence and dull people's senses, so that people devote much of their time and energy to competing in conventional writing and flowery compositions in order to achieve fame; they no longer remember that there are such deeds as honoring the fundamental, valuing truth, and returning to simplicity and purity. All this trouble was started by those who wrote [extensively and superficially].
>
> 天下所以不治，只因文盛實衰。入出己見。新奇相高，以眩俗取譽。徒以亂天下之聰明，涂天下之耳目。使天下靡然爭務修飾文辭，以求知於世。而不復知有敦本尚實，反僕還淳之行。是皆著述者有以啟之。[82]

While Wang Yangming does not suggest that a wide-scale book burning should be undertaken in his own time, Jin Shengtan's first preface suggests that this kind of thinking might lead to such violent extremes. Little did Wang realize, his moral values were to make him a target for a later parody.

Jin seems to have perceived a certain absurdity in the idea that a Neo-Confucian philosopher had taken his valorization of principle to such an extreme that not even Confucius himself, despite historical statements to the contrary, could be acknowledged as having added words to doctrine. Jin's preface develops Wang Yangming's notion of literary restraint to put Confucius in something of a difficult position, one brought about—but not anticipated—by his

[81] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu* 3:11; *Instructions for Practical Living*, trans. Chan, 19.
[82] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi lu* 3:11, *Instructions for Practical Living*, trans. Chan, 18–19.

Ming-dynasty doctrinal heir. Inspired by Wang, Jin describes the ancient sage kings' extreme restraint in composing the classics:

> Possessed of sagely morality and kingly status, the sage kings thus bore their right; only bearing their right did they then compose the *Changes*, and afterward yet desire to compose the *Documents*, and yet desire to compose the *Poetry*, and yet desire to compose the *Rites*. In all cases, they obtained the opportunity to wield the brush and forthwith executed these works, such that if people had not obtained these works, the sage kings would have been condemned. If one does not possess the sage kings' status, then one does not bear their right; to be without this right yet be unable to avoid composing—this is Confucius.
>
> 有聖人之德而又在聖人之位，則有其權；有其權，而後作《易》，之後又欲作《書》，又欲作《詩》，又欲作《禮》，咸得奪筆而遂為之，而人不得而議其罪也。無聖人之位，則無其權；無其權而不免有作，此仲尼是也。[83]

Wang Yangming insists on a highly forced reading of Confucius' purported admission to having "written" (*zuo*) the *Annals*: "What is meant by Confucius' writing down is that he wrote down the original." Jin Shengtan, by contrast, upholds Mencius' assertion that Confucius had felt compelled to write. Unfortunately for Confucius, this means, at least by Wang Yangming's reasoning—which Jin exaggerates to spectacular effect, at once funny and dismal—that the Sage has a punishment coming. For, given the (manufactured) Neo-Confucian assertion that only those of sagely morality *and* status are at liberty to write, Confucius must be among those who should have his books burned—and worse! Jin relates, in emphatic parallelism:

> For this reason, composing works is the affair of sages. If one who is not a sage compose a work, it is permissible to execute them, it is permissible to burn their work. Composing works is the affair of sages and, moreover, of rulers. If one who is not a ruler composes a work, it is permissible to execute them, it is permissible to burn their work. Why is this? If one is not a sage yet composes a work, their work corrupts the teachings. If one is not a ruler yet composes a work, their work corrupts governance. Corrupting the teachings and governance, this is "reckless discourse." [In instances of] reckless discourse, how can one not [proceed with] burning? [In instances of] people whose discourse is reckless, how can one not proceed with execution?

[83] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:12.

> 是故作書，聖人之事也。非聖人而作書，其人可誅，其書可燒也。作書，聖人而天子之事也。非天子而作書，其人可誅，其書可燒也。何也？非聖人而作書，其書破道；非天子而作書，其書破治。破道與治，是橫議也。橫議，則烏得不燒？橫議之人，則烏得不誅？[84]

In fact, Jin's preface spares Confucius from execution. While Wang Yangming (as filtered through Jin's preface) would seem to give us reason to burn the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as a work of reckless discourse, Jin reasons that, although Confucius could not help but compose a work, this does not mean he intended to grant permission to do the same to future generations. And yet, Jin suggests, Confucius knew later people would construe his act of authorship as a precedent for their own reckless discourses. Jin uses this rationale to assign a novel intention to Confucius' legendary declaration that "those who condemn me will only do so because of the *Annals*!"[85] What Confucius is to be blamed for is not composing the *Annals*, but for opening the floodgates for the literary deluge that Wang Yangming insists Confucius wanted to put a stop to.

With no small degree of literary historical insight, Jin positions Confucius at the crux of two established hermeneutic traditions. The first is the Neo-Confucian tradition that takes writing as a vehicle for sagely morality and, in turn, a guide to good governance. The second is the tradition of writing out of personal indignation, the clearest early articulation of which is probably Sima Qian's personal postface to the *Historical Records* (discussed in chapter one). As we have already observed, Li Zhi develops the latter literary tradition into a more philosophically developed hermeneutics by associating it with his conception of the childlike mind, an individually oriented subversion of moral principle. By highlighting the absurdity of Confucius' position at the intersection of these two competing discourses, Jin suggests that the Neo-

[84] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:12–13.

[85] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:12. Jin discusses this statement at some length, possibly to underscore his novel take on the meaning of this line.

Confucian insistence on morality might be as much a part of the problem as "reckless discourse" itself. The Confucian gentleman is meant to be a paragon of restraint, but Wang Yangming suggests Confucius might have approved of the violent lengths to which the Qin Emperor went in eliminating unwanted works.

Jin Shengtan's preface explodes Wang Yangming's apparent moral hypocrisy. As the preface proceeds, Jin spends hundreds upon hundreds of words playing up the conflict between superfluous writing and violent suppression, parodically insisting that the Qin book burnings were, ironically, better for the transmission of the Six Classics nearly lost to those conflagrations than the subsequent Han dynasty's countermeasure of soliciting works that had not been destroyed.[86] In this extended section, Jin elaborates upon Wang Yangming's mention of those who "advance their own opinions, valuing what is novel and strange, in order to mislead the common folks and gain fame," describing in great detail how superfluous literary works eventually appeal even to those in governance, after which point everyone and their brother competes in appealing to their superiors with writing. Out of the literary deluge that ensues, however, a new theme glimmers briefly upon the page:

> Fathers and sons, younger and elder brothers, entire clans [took up] writing, and, as this carried on for some time, talented thought overflowed. Those who responded to the call for books of course had to beautify their words, so, naturally, how could [their writings] not have brought pleasure to everyone? [They] depicted demons in the wilderness and ridiculed the sages and worthies, [but their use of] brush and ink was intoxicating, [so] why would anyone resist it? For this reason, those who caused disorder among the people had to be punished, so [Sima Qian] composed the biography of "The Wandering Knights;" sordid merchants brought shame upon the people, so he wrote "The Profiteers." [Sima's] intention lay in exhausting the marvelous and achieving all variations, such that the emperor would be moved to tear at his breast and shed tears of blood. This is what's known as ascending to the Empyrean above and descending to the Yellow Springs below—if it hasn't gone all the way, [the author] is not happy; if he isn't happy, he doesn't stop.

[86] These passages of Jin's preface have been translated by Ding Naifei. See *Obscene Things*, 69–71.

> 父子兄弟，聚族撰者，經營既久，才思溢矣。夫應詔固須美言，自娛何所不可？刻畫魑魅，詆訕聖賢，筆墨既酣，胡可忍也？是故，亂民必誅，而「游俠」立傳；市儈辱人，而「貨殖」名篇。意在窮奇極變，皇惜刳心嘔血，所謂上薄蒼天，下徹黃泉，不盡不快，不快不止也。[87]

Jin Shengtan's grasp of the eight-legged essay's rhetorical conventions shows in the way he only hints at what will eventually become the main theme of his entire commentarial corpus: Genius, here in its more commonplace form as talent (*cai*). After this first brief mention of a writer of Genius, Jin returns to his discussion of the contest between orthodox morality and morally dangerous forms of writing, with frequent declarations that book burning and execution are necessary to address literary excess. But here, in this brief parting of the flames, Jin suggests that morally efficacious writing need not necessarily come from the hand of a sage or ruler. Jin's emphasis on the emotional force of the historian's writing, such that "the emperor would be moved to tear at his breast and shed tears of blood," recalls Zhu Xi's wary praise for Qu Yuan. Zhu describes the martyred poet as having written "from such profound sentiments of concern and worry that he could not restrain himself." Zhu asserts that Qu Yuan's literary outpourings of feeling are too extreme to serve as moral standards but might inspire the disadvantaged "to sing their laments below so that he who is Heaven to them [such as the ruler] will fortunately listen to them," in a way that promotes moral and social order.[88] This implicit parallel is corroborated by the fact that Jin also deems Qu Yuan an author of Genius. By suggesting this comparison, Jin, like Zhang Nai before him, may have perceived in Zhu Xi's hesitant approbation an opportunity to propose a basis for literary authority aside from moral orthodoxy.

[87] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:13.

[88] "Chuci ji zhu xu" 楚辭集註序, in *Hui'an Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵朱文公文集 (*The Collected Works of Master Hui'an Zhu Wengong*) [*Sibu congkan* edition] 76: 33b. Also cited in Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist," 346–347.

There is something unusual about how Jin describes the emotional and moral efficacy of Sima Qian's writing in the above passage. In his "Personal Postface" to the *Historical Records*, Sima Qian presents his historical work as arising out of personal indignation, but Jin Shengtan's description completely omits the personal trauma that motivated the historian's work. Jin does not, however, deny Sima Qian's personal motives, which he acknowledges elsewhere in his writings. As I will propose, this initial characterization of Sima Qian's talent hints at Genius's remove from authorial intention. Before we proceed to examine Jin Shengtan's discussion of Genius later in his first preface to *Water Margin*, let us follow his commentarial apparatus to better understand intention's place in his hermeneutics. Where Jin chooses to position intention in the literary work is, I argue, a key to his conception of writing as a medium of karma.

Surfacing Intent

Jin's elevation of Sima Qian alongside Qu Yuan, *Water Margin*, and *Romance of the Western Chamber* risks giving the reader the impression that authorial Genius is merely a development of a tradition that Li Zhi had already established as an alternative to the Confucian Classics—an impression that many literary historians have indeed taken away from his project. As is widely known, and as this dissertation has already discussed, Jin's second preface denounces Li Zhi's reading of *Water Margin* as a work of indignation—clearly the sort of "reckless discourse" that Jin's caricature of Wang Yangming would have burned. But Jin himself would not do away with this novel, nor with Sima Qian's histories. Instead, Jin aims to reorient his reader's perspective on these works and on the role intention plays in their production.

While Jin frequently discusses authorial intention, his writings suggest that the content of a writer's intent has little bearing on that writer's status as a Genius. This is not to say that

identifying intention is unimportant. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jin's third preface to *Water Margin* distinguishes between Zhuangzi's and Sima Qian's intentions (*zhi*), specifying that Zhuangzi wanted to express the way of the sages (*yan shengren zhi dao* 言聖人之道) and Sima Qian, to contemplate his resentment (*lü qi yuanfen* 攄其怨憤). Jin Shengtan's second preface, moreover, is entirely devoted to clarifying authorial intention. Here he denounces Li Zhi's reading of the work as an expression of "loyal and righteous" indignation and insists that the author wrote out of moral concern (*you* 憂)—not to exhort people to outlawry, but to prohibit them from immoral conduct. Evidently, writers of Genius write for all sorts of reasons. But if intention is not the source of a writer's authority, why does Jin Shengtan's second preface go to such lengths to debate the intention underlying *Water Margin*?

Drawing on what we have previously gleaned from Jin Shengtan's discussion of Zhuangzi and Sima Qian, I suggest that we might find an answer to this question in Jin's literary adaptation of the three truths. Jin presents the authorial Genius as a bodhisattva, someone with a perfect grasp of absolute reality (i.e., emptiness). But in order to do what bodhisattvas do—deliver other sentient beings—the Genius author has to negotiate emptiness as provisional reality, that is, reality as an infinite array of diverse forms, words, images, for this is all unenlightened beings can understand. This suggests that every Genius author has two aspects: on one hand, the author as Genius perceives themself as empty, equal with all other phenomena; on the other hand, the author as Genius also perceives themself as provisionally existent, as a unique, historically embedded person with personal feelings and attributes. A bodhisattva would deploy this provisionally existent identity to liberate other beings from samsara according to those individual beings' particular interests and capacities. This provides a possible explanation for the fact that Jin accepts Sima Qian's indignation but denies the same attribution to the author

of *Water Margin*. Perhaps he sees no harm in reading the *Historical Records* as a work of indignation but identifies a moral risk in reading *Water Margin* as the same. As in the case of repentance, this moral risk is only provisionally existent, but how one engages with provisional reality might have karmic consequences.

For this reason, Jin would have his readers develop their provisional understandings of the text with care. As he states at the outset of his second preface, "Those who examine phenomena take care with the names [for things]; those who discuss people discern intention" 觀物者審名，論人者辨志.[89] Indeed, Jin seems very concerned about what might ensue if a reader personally identified with *Water Margin*'s characters as expressions of a "loyal and righteous" sentiment: "those who already regard themselves as thieves will read this work and take pride in themselves; those who do not yet regard themselves as thieves will read this work and become thieves" 已為盜者讀之而自豪，未為盜者讀之而為盜也.[90] Jin's second preface in this manner addresses readers who can only understand the novel from a provisional standpoint. With respect to Mahāyāna thought, this is precisely how Li Zhi's hermeneutics, based in a valorization of individual mind, would be regarded. Only after correcting readers' provisional perspectives in the second preface, insisting that they are neither loyal nor righteous, does Jin Shengtan proceed to consider the author from the standpoint of emptiness in the third preface, allowing for the idea that *all* phenomena—including thieves—are loyal to their dependently arisen natures. This alternate viewpoint reorients the reader's perspective on the author, as well—no longer to be

[89] "Xu er" 序二, in *Diwu caizi shu*, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:17. This accounts for how Jin Shengtan can describe himself as an "understanding listener" (*zhiyin* 知音)—a reader with a perfect comprehension of the author's intention, while maintaining his Mahāyāna approach to to literary hermeneutics. For a discussion of Jin's self-presentation as an understanding listener, see Martin Huang, "Author(ity) and Reader," 54. Huang notes that Jin compares himself to the consummate understanding listener, Zhong Ziqi, in his commentaries on chapters 16 and 21 of *Water Margin*.

[90] "Xu er," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:18.

naively regarded as a historical individual with a specific intention, but perceived as a Genius, an impersonal author. This, I suggest, is the vision of Sima Qian of which we just catch a glimpse in Jin's first preface.

In addition to reworking the particular content of the author's intention, Jin Shengtan's second preface also reworks authorial intention's perceived place in writing. Reading for authorial intention often suggests an effort to recover a literary work's origin in a historical author's lived experience. This sense of origin is suggested by the verb in the Mencian dictum to "use one's understanding to trace [as fording upstream] intent" 以意逆志. But if one regards both the author and the literary work as phenomena born of causes and conditions, and therefore dependently co-arisen, then one does not precede the other—there is no originary intent to "trace"—instead, both exist as apparitions on the surface of reality (which, according to threefold truth, is only surface). For the reader who is accustomed to thinking of intention as something that underlies the literary work, Jin's discussion of authorial intention gets a little strange as he proceeds:

> Names are the external expressions of phenomena; intention is the external expression of a person. If the name is unclear, I take this as reason to suspect the work; if the intention is not upright, I take this as reason to suspect the person. The reason I have excised "loyal and righteous" and retained "water margin," is in order to retain the trivial matter of Nai'an's writing, is in order to retain the great matter of Nai'an's intention.
>
> 名者，物之表也；志者，人之表也。名之不辨，吾以疑其書也；志之不端，吾以疑其人也。削「忠義」而仍「水滸」者，所以存耐庵之書其事小，所以存耐庵之志其事大。[91]

While this brief passage of discourse does not quite realize a hermeneutic revolution, it does present a remarkable inversion. Jin describes intention as external, the surface expression of the person. By easing intention up to the literary surface, Jin seems to remove it from its usual place

[91] "Xu er," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:18.

in the heart of the person who writes and position it instead on the same level as writing itself (as his parallel structure above suggests).

Later in his commentary on *Water Margin*, Jin Shengtan continues to develop this understanding of intention as surface. As this idea develops, Jin's discussions suggest an intimate correlation between fiction's most literary values and its capacity to impart a comprehensive understanding of phenomena—in a manner I suggest we read as simultaneously "literary" and "philosophical." In his prefatory comment to chapter 28, Jin discusses *The New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書), a revision of the official Tang dynasty (618–690 and 705–907) historical records overseen by the two famous Song-dynasty officials and literary luminaries Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061) and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007–1072).[92] Because Song Qi favored a different style of prose than that employed in the original Tang histories, he made numerous emendations to the Tang documents, much to later scholars' dismay.[93] As David Rolston has observed, Jin Shengtan was no exception, for "Song Qi was popularly identified with a type of historiography that ignores all literary values except brevity, and Jin Shengtan used this conception of Song Qi's style as a contrast to *Shuihu Zhuan*."[94] Jin draws a line between historical material and the writing through which it is conveyed, a contrast that parallels the distinction he draws in his reading guidelines between events as mere content to take note of (*shiji*) and events as literary forms (*fa*), subtle variations among literary phenomena (such as *Water Margin*'s various tiger fights) whose interrelations merit closer examination. In accord

[92] Song Qi was originally in charge of this project, whereas Ouyang Xiu joined much later. For a detailed account, see Chia-fu Sung, "An Ambivalent Historian: Ouyang Xiu and his *New Histories*," *T'oung Pao* 102, no. 4–5 (2016): 358–406, especially pages 388–402.

[93] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi favored a style of prose akin to that of Han Yu, whereas the original Tang histories were written in a more ornate court style. Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 737.

[94] Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 136.

with traditional understandings of dynastic history, Jin presents the former as the province of rulers (*junxiang* 君相). He insists that the latter, by contrast, is the prerogative (*quan* 權) of the "literary person" (*wenren* 文人), who "does not merely narrate events, but necessarily takes their mind as warp, their hand as weft, contemplates variations, then engages in composition to produce exceptionally marvelous writing" 不止敍事而已，必且心以為經，手以為緯，躊躇變化，務撰而成絕世奇文焉.[95] For Jin Shengtan, the fiction writer's capacity to think through variations is intrinsic to their ability to conjure a compelling reality:

> The noblemen of ancient times received the command to wield the brush and record events on behalf of an era, yet were still able to set forth the exquisite brocade of their minds and from this accomplish a work of incomparably wonderful writing. How could there be a master of fiction—with no events to record, yet wanting to accomplish an incomparably wonderful work of writing for his own amusement, and [regarding it as] necessary that [the character] Zhang is definitely Zhang and Li is definitely Li—who is devoid of the intention carry this out arduously from every angle? If one reads fiction, then what needs is there to yet read Song Zijing's [Song Qi's] *New History of Tang*?
>
> 古之君子，受命載筆，為一代紀事，而猶能出其珠玉錦繡之心，自成一篇絕世奇文。豈有稗官之家，無事可紀，不過欲成絕世奇文以自娛樂，而必張定是張，李定是李，毫無縱橫曲直，經營慘淡之志者哉？則讀稗官，其又何不讀宋子京《新唐書》也！[96]

Whereas the sage kings of Jin's first preface composed on the authority of their morality, here Jin reinforces the point (also made in his first preface) that the Genius's authority rests on their fine manipulation of literary material, which Jin describes as an ornate coextension (rather than expression) of the authorial mind.

Jin's discussion of writing works to shift the reader's focus from literary content to literary content as a variation on literary form, exactly the shift of emphasis Guo Chaoshun identifies in Zhiyi's literary hermeneutics. To recall a discussion from the previous chapter, Guo

[95] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:529.
[96] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:530.

explains that, according to Tiantai hermeneutics, any object of perception might serve as a sutra, as a vehicle of truth, so long as one understands "sutra" not as an object that represents truth by means of its content, but as an object that embodies truth by means of mutual entailment, a revelation of dependent co-arising by virtue of its "genuine basic substance" (i.e., its emptiness of own-being). I previously proposed that Jin uses this hermeneutic emphasis on literary phenomena as mutually entailing, dependently co-arisen forms to transform morally problematic content (such as outlawry) into a demonstration of Buddhist truth and, in turn, a basis for ethical conduct. In his prefatory comments to chapter 28, Jin uses just this strategy to transform material that might otherwise be regarded as politically dangerous, "reckless discourse." Here we again catch a glimpse of Sima Qian as a Genius rather than a writer clinging to his personal enmity. In the case of Sima's biography of the ancient political martyr Bo Yi 伯夷, which is ripe for an allegorical reading as an expression of authorial resentment, Jin proposes an alternate reading: "Take [Si]ma Qian's biography of Bo Yi: his topic is Bo Yi; but his intention is not necessarily Bo Yi" 馬遷之傳伯夷也，其事伯夷也，其志不必伯夷也.[97] Jin applies the same rationale to Sima Qian's other politically provocative writings, all the way up to the Royal Annals of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武本紀, of whom Sima Qian was notably critical. At the end of this reflection, Jin asserts that the reader should not approach literary content as an allegory for authorial intent, for, "Where, then, is the intention? In the writing—and nowhere else" 惡乎志？文是已.[98]

In the second half of his prefatory comments to chapter 28, Jin Shengtan offers a detailed demonstration of how one to read writing as an intention to examine literary phenomena from

[97] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:529.
[98] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:529.

every angle.[99] This extended rumination on writing illustrates how a Genius "takes their mind as warp, their hand as weft, contemplates variations, then engages in composition." While Jin could ostensibly have selected any passage from the novel for such a demonstration, his choice to use this one effectively redirects the reader's attention to a scene ripe for allegorical reading. The chapter features a fight between the tiger-fighting hero Wu Song and Jiang the Door God, so called for his tremendous size. Jiang is an instrument of official corruption, whose machinations eventually drive Wu Song onto the margins of society and into a life of brigandage. After having explained at length that a writer's intention is but to contemplate literary phenomena's variations, Jin shows his reader how to do the same with the literary material before them. He begins by distinguishing between the event (which, to continue a line of thought from his second preface, we should regard as trivial) and the writing (equivalent to intention, which we should regard as significant):

> In the case of this passage, Wu Song fights Jiang the Door God on behalf of Shi En—this is its event; Wu Song drinks wine—this is its writing. Fighting Jiang the Door God is its material; drinking wine is the brilliant brocade of the author's mind.
>
> 如此篇，武松為施恩打蔣門神，其事也；武松飲酒，其文也。打蔣門神，其料也；飲酒，其珠玉錦繡之心也。[100]

From here Jin proceeds with a meticulous account of twelve aspects of Wu Song's drinking, each of which Jin Shengtan praises as "the first in a thousand ages," to cite just a few of these aspects:

> Therefore, the drinking features a drinker: the brave who fought a tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and he is the premier drinker of a thousand ages! The drinking features a drinking spot: a field fourteen or fifteen miles from the east gate of Mengzhou toward Kuaihuo Forest, and this is the premier drinking spot of a thousand ages! The drinking features the moment of drinking: when the sweltering heat of summer abruptly dissipates and the

[99] In his guidelines for reading *Romance of the Western Chamber*, Jin Shengtan provides a comparable discussion of Genius as a lion playing with a ball. See items fifteen through seventeen in "Du Diliu caizi shu *Xixiang ji fa*," in *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji*, *juan* 2, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:854. For a translation and discussion of these passages from *Romance of the Western Chamber*, see Sally Church, "Beyond the Words," 13–15.

[100] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:530.

> autumn wind starts rustling, and one loosens one's jacket to face the breeze—this is the premier moment of drinking in a thousand ages!
>
> 故酒有酒人，景陽岡上打虎好漢，其千載第一酒人也；酒有酒場，出孟州東門，到快活林十四五里田地，其千載第一酒場也；酒有酒時，炎暑乍消，金風颯起，解開衣襟，微風相吹，其千載第一酒時也……[101]

Jin continues to describe nine more literary forms in somatically evocative language, much of it drawn from the text, that recalls his and Zhuoshan's thirty-three moments of happiness. But each of these forms—the drinker, the place, the time—arises out of just one form: the drinking. In this respect, Jin's examination of this literary phenomenon and the manifold other phenomena that dependently arise alongside it offers a literary parallel to Zhiyi's discussion of the single inky black character, whereby a single horizontal stroke entails manifold other forms. By contemplating these manifold variations in relation to one another, the reader might approach the Genius's grasp of mutual entailment.

As in the case of Zhiyi's discussion of the inky black word, the reader is invited not only to think through the manifold diverse forms that one form entails, but also to consider how all of these dependently co-arisen variations are equal: to quote Zhiyi, "No single dharma exceeds this ink." At the end of his somatically detailed account of the drinking's manifold associated forms, Jin also reminds his readers what these many forms are:

> All of these things [the drinker, the place of drinking, the time of drinking, etc.], all of them are this passage's writing, not this passage's events. If you take them as nothing but an events, then [his associate and fellow outlaw] Shi En could simply have taken Wu Song to fight Jiang the Door God, and on his way Wu Song could have drunk thirty-five or thirty-six bowls of wine, [in a manner that] merely emulates Song Qi's example [from the *New History of Tang*]: a great work could be written in one line, and this would be sufficient. Why would Nai'an yet trouble himself to compose this passage?
> 凡若此者，是皆此篇之文也，並非此篇之事也。如以事而已矣，則施恩領卻武松去打蔣門神，一路吃了三十五六碗酒，只依宋子京例，大書一行足矣，何為乎又煩耐庵撰此一篇也哉？[102]

[101] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:530.
[102] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:531.

The difference here is a matter not so much of content as one of perspective: to look upon a literary form as writing, rather than event, is to see it from all angles in relation to other forms. This is also to see these forms as writing, and as intention—as arising out of the Genius author's ink, hand, brush, and mind. Jin Shengtan's in-text commentary intermittently assists the reader maintaining this perspective on literary forms. In chapter 28, Jin's brush-and-ink-oriented comments begin well after the beginning of the chapter, but just after the extended drinking scene begins, when Wu Song and his companion Shi En leave Mengzhou through the aforementioned east gate. When they catch sight of the first wine shop on their way, Jin writes, "Stroke after stroke [of the brush] wants to dance [upon the page], word after word is able to fly" 筆筆欲舞，字字能飛.[103] When Wu Song rises from his seat after downing his first three large bowls of wine, "It flutters down [upon the page]" 飛舞而下.[104] When the text mentions the season, "a fine stroke [of the brush]" 好筆.[105] When the pair catch sight of a banner for another wine shop on their route, "He writes out another 'catch sight of', the brush tip has grown too weary to switch [words]" 另寫出一個望字，筆尖疲于變換矣.[106] When the text describes the shop attendants who clear the table after the two men drink their second round [of three bowls], "It flutters down [upon the page], the brush tip cannot bear to rest even for a moment 飛舞而下，筆尖不得少定.[107] When Wu Song insists Shi En order him more wine before departing, "Truly a brush dripping with ink, one sighs wishing the drunken poet Liu Ling (221–300) could

[103] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:536.
[104] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:536.
[105] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:537.
[106] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:537.
[107] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:537.

read it" 真是筆墨淋漓，有恨不起劉伶讀之之歎.[108] When Wu Song drinks yet more wine on his way to Kuaihuo Forest, "The brush moves with ease and the ink follows, [the author] truly bears no resentment for fine detail" 筆暢墨遂，真無纖毫之憾.[109] What is remarkable about Jin Shengtan's comments on brush and ink, which appear regularly throughout this novel, is how diverse they are, not only reminding the reader that the forms on the page are conjured by someone's hand, but also attending to the diversity of those forms. In this way, even with his most minute comments on the authorial gestures that bring the novel's contents to life, Jin maintains a view of literary phenomena as at once provisionally existent in all their vivid diversity and all equal, none of them surpassing this writing.

Revitalizing Form

Throughout Jin Shengtan's commentaries, Genius engages diligently with literary forms in a way that seems to have miraculous or metaphysical implications. In this way, Genius presents a direct opposition to earlier critics' philosophies of literature, specifically the "expressionist" theories of Li Zhi and Zhang Nai. As we saw in chapter one, Li Zhi fiercely dismisses literary form while discussing *Romance of the Western Chamber*, asserting that "a sage whose voice genuinely responds and whose *qi* immediately attracts others is not to be found among those scholars who count their lines and weigh out their ink; and writing that moves like wind over water is certainly not to be discerned in the marvel of a word or phrase."[110] A couple decades later, Zhang Nai and his associates published an anthology of classical prose firmly poised against "those scholars

[108] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:537. Liu Ling was one of the famous "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" whose most famous work is the poem "In Praise of the Virtue of Wine" 酒德頌.

[109] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 33, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:537.

[110] Li Zhi, "Za Shuo" 雜說 ("On Miscellaneous Matters") *Fenshu*, 96; *Fenshu zhu*, 272; translation adapted from Pauline C. Lee, trans., "On Miscellaneous Matters," in *A Book to Burn*, 103.

who count their lines and weight their ink," denigrating talent for its association with cynical self-promotion and "deliberately ornate writings of trifling skill, [those which] obtain transient success, even if they are made known for a thousand years, these are but excesses of carefully plotted writing!" These vehement dismissals of literary forms drew on the precedent of Wang Yangming's turn from outward phenomena to the inborn mind. What the expressionist critics turned to, however, was not the transpersonal moral mind of Neo-Confucian philosophy, but a relatively individualized subjectivity more amenable to emotional extremes such as those for which Qu Yuan's poetry was known and revered. The latter part of Jin Shengtan's first preface to *Water Margin* departs from both the moralist and individualist extremes associated with these hermeneutic traditions, without yet doing away with either morality or individual expression. Jin accomplishes this by revitalizing form, granting it the power to embody individual subjectivity in full force, and to impart an embodied consciousness of manifold individual subjectivities in a way that, according to Buddhist thought, should preclude selfish conduct and offer a strong basis for moral governance.

To return to the first preface, as soon as Jin Shengtan has brought his wildly emphatic insistence on the necessity of book burning to a climax, his tone suddenly softens with a sigh—What is the Confucian gentleman to do? Here, the theme of talent (still not yet theorized as Genius) reappears as an alternative, and Jin introduces his *Six Works of Genius* as an alternative to the *Six Classics*, though it is not yet clear how this alternative will serve its readers. Jin begins to explain by describing talent in remarkably fresh terms—not in relation to personal expression, as Neo-Confucian critics had long understood, nor as a superficial engagement with form, as expressionist critics had made it out to be, but as a seemingly metaphysical capacity. He initiates this conceptual overhaul with a pair of etymological associations. In the first case, talent figures

as a means of getting to the very bottom of things in a manner that seems to have great implications:

The word *cai* [talent] is interchangeable with the word *cai* [also talent, written with the character component for tree]. Ability of the sort that can soar into the clouds and block the sun originates in the moment when a plant's roots are cleft and the seed pod split open—this contains the force of the sort that soars to the clouds and blocks the sun. As for the moment when it soars to the clouds and blocks out the sun, this is no different from the force that cleaves the plant's roots and splits open the seed pod—this is what people refer to when they speak of "talent" [with the tree component].

才之為言，材也。凌雲蔽日之姿，其初本于破荄分莢之時，具有凌雲蔽日之勢；于凌雲蔽日之時，不出破荄分莢之勢，此所謂「材」之說也。[111]

Jin's description here is probably deliberately mysterious, aimed at granting just a sense of Genius to those who aren't yet ready for the whole picture. The imagery of seeds and roots is suggestive of Buddhist ideas about karmic potential but is not presented in Buddhist terms. Ultimately, this image of creative force could pertain to any system of thought—or no system at all. Jin's second etymological association presents relatively concrete imagery that more readily serves as a metaphor for literary craft:

> The word *cai* 才 [genius] is also interchangeable with the word *cai* 裁 [used to refer to cutting out cloth for garments]. One has the entire piece of brocade in one's hand, but not in sight; one doesn't have the entire piece of brocade in sight but has it in mind. [Likewise,] the entire garment is not in sight, but it is in mind. This means that upon seeing the collar, one knows what the sleeve looks like; seeing the front of the garment, one knows what the back looks like. Now, the collar is not the sleeve, and the front is not the back, yet left and right meet one another, and front and back correspond. Apart and different from one another, yet resembling and completing one another, this is what people refer to when they speak of *cai* [cutting cloth for a garment].
>
> 又才之為言，裁也。有全錦在手，無全錦在目；無全衣在目，有全衣在心。見其領，知其袖；見其襟，知其帔也。夫領則非袖，而襟則非帔，然左右相就，前後相合，離然各異，而宛然共成者，此所謂「裁」之說也。[112]

[111] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:15.
[112] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:15–16.

Here Jin seems to describe the art of fitting together the pieces of a work before all the pieces are in sight, suggesting an expert grasp of structural or formal correspondence. As evocative as these descriptions are, they still evade a forthright definition of Genius. Instead, Jin begins with a commonplace term—albeit one with a problematic place in literary history—and very gradually develops a sense of how he conceives it. Jin's indirect approach accords with the gradual conceptual development of his three prefaces: first, a fiercely satirical appeal to those who value orthodox morality to the point of potentially violent excess; then, a firm correction for those who valorize personal expression to the point of condoning violent conduct; and only then a clearer, openly Buddhist description of Genius. This gives Jin's prefaces an upāyic thrust, as he attempts to persuade readers in terms with which they are familiar before thrusting an entirely alternate philosophy of literature upon them.

The conceptual apparatus that winds throughout Jin Shengtan's paratextual material anchors some of these upāyic discussions to Jin's explicit application of Buddhist thought. At the climax of Jin Shengtan's third preface, where Jin presents a coherent—even iconic—image of Genius, talent's second etymological association reappears. Here, as discussed in chapter one, Jin Shengtan has already redefined the Confucian ideal of "loyalty" or "fidelity" (*zhong*) as the Buddhist truth that causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena (*yinyuan sheng fa*) and "reciprocity" (*shu*) as a comprehension of this truth, which allows for a perception of all things (including thieves, dogs, bells, and fire) as bearing fidelity. These redefinitions give way to a revelation of the Genius as a bodhisattva, though Jin will not explicitly define the Genius as such until chapter 55:

> Fidelity and reciprocity are the measuring bowl that weighs out myriad phenomena; [the understanding that] causes and conditions give rise to all existent phenomena is the blade that cuts through (*cai*) the world. Shi Nai'an in his left hand holds such a measuring bowl and in his right grasps such a blade, and only then does he relate the characters,

> demeanors, postures, and voices of 108 people—this is yet a small test of his skill. As for his writing, it bears methods of wording, methods of phrasing, methods of sectioning, and the method of the work as a whole—yet what difference is there [between the two]?
>
> 忠恕，量萬物之斗斛也；因緣生法，裁世界之刀尺也。施耐庵左手握如是斗斛，右手持如是刀尺，而僅乃敘一百八人之性格、氣質、形狀、聲口者，是猶小試其端也。若其文章，字有字法，句有句法，章有章法，部有部法，又何異哉？[113]

Genius now appears head-on as a figure who, like so many bodhisattva icons, holds emblems of enlightenment, which in this case are also the tools of literary craft. By understanding that causes and conditions give rise to all phenomena, the Genius is able to conjure singular, lively forms that are at once real people and nothing apart from writing, compelling formal variations on the "brilliant brocade of the mind" (*zhuyu jinxiu zhi xin*). Upon this revelation, Jin's earlier discussion of *cai* in terms of cutting fabric suggests a mode of synecdochic discernment: perceiving all phenomena as equal in their dependent co-arising enables a consummate form of "reciprocity" through mutual entailment (*huju*). Looking upon one fragment of the garment, one readily perceives the rest (even without having seen it firsthand) and perceives every piece as a coextensive whole. This perception of reality as a coextensive brocade is one mind—a term that appears immediately before this passage in the third preface in relation to the author's infinite capacity to conjure living forms. Importantly, however, this "mind" is not proper to the author as an individual. One mind describes the author's comprehension in the instant that the author is no longer themself, in the conventional sense, but, in a state of perfect reciprocity, but all of phenomena aware of itself as dependently co-arisen. Genius's association with causes and conditions in this manner dissolves talent's associations with selfishness. By interweaving Buddhist and literary thought, Jin invests literary form with new potential.

[113] "Xu san," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:20.

Jin's first preface underscores the point that this is not literary form as his contemporaries have understood it. For Li Zhi and Zhang Nai, a writer's capacity to manipulate words on the page has no bearing on a work's real aesthetic and moral value. Jin Shengtan redefines talent as Genius by distinguishing it from such superficial forms of manipulation:

> Today's people only understand that one has to be talented before one can conceive of a composition, yet don't understand that when the ancients employed talent, it wound around the spaces after their artistic conception; [today's people] only understand that one has to be talented before one can formulate a scheme, yet don't understand that when the ancients employed talent, it wound around the spaces after they formulated the scheme… [and so on]. When it comes to those who say one must be talented before one can conceive of a composition, formulate a scheme, deliberate over phrases, and arrange words, in addition to never having arduously carried anything out,[114] such people easily set the brush [to paper] and take themselves to be in the right. Yet they do not realize that what they take for talent is truly not what the ancients took for talent. This is precisely a matter of having no methods (*fa*) in hand and no shame in one's heart.
>
> 今天下之人，徒知有才者始能構思，而不知古人用才乃繞乎構思以後；徒知有才者始能立局，而不知古人用才乃繞乎立局以後……言有才始能構思、立局、琢句、而安字者，此其人，外未嘗經營于慘淡，隤然放筆，自以為是。而不知彼之所為才，實非古人之所為才，正是無法于手而又無恥于心之事也。[115]

We might read this as a polemic against Li Zhi, who spoke vociferously in favor of "writings that immediately flow from the childlike heart-mind."[116] Li Zhi associated excess attention to form with the emulation of ancient models and hypocritical displays of hypocrisy. This is the sort of activity that Zhang Nai describes in terms of "talent." According to this reasoning, only a "talented"—and, by extension, cynically self-promoting—individual will obsess over the formal aspects of their writing, often for the sake of affecting a classical Confucian moral superiority. Jin, by contrast suggests that talent comes into play not *before* writing, but *after*. Accordingly, talent (now rapidly undergoing theorization into Jin's concept of Genius) is not proper to the

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[114] Note that here Jin Shengtan uses the same phrase that appears in his prefatory comments to chapter 28, "to carry out with arduous effort" (*jingying candan* 經營慘淡), establishing an association between these two physically removed passages by means of his commentarial apparatus.

[115] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:16.

[116] Li Zhi, "Explanation of the Childlike Heart-Mind," trans. Haun Saussy, in *A Book to Burn*, 109.

individual writer, but something that develops specifically out of the writer's concerted, arduous engagement with literary form. And this engagement involves something more than thinking about how to place words on paper.

What more is involved corresponds to the Jin Shengtan's emphasis on variation in writing. The next passage of his first preface offers a preliminary theorization of the arduous engagement with form that Jin Shengtan describes in his prefatory comments to chapter 28, a dedication to consider one's subject from all angles:

> The reason I say their talent winds around the spaces before and after their artistic conception, and even winds around the spaces before and after their planning its parts, determining its phrasing, and arranging its words, is that this sort of person is one whose brush has a right and left side; their ink, a front and back. If they're dissatisfied with what comes from the left side of their brush, they'll switch to the right, and vice versa; if the idea doesn't come out using the front of the ink, they'll switch it out for the back, and vice versa.
>
> 言其才繞乎構思以前、以後，乃至繞乎布局、琢句、安字以前、以後者，此其人，筆有左右，墨有正反；用左筆不安換右筆，用右筆不安換左筆；用正墨不現換反墨；用反墨不現換正墨。[117]

To return again to the passage from Zhiyi's *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* that is likely to have inspired this inky component of Jin Shengtan's commentary, "On the basis of a black inkspot that ever so slightly twists and turns, marking amounts to vast distinctions."[118] By resolving themselves to proceed through these transmutations, the Genius "extends their knowledge" (*zhizhi* 致知) through the causal relations among phenomena, and in this manner manages to depict phenomena as "real." Stepping back from Buddhist discourse, with respect to literary aesthetics, this minutely detailed approach to examining literary phenomena also results in a sort of "realism" by providing somatic and affective detail, such as the autumn breeze that

[117] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:16.
[118] Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, *juan* 8, T 33.1716.777.

accompanies Wu Song's and Shi En's drinking. For Jin Shengtan, *Water Margin*'s descriptive detail sets it apart from Song Qi's stylistic streamlining of the *New Histories of Tang* with respect to both the vernacular text's aesthetic appeal and its capacity to exhibit reality—philosophically construed. In this sense, Jin Shengtan discovered a uniquely Chinese form of literary realism—one based in a Chinese Buddhist definition of the real, and aesthetically elaborated in Chinese vernacular fiction—some centuries before a philosophically informed conception of literary realism took hold in western criticism.

The same quality of descriptive detail that inspired Jin Shengtan to identify a Buddhist realism in vernacular literature once motivated Patrick Hanan to identify something akin to "formal realism" in the Chinese vernacular story.[119] Hanan derived his theoretical terms from Ian Watt's then-recent *Rise of the Novel*, in which Watt associates the rise of the novel with the roughly contemporaneous rise of philosophical individualism. Watt posits that "Modern realism [as exemplified by the modern European novel, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses: it has its origins in Descartes and Locke, and received its first full formulation by [Scottish philosopher] Thomas Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century."[120] Jin Shengtan's Genius offers an alternative philosophical platform, based in an alternate conception of subjectivity, for realism in Chinese vernacular fiction. In Jin's theorization, literary particularity develops not from the standpoint of a singular, isolated individual perspective that ascertains and then represents reality in writing, but from the practice of extending knowledge by examining literary forms as dependently co-arisen phenomena—the process of thinking through causes and conditions in the act of writing. Jin's first preface

[119] Patrick Hanan, "The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 27 (1967): 168–207.

[120] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 12.

promises to show readers how to engage in this exercise so that they, too, might become Geniuses. To this end, he invites his readers to look beyond the writing on the page, offering another highly elusive description that seems to parallel Genius's synecdochic comprehension:

> Where the mind reaches, the hand also reaches; where the mind doesn't reach, the hand yet reaches; where the mind doesn't reach, nor does the hand reach. When the hand reaches where the mind reaches, this is realm of the sage. When the hand reaches where mind doesn't reach, this is the realm of the supernormal. When the hand does not reach where the mind does not reach, this is the realm of transformation. As for literary works that have achieved the state where neither the mind nor the hand reach, this is always a case of the author's page being devoid of words, of phrases, of parts, and of an overall conception. Yet have the people of countless ages read my text, and then in their minds, before their eyes, there will be some obscure sense of a conception, some quivering sense of a part, some flicker of a sentence, some flash of a word. When they pick up their brushes and face the paper, genius will wind around the spaces before and after them, nor will this be an occasional or transient state of affairs.
>
> 心之所至，手亦至焉；心之所不至，手亦至焉；心之所不至，手亦不至焉。心之所至手亦至焉者，文章之聖境也；心之所不至手亦至焉者，文章之神境也；心之所不至手亦不至焉者，文章之化境也。夫文章至于心手皆不至，則是其紙上無字、無句、無局、無思者也。而獨能令千萬世下人讀吾文者，其心頭眼底乃窅窅有思，乃搖搖有局，乃鏗鏗有句，而燁燁有字，則是提筆臨紙之時，才以繞其後，而非徒然卒然之事也。[121]

While it is difficult to pin down every referent in this mysterious account of writing's various realms, in the context of this first preface, the "realm of the sage" might pertain to the idea of writing as an expression of moral intention, perhaps (drawing on Jin's discourse in chapter 28 of *Water Margin*) a record of dynastic events as opposed to an examination of literary forms. The "realm of transformation," as Jin's main topic of concern, is ostensibly the realm of Genius, and it is here that Jin suggests he might impart to readers the sort of synecdochic comprehension that Genius attains, that ability to perceive the expansive brocade of the mind with but a fragment of the expanse in hand. This is, of course, an exercise in examining phenomena as dependently co-arisen, and is in this respect an exercise in perceiving reality on the basis of literary form.

[121] "Xu san," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:16.

It is likely that the somatic specificity of certain passages of Jin Shengtan's commentaries—including his account of the ventriloquy performance and his list of thirty-three happy moments—arises out of just such a contemplative exercise. One such instance of detailed commentary, a prefatory comment to book one, act two or *Romance of the Western Chamber*, seems to provide a direct demonstration of Jin's promise to make previously unwritten literary forms glimmer before the reader's eyes. An apparent continuation of the discussion of mind and brush that appears in Jin's first preface to *Water Margin*, Jin's prefatory comment on the dramatic act begins with another extended rumination on where the mind and brush reach. In this case, he describes the most advanced stage as that of a writer who "takes Heaven and Nature as their mind, Creation as their hand, yin and yang as their brush, and all worldly phenomena as their ink" 以鴻鈞為心，造化為手，陰陽為筆，萬象為墨者也.[122] Jin takes a line from the act at hand to demonstrate how such writing works. The act takes place the morning after Zhang has caught a brief glimpse of the beauty Yingying in the courtyard of the temple complex at which they have separately arrived. Immediately lovestruck, Zhang determines to take up residence at the temple in the hope of realizing a romantic assignation. As soon as Zhang comes onstage, he relates that he was up all night thinking about Yingying. The he bumps into the monk Facong, from whom he must request permission to stay, and immediately breaks into an aria, singing: "You're no help! How I resent you, Monk Facong!" 不做周方，埋怨殺你個法聰和尚.[123] In his prefatory comment, Jin praises this line:

> Just this first stroke of the brush, in two lines and thirteen words, reaches all the way down to the extreme root of Student Zhang's sleepless night, such that he comes to life.

[122] "Jie xiang" 借廂, in *Guanhua tang Diliu caizi shu*, *juan* 4, *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:904.

[123] "Jie xiang," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:907. Sally Church reads Jin Shengtan's preoccupation with these lines as evidence of his concern to maintain an image of Student Zhang as a morally upstanding young man. Church, "Beyond the Words," 27.

> This is what's called using the brush before writing. Typically only the *Zuo Tradition* accomplishes this [technique] to such a degree of subtlety (*miao*).
>
> 只此起頭一筆二句十三字，便將張生一夜無眠，盡根極底，生挼活現。所謂用筆在未用筆前，其妙則至于此，是惟《左傳》往往有之。[124]

Jin's prefatory comment elaborates on this line at length:

> What does this [characterization of a writer with seemingly metaphysical attributes] mean? As in the case of the previous evening, when Zhang Sheng caught a glimpse of a breathtaking beauty, and like the moon on the horizon, like a Buddha seated on a lotus, attempting to approach her, he certainly cannot get close; yet attempting to remove himself from her, he definitely cannot get away. Since he definitely cannot get away from her, he can only approach her, yet whence does the path of approach begin? Sleepless all night long, thinking all night long, Student Zhang is a peerless genius (*caizi*), and he suddenly comes up with a plan.
>
> 何也？如夜來張生之瞥見驚艷也，如天邊月，如佛上華，近之固不可得而近，而去之乃決不可得而去也。決不可得而去，則務必近之，而近之之道，其將從何而造端乎？通夜無眠，通夜思量，夫張生絕世之聰明才子，彼且忽然而得算矣。[125]

In the process of describing the psychological consequences of Zhang Sheng's initial encounter with the object of his desire, Jin describes a writer of Genius by detailing the mindset of *character* of Genius, one examining his situation from every conceivable angle.[126] Starting from the base text's thirteen words, Jin composes a detailed account of Student Zhang's nocturnal rambling, which suddenly slips into the form of an extended monologue that gathers the commentator's, implied author's, and character's subjectivities into one anxious writing body. Zhang (or the author? or Jin?) deliberates over how he should advance the plot according to the process of assembling a piece of furniture, specifically in terms of first fitting the mortise and

[124] "Jie xiang," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:905–910.
[125] "Jie xiang," *JSTQJ* (2008), 2:904–905.
[126] Church reads these lines as referring directly, and specifically, to the author's dilemma in dealing with Yingying. Her reading emphasizes the blurring of commentator and author in this section, but the blurring of both these literary practitioners with the character is equally important to the intersubjective mode of consciousness that Jin's commentaries aim to cultivate.

tenon (*dousun* 鬥筍), then joining the seams (*hefeng* 合縫).[127] What Jin composes here is surely an account of the karmic consequence of Zhang's first encounter with Yingying, but this consequence—nocturnal madness—seems to impact Jin and the author, as well. Thinking through causes and conditions is also a case of embodying another (dependently co-arisen) person's karma so fully that, when it comes time for the Genius to compose Student Zhang's first aria, they know exactly what he really says.

In a manner consistent with his frequent commentarial emphasis on liveliness (*huo* 活), Jin Shengtan describes this process as bringing Student Zhang to life (*huoxian* 活現). For Sally Church, who has examined this passage in detail, Jin Shengtan's commentary evinces something like "psychological realism":

> In this passage Jin's analysis of Zhang's psychological state is remarkably perceptive, as is his ability to represent so realistically Zhang's thoughts…. Jin captures the intrusion of the student's irrational, almost desperate thoughts into his planning, and Zhang's vacillation between rational and irrational thinking—behavior typical of someone in a heightened state of anxiety. Perhaps the most human touch is the gradual giving way of Zhang's positive and optimistic thoughts to a negative, impulsive conclusion: at first confident in his efforts, the scholar eventually talks himself into a sense of certainty he will fail.[128]

Like the mode of literary realism with which modern readers are more familiar, Jin's meticulous description of a character's psychological state is born out of a close, imaginative examination of the phenomenal world, but in this case one born of causes and conditions. This means that Jin Shengtan's author is not an individual Genius, at once apart from and observing the world, but

[127] Church translates this passage at length in "Beyond the Words," 24–25. While Andrew Plaks identifies furniture joinery as a common metaphor Chinese fiction commentators apply to plot analysis, Church points out that Jin's application of the metaphor, which distinguishes between fitting the joints and closing the seams as separate stages in narrative progression, is far more detailed than typical commentarial uses of this metaphor "Whereas these terms are commonly used [by literary commentators] to describe patching events together in a literary text, Jin uses them here in a portrayal of Zhang's thoughts as he 'writes his text,' or plans his future actions." See Church, "Jin Shengtan's Commentary on the *Xixiang ji* (*The Romance of the Western Chamber*)" (PhD diss., Harvard, 1993), 115.

[128] Church, "Beyond the Words," 27.

someone who, seeing all phenomena, including themself, as dependently co-arisen, is inextricable from the literary figures they conjure. In this respect, Jin Shengtan's literary realism arises from an intersubjective—as opposed to individual—consciousness.

There is some scholarly irony in the fact that this early modern instantiation of realist criticism developed out of a conception of literature as a medium of karma. Just a decade before Patrick Hanan insisted that evidence of formal realism could be found in Chinese fiction, John L. Bishop (also a scholarly denizen of Harvard) held the concept of karma partly responsible for precluding the development of realism in Chinese fiction, largely because (according to Bishop's casual understanding) karma reduced individual will to a mere sequence of cause and effect relations.[129] Karma—as both cause and effect (*yinguo*) and embodied speech, action, and thought (*kou*, *shen*, *yi*)—is more complex than Bishop imagined.

Exhausting the Self

Jin conceives a literary practice that attains the greatest heights of what we might call (in both conventional and Buddhist terms) realism at precisely the moment when the author is no longer an isolated subject. Near the end of his first preface to *Water Margin*, Jin Shengtan delineates this conception, but, again, in rather mysterious terms. What he underscores here is that undertaking the work of Genius is not easy:

> Therefore, according to what common people refer to as talent, when someone accomplishes writing with ease, then they're a talent; according to what people of the past referred to as talent, when someone accomplishes writing with difficulty, then they're a talent. On the basis of accomplishing writing with ease, a talent is always someone who swiftly wields their brush and maintains a complacent air; on the basis of accomplishing writing with difficulty, then a Genius must be someone whose mind has reached its utmost limit, their breath exhausted, their face resembling that of a corpse. Consequently, when it comes to Zhuang Zhou, Qu Ping, [Si]ma Qian, Du Fu, as well as

[129] John L. Bishop, "Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1956): 239–247.

> Shi Nai'an and Dong Jieyuan, each of these writers is what we refer to as a person whose mind has reached its utmost limit, their breath exhausted, their face resembling that of a corpse—only then does genius wind around the spaces before and after them, such that they are able to accomplish a work.
>
> 故依世人之所謂才，則是文成于易者，才子也；依古人之所謂才，則必文成于難者，才子也。依文成于易之說，則是迅疾揮掃，神氣揚揚者，才子也；依文成于難之說，則必心絕氣盡，面猶死人者，才子也。故若莊周、屈平、馬遷、杜甫、以及施耐庵、董解元之書，是皆所謂心絕氣盡，面猶死人，然後其才前後繚繞，得成一書也。[130]

While Jin Shengtan elsewhere distinguishes among the intentions of Zhuangzi, Sima Qian, and Shi Nai'an as provisionally existent, historical individuals, here he speaks of these authors as Geniuses, writers who have, by means of their writing, arduously ascertained causes and conditions and who consequently perceive themselves as such. This exercise could be understood as depleting in two complementary ways: on one hand, the mental labor involved in considering a subject from all angles depletes the writer of mental energy; on the other hand, thinking through manifold causes and conditions will gradually deplete the author of their personal subjectivity, which, in the process of extending of knowledge, gradually merges with the other phenomena they conceive as dependently co-arisen.

Jin Shengtan's commentarial apparatus links this pivotal moment in his first preface, when the author as Genius finally (if elusively) comes to the fore, to his prefatory comment to chapter 41 of *Water Margin*. The beginning of this chapter focuses on the adventures of the historically inspired character of Song Jiang 宋江, the eventual leader of the 108 outlaws and the character Jin Shengtan most loathes.[131] Jin Shengtan first mentions Song Jiang at the beginning of his second preface, where he identifies Song Jiang as the key figure in the novel, and the most

[130] "Xu yi," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:17.

[131] For a succinct overview of how *Water Margin* evolved out of historical accounts of Song Jiang's rebellion during the Song dynasty, see Robert Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*, 70–77.

morally flawed.[132] In Jin's guidelines for reading *Water Margin*, in addition to listing fifteen literary forms proper to the novel, Jin ranks 32 of the novel's 108 outlaws, among whom Wu Song ranks as one of the most superlative (*shangshang renwu* 上上人物) and Song Jiang the most despicable (*xiaxia renwu* 下下人物).[133] Jin's rankings do not clearly distinguish between characters' moral attributes and aesthetic portrayals—the two are often intermixed. Most of the characters that Jin regards as relatively underdeveloped fall into the middling categories (*zhongshang* 中上 or *zhongxia* 中下). But it is evident from Jin Shengtan's commentary that he feels the author has carefully portrayed Song Jiang, while Jin insists that the author also loathes Song Jiang, whom Jin describes as profoundly dishonest.[134]

But Jin Shengtan's moral evaluation of Song Jiang does not prevent him from admiring the author's vivid portrayal of this apparently detestable character. By deploying his commentarial apparatus to anchor the end of his first preface to Song Jiang's drama in chapter 41, wherein the outlaw hides out in a temple at night in order to escape the officials trying to seize him, Jin Shengtan invites a reflection on the moral implications of Genius's engagement with immoral figures.

The language of the prefatory comment to chapter 41 evokes metaphysical extremes that recall Jin's first preface. Jin begins his prefatory comment by describing an ancient method for training a disciple in the art of the sword, whose master would "first set him atop abrupt cliffs and sheer walls and make him run at full speed" (先置之斷崖絕壁之上，迫之疾馳).[135] Only

[132] "Xu er," *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:17. According to David Rolston, early bibliographic sources refer to the novel by the title *Song Jiang*. See Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 196.

[133] Jin's character rankings span reading guidelines 22 through 48. See *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:31–36.

[134] See, for instance, reading guidelines 27 and 32–35, *JSTQJ* (2008), 3:32–33. For a detailed discussion of Jin Shengtan's evaluation of Song Jiang, see Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia*, 84, 88–90. In a detailed analysis of a passage from Jin's *Fifth Work of Genius*, Robert Hegel demonstrates how Jin Shengtan's emendations to *Water Margin* serve to incriminate Song Jiang's character. See Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*, 79–84.

[135] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:751.

after three months of such intensive training could the disciple be called "a [subtle] marvel of the realm" (*tianxia zhi miao* 天下之妙).[136] Shengtan exclaims that it is the same with the perilous (*xian* 險) and subtle (*miao* 妙) in literary composition, asserting that "the world's perils are able to produce wonders; it is not that the world's wonders are able to produce perils" 夫天下險能生妙，非天下妙能生險也.[137] Shengtan proceeds to compare writing to mountain climbing. As he does so, he describes his own work in the same terms he applies to authors of Genius in the first preface:

> Roaming among mountains is also like this. Those who ascend without climbing for themselves, those who descend without holding a rope—I have not yet seen that such people are able to immerse themselves fully in the beauty of mountains and rivers, the shadowy recesses of caves and valleys. When I climb and abseil, the places I reach are beyond where the birds soar, beyond where snakes and tigers roam. My energy runs out, my breath is exhausted, and my soul disperses just like [that of] a corpse, and my eyes and ears thereupon are transformed, and my heart is scoured clean, and my insight achieves ever loftier heights and deeper depths. Taking writing as a travail, I also attain transformations of yet more extreme height and depth.
>
> Writing is also like this: [although there are those who] do not rack the brush, do not roll up the paper, and do not rest the ink stick, I have never seen one among them produce a work that expends the marvelous and exhausts all transformations, that transcends the subtle and achieves the miraculous. Wanting to take down the brush yet leaving it racked; wanting to spread the paper yet leaving it rolled; wanting to grind the ink yet leaving it at rest: [under such circumstances] my talent runs dry, my whiskers break up, my eyes grow dim, my stomach hurts, spirits come to my aid, the wind and clouds suddenly clear, and only then are marvels truly marvels, transformations truly transformations, the subtle truly subtle, the miraculous truly miraculous. I have employed this method in reading through all the world's texts and have not met my match. Now, upon reading this one passage on Ring Road Village, I yet delight in reading its unsurpassed perils and wonders! [The prominent monk] Zhi Gong (*ming* Dun 遁 *zi* Daolin 道林, 314–366) raised horses [due to his] loving their vigor. Saying this is akin to deeming that, outside of horses, everything else is yet devoid of vigor. Now I also deem that outside of *Water Margin*, everything else is yet devoid of literary value—how could this be untrue?
>
> 游山亦猶是矣。不梯而上，不縋而下，未見其能窮山川之窈窕，洞壑之隱秘也。梯而上，縋而下，而吾之所至，乃在飛鳥徘徊，蛇虎躑躅之外，而吾之力絕，而吾之

[136] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:751.
[137] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:751.

> 氣盡，而吾之神色索然猶如死人，而吾之耳目乃一變換，而吾之胸襟乃一蕩滌，而吾之識略乃得高者愈高，深者愈深，奮而為文筆，亦得愈極高深之變。
>
> 行文亦猶是矣：不閣筆，不捲紙，不停墨，未見其有窮奇盡變、出妙入神之文也。筆欲下而仍閣，紙欲舒而仍捲，墨欲磨而仍停，而吾之才盡，而吾之髯段，而吾之目矐，而吾之腹痛，而鬼神來助，而風雲忽通，而後奇則真奇，變則真變，妙則真妙，神則真神也。吾以此法遍閱世間之文，未見其有合者。今讀「還道村」一篇，而讀賞其險妙絕倫。支公畜馬，愛其神駿。其言似謂自馬以外，都更無神駿也者；今吾亦雖謂自《水滸》以外，都更無有文章，亦豈誣哉？[138]

Jin's extended discussion subtly establishes the theme of peril (*xian*), which will feature again in his in-text comments on this chapter, wherein Song Jiang finds himself in a most perilous situation. At the same time, the language of this prefatory comment might serve to remind the reader, now more than halfway through Jin Shengtan's commentary edition of the novel, of the themes of Jin's first preface. In this way, Jin's prefatory remarks remind the reader to attend to the variations realized by the author's fine writing, the forms which, as his third preface specified, are born of causes and conditions, as opposed to merely attending to the events in the chapter at hand. This reminder is also an invitation to the reader to exhaust their own energy in this approach to reading, just as, according to these remarks, Jin Shengtan did in composing his commentary, and just as the author did in writing.

Just as Jin Shengtan goes out of his way by means of this finely wrought description to praise and encourage Genius, he dedicates even more words in his preface to a discussion of morality, specifically filial piety—and Song Jiang's lack thereof.[139] In chapter 41, Song Jiang is goes to retrieve his father and bring him to the outlaws' stronghold. But Jin feels Song Jiang puts on too overt a display of filial piety, and takes Song Jiang's words for cynical self-promotion:

> This filial piety in speech [only] is the filial piety of thieves, for which the author specifically uses Song Jiang to provide a living picture. Generally speaking, when we speak of a thief's being a thief, this is only because someone treats others with a vile

[138] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4: 751–752.
[139] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4: 753–754.

> heart. Just as in the case of those who repeatedly speak of [their] filial piety yet attend to their parents with vile hearts—such people are thieves of the first degree.
>
> 此口說之孝所以為強盜之孝，而作者特借宋江以活畫之。蓋言強盜之為強盜，徒以惡心向于他人；若夫口口說孝之人，乃以惡心向其父母，是加于強盜一等也。[140]

Jin elaborates on Song Jiang's moral shortcoming by observing Song Jiang's inability to inspire feeling in others. In his prefatory remarks, Jin Shengtan explains that after Song Jiang has brought his father into the safety of the stronghold, another outlaw, Gongsun Sheng 公孫勝, determines to go and see his mother. Then, and (according to Jin Shengtan's interpretation) only then, does the outlaw Li Kui 李逵 decide to go and retrieve his own mother. Jin suggests that Li is not at all inspired by Song Jiang's perceived display of filial feeling but is readily moved by Gongsun Sheng's relatively subdued decision to go see his mother. Song Jiang's failure to transmit a filial affect to his associates has karmic implications, which Jin Shengtan invokes through a closing remark on fidelity and reciprocity:

> The [commentary on] *Analects* states: "The Master's way consists in fidelity and reciprocity, that is all!" Observing that he is not possessed of reciprocity, one understands that he is not possessed of fidelity. What does it mean that a fiction writer takes pleasure in discoursing on the teachings in this manner?
>
> 《傳》曰：「夫子之道，忠恕而已矣。」觀其不恕，知其不忠，何意稗官有此論道之樂。[141]

Jin's statement presents an unusual take on the meaning of reciprocity, which usually refers to the act of extending kindness to others, not having the capacity to move others. This unusual unsettling of a familiar term of Confucian morality redirects us to Jin's Buddhist redefinition of

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[140] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4: 753.

[141] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4: 754. As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, when Jin refers to the *Zhuan* 《傳》, he appears to be referring to Zhu Xi's dialogues on the Four Books as recorded in *Zhuzi yulei*. In this case, the citation is no different from as it appears in the *Analects*. In his third preface to *Water Margin*, by alluding to this line alongside the Neo-Confucian theme of singleness of mind (*yi xin*), Jin playfully engages with Zhu Xi's dialogues on this Confucian passage, restoring *yi xin* to its Buddhist definition by defining fidelity and reciprocity in relation to dependent co-arising.

reciprocity in his third preface, where he explains this term as the understanding that all phenomena arise from causes and conditions. By characterizing Song Jiang as lacking in both reciprocity and fidelity, Jin Shengtan positions *Water Margin*'s central character as the anti-Genius, one who, failing to understand dependent co-arising, persists in behaving selfishly and attempts to conceal their true intentions. Considering Jin's comment from the standpoint of causes and conditions, perhaps Song Jiang is unable extend (through reciprocity as Jin understands it) his filial words, actions, and intentions to Li Kui because these outward forms are karmic manifestations of not filial piety, but duplicity.

Elsewhere in the chapter, when Song Jiang's affect is more sincere, Jin Shengtan does observe the scene as gathering individuals into an intersubjective body. And, regardless of Song Jiang's status as the novel's anti-hero (and anti-Genius) Jin Shengtan invites the reader into this shared experience. Jin discusses Song Jiang's perilous situation as he hides in a temple to escape the officials trying to capture him. Here, Jin explicitly relates the author's readiness to "arduously carry out" this literary scene in detail to something we might describe as karmic force:

> In the first half of this passage, when the two Zhao brothers come to capture [Song Jiang], and Song Jiang hides himself away, a vulgar brush would make do with just one sentence. Now look how [the author] depicts an ascent and a descent, again an ascent and a descent, and yet again an ascent and a descent. Then [the author] has Song Jiang himself in a cabinet [for storing religious images], and the reader is outside the book, and yet—I know not why—in a single moment, [Song Jiang and the reader] are gathered together into a single state of mind and are together subjected to [these] many frights. The candle grows dim and the window rattles, the walls quake and spirits emerge. That the stuff of brush and ink is able to make circumstantial and direct karma quake in unison is truly remarkable beyond compare.
>
> 前半篇兩趙來捉，宋江躲過，俗筆只一句可了。今看他寫得一起一落，又一起一落，再一起一落。遂令宋江自在厨中，讀者本在書外，却不知何故一時便若打並一

> 片心魂，共受若干驚嚇者。燈昏窗響，壁動鬼出，筆墨之事，能令依正一齊震動，真奇絕也。[142]

With respect to general fiction criticism, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Jin's observation that good writing can cultivate a sense of shared feeling between a reader and the character with whose drama they are engaged. What is remarkable is how Jin Shengtan understands the operation of empathy in fictional experience, in terms of writing as a medium of karma. Jin Shengtan's language here continues the image of the dramatically varied topography that he evokes at the very beginning of his prefatory remarks and relates that dramatic topography at once to the literary texture of the scene in question and Song Jiang's fearful affect, such that the two—character and writing—seem to meld (as Jin Shengtan's third preface states, "What difference is there?" 又何異哉). This fusion of authorial brush and fictional affect then extends, apparently by means of the brush's trace, to the reader. The way Jin goes about interweaving these fictional, authorial, and readerly subjectivities renders the context of this descriptions last sentence somewhat uncertain. The dimming candle and quaking walls are fictional phenomena that arise right as Song Jiang is rescued by spirits. Jin describes the anxiety of this moment with a highly technical Buddhist term referring to two kinds of karma: circumstantial karma refers to how one's environment is produced by causes and conditions, whereas direct karma refers to one's own body and personality as a karmic consequence. In this case, however, what actually constitutes the circumstances? The answer could be Song Jiang's fictional surroundings, the temples candles, windows, and walls, or it could be the writing itself. Similarly, who is the person resulting from direct karma? Is it Song Jian, or is it the reader? If the

[142] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:753.

latter, then these dimming candles and quaking walls are the reader's circumstantial karma, as is the writing on the page before them. I believe Jin Shengtan intends this ambiguity.

Jin Shengtan's in-text comments aim to bring these subjective bodies together by means of a careful attention to literary form. His comments on the scene of Song Jiang's karmically induced peril fall broadly into three categories. One series of comments attends to the scene's affect, which Jin identifies early on as anxiety. When Song Jiang hides in the cabinet, Jin remarks on the care with which the author has portrayed the development of this action:

> How does [Song Jiang] end up hiding in the cabinet? This is necessarily because the author describes Zhao Neng's having arrived, and, at the height of his anxiety, Song Jiang retreats, then sees the cabinet for religious idols. [The author] describes Song Jiang's circumstance in the midst of urgency, and the appropriate actions follow.
>
> 神廚如何躲得過？故必寫到趙能到了，急殺躲處，然後看到神廚。寫慌迫中情事，分寸都出。[143]

After this initial, relatively detailed comment, Jin Shengtan intermittently offers briefer remarks on Song Jiang's affective condition to focus the reader's emotional experience of this scene. Just after Song Jiang conceals himself, he hears people entering the temple with torches, and Jin exclaims "Terribly anxious" 急殺! When a large team of men begin investigating the temple in search of Song Jiang, Jin remarks, "Anxious beyond words" 急殺不可言! When Song Jiang, in his fear of being seized, starts calling upon spirits to come to his assistance, Jin comments, "[The author] vividly depicts how, when someone is anxious, chanting comes from their mouths without rhyme or reason" 活寫出情急人口中念誦無倫無次來.[144]

These anxiety-oriented comments of this kind proceed throughout the scene, but Jin invites his reader yet more deeply into Song Jiang's affective situation with a second category of

[143] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:756.
[144] All of the above comments appear in *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:756.

comments. These attend to Song Jiang's body, in particular his anxious trembling, a feature of the original text that Jin Shengtan in this case has not emended or added to. Jin identifies the first instance of trembling, immediately after Song hides in the cabinet, with a simple numeral "one" and proceeds to enumerate these instances throughout the scene, for a total of nine.[145] Such counting is a common feature of Jin Shengtan's commentaries, and usually attends to recurring features of characters' speech or gestures. Certain twentieth-century scholars, most famously Hu Shih, despised this aspect of Jin Shengtan's commentary as a superficial approach to criticism, but I propose that this is actually one of the ways Jin Shengtan identifies karmic force in literary forms: embodied rhythms are consequences of causes and conditions, and here Song Jiang's body quakes alongside his surroundings, as Jin suggests in his prefatory remark.

Yet a third form of commentary suggests how the author brings together the reader's and Song Jiang's embodied subjectivities. Here, we return again to Jin Shengtan's recurring figurations of brush and ink, which, in this case, Jin weaves into his commentarial apparatus for chapter 41 by extending the topographical metaphor he introduced in his prefatory comment. What initially seemed to be merely an evocative description of literary experience here reveals itself as writing that has a capacity to transmit a bodily and affective sensation—a consummate example of Jin Shengtan's haptic poetics. Throughout this scene, alongside Song Jiang's trembling and anxiety, Jin describes the author's brush as ascending and descending like a perilous sierra. Here I cite only some of Jin's comments of this kind: "A marvelous peak such as this, then suddenly a drop" 如此奇峰，忽然一跌; "As soon as [the author] has obtained a drop in the previous sentence, the next sentence suddenly towers forth, bringing people face [this] fright head-on" 方得上句一跌，下句忽然矗起，令人劈面一嚇; "[The author] wants to

[145] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:756–758.

descend without yet descending, then suddenly he ascends. [The writing] is marvelously unrestrained in this way, truly a case of alarming talent and superlative writing" 欲落未落，忽然又起。奇恣至此，真是驚才絕筆; "An affair such as this, that makes one deathly anxious, and persistently, as before, [he] inscribes an ascent and a descent, then abruptly comes to an extreme point, and one faces it as though he had composed a ranged of twisted peaks and ridges, truly a Genius 如此死急事，偏有本事寫得一起一落，突兀盡致，臨了猶作峰巒拳曲之形，真是才子.[146]

Jin Shengtan in this manner imagines the writing itself as a series of rhythmic, affectively charged gestures, in this case co-extensive with Song Jiang's trembling body. By means of the Genius writer's concerted engagement with the literary object, the writing takes on similar attributes as the character's affectively charged body, both which Jin Shengtan understands as phenomena born of causes and conditions. Jin's commentary suggests that, by contemplating the dependently co-arisen nature of the fictional character alongside the writing, the reader might intuit, through their own embodied affects, how their own experience is implicated in this dependent co-arising. To exhaust oneself in this manner is to draw nearer to understanding oneself as part of the reality fiction embodies.

[146] *Diwu caizi shu*, *juan* 46, *JSTQJ* (2008), 4:757–758.

CODA

This dissertation has sought to elucidate Jin Shengtan's conception of "literary method" (*wenfa*), through a sustained examination of his flagship term, Genius. Jin's most famous commentaries, the *Fifth and Sixth Works of Genius*, pose something of a challenge to this historicizing aim because their base texts have played a formative role in the historical development of Chinese literature as a discipline over the last three centuries. It is consequently difficult to disentangle the "literary methods" specific to Jin's commentaries on vernacular fiction and drama from literary methods in general as construed by twentieth-century scholarship. For this reason, the present study begins by turning to Jin's *Must-Read Works for Geniuses*, a prose anthology that, for its association with a classical genre of writing, has played a lesser role in shaping modern understandings of early modern Chinese literature. Jin Shengtan's annotations on classical prose offer a streamlined demonstration of his commentarial approach in the form of remarks that envision the text as an extension of the writer's affectively charged bodily gestures, often through references to brush and ink.

Attention to methods of reading and writing comprises only half of Jin Shengtan's commentarial program, which both he and his student Xu Zeng describe as a basis for moral self-cultivation, a literary complement to the Confucian *Six Classics*. The association Jin draws between literary method and morality is somewhat surprising, given the oft-expressed tensions between writing (*wen*) and morality (*de*) in Chinese literary criticism since the Song dynasty. With the aim of clarifying how Jin Shengtan understood the relationship between literary methods and Confucian morality, chapter one reconstructs Jin's context in intellectual history. An archival detail—Jin's passing reference to Zhang Nai's classical literature anthology—opens onto a historical hotbed of contention regarding this relation. Zhang Nai, an intellectual associate

of the Gong'an critic Yuan Hongdao and a literary-critical heir to Li Zhi, disparaged literary methods as the mere manipulation of literary form wielded for the self-serving ends of superficial talents (*cairen* 才人). By elevating talent as Genius, Jin counteracted Zhang Nai's diminution of literary method to mere technique.

Jin's valorization of Genius and literary method was also set against Zhang Nai's celebration of a certain take on morality, one greatly influenced by Li Zhi's celebration of the childlike mind. This was an unorthodox interpretation of morality as deriving from personal feeling, in particular feelings of righteous indignation. The latter sentiment was closely associated with Li Zhi's discussions of *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* as expressions of naturally moral authorial sentiment, unpolluted by the hypocrisy of Confucian standards of conduct. By tracing a new path toward Jin's *Works of Genius* from the standpoint of intellectual history—rather than established critical themes such as genre, authority, or literary form—we rediscover his most famous works of commentary as contributions to a moral-philosophical debate. While Li Zhi and his associates valorized individual expression as a basis for moral order, Neo-Confucian thinkers, ranging from Zhu Xi to Wang Yangming to Jin's contemporary Liu Zongzhou, advocated for a transpersonal morality. In Jin's thinking, reading and writing are moral acts in their own right, not vehicles or instruments of an external morality.

The next two chapters advance the claim that Jin Shengtan cultivated literary form's morally transformative potential through a Buddhist discourse. There are two strong reasons, one textual and one contextual, to proceed with this reading. The textual reason appears in Jin Shengtan's third preface to *Water Margin*, which appears after a first preface parodying Wang Yangming's moralizing discourse on literary practice in *Instructions for Practical Living* and a second preface denouncing Li Zhi's characterization of *Water Margin* as portraying "loyal and

righteous" outlaws. Jin's third preface proposes an alternative to these two pre-existing hermeneutic approaches, and he outlines this alternative in terms of the Buddhist ontology of dependent co-arising, according to which "literary methods" are also understood as dharmas, phenomena born of causes and conditions; and the Genius author is conceived as a bodhisattva possessed of the capacity to perceive all of reality in a single instant of thought. With respect to the Genius's knowledge, Jin cites the philosopher Nagarjuna, whose statement of truth allows for the simultaneous elevation of form and emptiness, illusion and truth, fiction and reality. Jin Shengtan asserts that one who has grasped this truth will also attain the Confucian ideals of fidelity and reciprocity. By overcoming the distinction between self and other, Jin relates, a person also comes to possess the knowledge that brings self-restraint and good governance.

While this reading departs from the established scholarly understanding of Jin Shengtan's work, it accords with what we know of his social network. As chapter two relates, Jin's student Xu Zeng sought to study Jin's *Sixth Work of Genius* along with Jin's more explicitly Buddhist works for the sake of his moral and spiritual cultivation, which he describes in relation to distinctly Buddhist ideas of karma. Xu's personal account of his acquaintance with Jin Shengtan relates that before Jin published his first work of commentary, he was known for lecturing on the dharma at Buddhist temples around Suzhou. Xu Zeng is not likely to have been an isolated case—the fellow student with whom he hoped to study Jin's *Romance of the Western Chamber* commentary was Wang Daoshu, a close friend of Jin's who, along with his brother Wang Zhuoshan, is frequently mentioned in Jin's commentaries. Moreover, everywhere Xu discusses studying Jin's works, he also mentions other classmates. The image that arises from these descriptions, along with contemporaneous accounts of Jin's well-attended lectures, accords with

Jennifer Eichman's research on Ming-dynasty Buddhist fellowships.[1] During the unsettled late-Ming era, communities of monks, scholar-officials, and literati engaged concertedly in Buddhist study for the sake of working out their own socially and ethically viable approaches to self-cultivation. These communities were relatively non-institutional and non-hierarchical, to the extent that monks could even study under lay-Buddhist literati such as Jin Shengtan, but this is not to say they were intellectually lax. Eichman's study of Huang Hui, in particular, reveals a creative but methodologically careful interworking of Yangming Neo-Confucian and Buddhist ideas. Jin Shengtan's commentarial program should be understood as having catered to this discursively open-minded and ethically engaged population of students.

The aim of this dissertation, however, is not so much to illuminate a phenomenon of intellectual history as it is to investigate how this phenomenon shaped Jin's innovative conception of literary method. By treating Jin's understanding of literary practice as something divorced from his lived work, as something more akin to our own understanding of literary criticism, we risk losing sight of the reason for his exaltation of "literary method" and "Genius." Seeking to establish a better balance between literary criticism and ethical guidance, chapter two presents a series of methodological adjustments that might enable scholarship to not only see his work in light of an unusual historical context, but also evaluate that work differently.

The first of these adjustments entails reading Jin's annotations as a coherent apparatus rather than an assemblage of personal literary impressions. This is to examine Jin's work as a discursive framework which, like the canon-oriented discourses produced and consumed in printed form throughout the late imperial period—ranging from the *Categorically Arranged Dialogues of Master Zhu* to Qian Qianyi's commentary on the *Surangama Sutra*—present a

[1] Eichman, *A Late-Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship*; "Intertextual Alliances."

coherent, if not entirely systematic, understanding of an intellectual discourse. Chapter two engages with this commentarial apparatus by examining disparate moments in Jin's commentary for recurring themes—verbal repetitions of the sort he himself enthusiastically traced throughout (and sometimes inserted into) his base texts. This approach reveals a parallel between a distinctly Buddhist moment in Jin's *Fifth Work of Genius*—where he describes Genius in his third preface—and what at first seems to be a purely literary moment of commentary, where he remarks at length upon Wu Song's famous fight with the tiger.

Two further adjustments proceed from a consideration of how it might be possible for a commentarial moment that is not overtly colored by philosophical concerns to serve a broadly transformational or soteriological aim—in other words, what might someone such as Xu Zeng have gleaned from the more "literary" moments in Jin Shengtan's commentary. This question is most appropriate, given the important place Jin gave the *Lotus Sutra*, a work largely concerned with upāya (*fangbian* 方便, skillful or expedient means). In light of this intertextual backdrop, as well as the late-Ming resurgence of Tiantai thought, I propose a methodological adjustment in the form of a new understanding of art as upāya. According to the Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi's theory of upāya as expressed in his discourse on the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, skillful means (such as art) is, from the standpoint of emptiness, not a half-truth that leads to an insight beyond the realm of concepts, but the whole truth unto itself, so long as one looks upon it correctly. I reason that this is what Jin's commentary invites readers to do.

The turn to Zhiyi, whose *Profound Meaning* circulated among late-Ming readers, reveals a likely source for Jin Shengtan's persistent emphasis on the implements of writing, his recurring figurations of brush and ink. The inspiration for this unusual emphasis may derive from Zhiyi's all-important discussion of the inky black word (*heimo zi* 黑墨字), through which Zhiyi explains

how a simple reflection on permutations of ink from the standpoint of dependent co-arising can transform the very medium of writing—an object of visible or material perception (*sechen* 色塵) into a sutra, a means of realizing emptiness. Based on this discussion, I propose a third methodological adjustment, suggesting that Jin Shengtan's emphasis on literary methods should be understood not in terms of variations on literary form as we understand it today, but in terms of literary form as rūpa (*se* 色), a visible and material form that might give way to a philosophical contemplation of its dependent co-arising. Because Buddhist discourse perceives in the apprehension of emptiness a basis for compassionate and moral conduct, Jin Shengtan's ongoing attention to literary forms as dependently co-arisen objects of perception could promise to cultivate morality.

With respect to the Buddhist understanding of skandhas (*yun* 蘊, the elements that compose existence), to describe literary form as rūpa is not to delimit writing as a category of visible or material form, but to acknowledge writing as belonging to one dependently co-arisen category of skandha among four others—sensation, ideation, impulse, and discrimination. Jin Shengtan discusses writing in somatically, affectively, and psychologically evocative terms that evince the undifferentiability of such perceptual categories. Chapter three begins with a preliminary foray into reading alongside Jin from this standpoint, considering how his commentary on book four, act two of *Romance of the Western Chamber* invites the reader into an embodied apprehension of emptiness. Jin's commentary resurfaces a dramatic scene of confession into an opportunity to participate in a shared act of Buddhist repentance. By re-envisioning writing as a medium of karma, Jin imagines a means of enhancing writing's impact on the reader's bodily, affective, and karmic condition through literary features.

From here, I consider how Jin Shengtan presented this innovative approach to literary hermeneutics to an audience that was already acquainted with Neo-Confucian and anti-archaist approaches to literary self-cultivation. Chapter three, part two presents a close reading of Jin Shengtan's three prefaces to *Water Margin* alongside moments of commentary affiliated with those prefaces by means of Jin's commentarial apparatus. Jin parodies Neo-Confucian thinkers' moralizing extremes, decries Li Zhi's valorization of personal indignation, and invites his readers to take leave of these value-based approaches to hermeneutics by presenting a vision of literature wherein everything—including authorial intent—is but one form among others. According to this outlook, particular modes of intention such as promoting sagely morality (which Jin attributes to Zhuangzi) or expressing indignation (as in the case of Sima Qian) are not values to be upheld and pursued at the expense of others, but dependently co-arisen parts of an undifferentiable field of reality. Over the course of his commentaries on *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Western Chamber*, Jin examines far-ranging variations in literary methods of brush and ink as well as in portrayals of human character, action, and intention precisely for the sake of appreciating these differences as excellent, interrelated variations on form, none of them being more or less worthy of examination than the others. By imparting this literary outlook to his readers, Jin encouraged them to look upon themselves from the standpoint of Genius, as but one dependently co-arisen object among infinite others. To be a Genius, in Jin's view, is not to have mastery over a medium, but to perceive oneself as inextricably bound up with writing as reality.

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Abbreviations

J *Jiaxing dazing jing* 嘉興大藏經

T *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經

X *Shinsan Dai Nihon zoku Zōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經

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