

GHOSTS SEEKING SUBSTITUTES: FEMALE SUICIDE AND REPETITION

Rania Huntington

In late imperial Chinese ghost tales, the victims of certain kinds of untimely death, including some methods of suicide, become ghosts who seek out mortals to take their places. If such a ghost can incite another to die by the same means that she died, then she will be freed from suffering as a ghost and can be reborn. They and their replacements are often, but are not exclusively, female. Responsibility for the suicides in which the ghosts are involved varies from story to story, and may be ambiguous: the ghosts may be portrayed as essential causes of suicide, or as taking advantage of deaths that would have happened in any case. The seeking of substitutes may be portrayed as primarily the independent action of the ghost, or as sanctioned by other sources of authority. Commonly there is more than one cause for a particular death, with human despair and ghostly influence compounding one another.

The ghost of a suicide seeking a substitute is terrifying largely because of the expansion of personal vengeance to general malevolence. A wronged ghost who takes revenge on the living person who wronged him or her, the more common and ancient figure, can be a force of terrifying violence, but that violence is contained by equations of moral justice and injustice. One of the central organizing concepts of the Chinese imaginary cosmos is *bao*, repayment or retribution, which may take the form of either heavenly or personal repayment of past good and evil deeds. Essential to the idea of *bao* are equivalence of original deed and consequence (whether in the form of “an eye for an eye” or monetary or other exchange) and personal (or familial) responsibility for deeds. The relationship involves a specific and finite number of individuals, and once a debt has been repaid in full, *bao* comes to an end. The ghost seeking a substitute, however, wreaks destruction on unconnected strangers. The new death is repetition, but not repayment, and thus the story has no ending. An initial act of violence reproduces itself indefinitely, apparently beyond the control of moral authority.

Rather than moral justice, the seeking of substitutes is closer to ideas of death pollution or contagion, which contaminates others based on proximity

Late Imperial China Vol. 26, No. 1 (June 2005): 1–40

© by the Society for Qing Studies and The Johns Hopkins University Press

rather than whether they deserve its ill effects. Pollution, too, can reproduce itself.¹ In some ways substitute-seeking is even more frightening, because it is not restricted to the places near the corpse or the moments after death, and thus is a form of pollution without clear limits in space and time.

The idea of ghosts seeking substitutes both creates and controls horror. Unjust or unclean deaths not only leave traces, but reproduce themselves indefinitely. The terror of all ghosts is often based on the fear that they will pull us over the same border parting the living from the dead that they violate themselves, and these ghosts do exactly that. Death, especially suicide, can come to prey on an individual from an external source. At the same time, even a horrifying explanation may be less frightening than inexplicable death. Placing the cause of suicide outside the individual, the family, and even the human world averts attention from possible internal causes: the flaw rests not in this individual or household, but in another one, beyond the narrative horizon of the story.

The means of death believed to produce this kind of ghost are hanging (as suicide), drowning (sometimes a suicide), and death in childbirth. These ghosts are an acknowledgment that certain kinds of death do not simply destroy the body, but malform the soul as well.² Within this category of unclean deaths, I will focus on the suicides (thus mainly the hanged ghosts), with the other kinds of substitute-seeking ghosts as comparison, because suicide is the most psychologically and culturally complex case. Motive is as crucial as manner of death: the woman who dies to protect her chastity almost never becomes such a ghost,³ but the one who dies for the sake of her personal grievances against her husband or parents-in-law does. It is not obvious that these deaths would demand revenge, because the woman died by her own hand (or, in the case of accidental drowning or death in childbirth, there is no one at fault).

¹ See James L. Watson, "Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society: Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy," in Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 112–13. Revealing a kinship between pollution and moral wrong which demands retribution, many of the terms for retribution are in terms of cleansing: a debt is "made clean" (*huangqing*), and wrongs are "washed away" (*xue*).

² A somewhat similar class of ghosts is the *chang* spirits, who are eaten by tigers and then become the slaves of the tiger, but this differs in that there is an external force commanding the ghost. These figures seem to have become less prevalent in late imperial times; one suspects this reflects the relative rarity of tiger attacks in an increasingly urban society. *Hanyu da cidian*, 1:1445. See also the man Yu Yue mentions, who died of cannon fire during the Taiping rebellion and has become a particularly black and horrible ghost. *Yutai xianguan biji*, (Shanghai: Chaoji shu zhuang, 1910) 5.15b.

³ Yuan Mei includes a counterexample, of the great Ming loyalist courtesan Liu Rushi, who hung herself to preserve her chastity, but nevertheless becomes a haunt. He argues that sometimes this fate is inevitable even for loyal and righteous ghosts. However, that he needs to even make this argument demonstrates the general conviction that virtue and haunting ought to be mutually exclusive. "Liu Rushi wei li," *Zi bu yu*, *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 4. (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji chubanshe, 1993) 16.304.

Even though she dies because of familial conflict, she does not take action against the family members with whom she had quarreled. Her generalized response seems to suggest that her grievance is against all the circumstances which brought her to this point, rather than an individual.

The distinction between those suicides which do and do not produce ghosts parallels the distinction made in legal discourse between proper and improper suicides: proper suicides were those resisting rape, betrothed girls who starved themselves when threatened with remarriage, and betrothed girls who mourned for the three years and then died. Proper suicide was a considered decision, not an act of passion, and it was only condoned if a woman was not neglecting her duties to her family.⁴ Legal treatment of improper suicide focused on finding responsible parties, those who had helped to cause the death by either assistance or coercion. The suicide ghosts may be related to this legal compulsion to find someone to blame for a suicide.⁵ They provide a villain in cases which do not meet the legal definitions of compelled suicide, but are not proper suicides either.

In general in the Chinese tradition, the Confucian adage that the body is a gift from one's parents and should not be lightly harmed is not an absolute: there are circumstances under which suicide is, for both men and women, the moral choice. In both historical and literary sources, suicide is often depicted as the result of a rational, if desperate, choice, rather than the result of mental illness. Attitudes towards suicide for acceptable causes are captured in the word *xun*, usually used in compounds for dying for a laudable cause, be it nation, chastity, name, or passion.⁶ These deaths are relatively understandable, their causes sanctioned and explicit. *Xun* has a clear object, something greater that is preserved by the loss of physical life.⁷ Although the individual life is sacrificed for a larger cause, and descriptions of such deaths may seem stereotyped, each death is unique and meaningful, entirely to the credit of the individual who decides to die. Motives for suicide that have no such ideal object beyond the self, such as rage, shame, and despair, are treated more ambivalently. It is the suicides who could not claim the word *xun*, who by dying complete or preserve nothing, who return, repeating an incomprehensible cycle, but offering an explanation for another apparently purposeless death.

⁴ Janet Theiss, "Managing Martyrdom: Female Suicide and Statecraft in Mid-Qing China," in Paul Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet Zurndorfer, eds. *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 53–55.

⁵ See Andrew Hsieh and Jonathan Spence, "Jindai yiqian de zhongguo shehui de zisha xingwei yu jiating de guanxi," 31. Also Geoffrey McCormack, "Suicide in Traditional Chinese Law," *Chinese Culture: A Quarterly Review*, Vol.32, #2, June 1991, 33–47.

⁶ On the approving use of the term *xun* in the Qing, see Theiss, 53.

⁷ See the discussion in Joseph S.M. Lau, "The Courage to Be: Suicide as Self-Fulfillment in Chinese History and Literature," *Tamkang Review*, vol. 19, 715–734.

Stories of substitute-seeking ghosts are revealing on two levels. First, the general concept of such ghosts reveals attitudes about death, suicide, gender, causation, and psychology. Second, actual individual narratives pose more precise questions, and posit answers, about these same issues, and can especially provide glimpses into seldom-exposed realms of the human interior. This essay analyzes both individual narratives and the “metastory” they form as a group. Throughout the variations on the motif, there is a tense balance of fear and sympathy, and an exploration of the limits of both.

Sources

The majority of my sources are Qing dynasty collections of brief classical-language tales about strange events, *zhiguai*. Such collections have a complicated relationship to amateur oral narrative or social storytelling on the one hand, and deliberate literary invention on the other.⁸ The traditional purpose of the genre is to record “things seen and heard,” including a small proportion of personal experience and a larger proportion of hearsay. These stories are commonly presented as records of oral narrative, but to be rendered in classical Chinese they are at the very least translations, if not free adaptations. With the popularity of *Liaozhai zhiyi*, fictional invention and literary embellishment became more accepted by some authors and readers, but their appropriateness to the genre was still contested.⁹ According to generic conventions, a man inventing his own stories would still present them as originating from an outside source, and even inventions draw on the conventions and motifs of shared lore. Thus these collections are, both on the level of the individual story and the entire collection, a complicated combination of personal memory, hearsay, adaptation, and fabrication, with different authors mixing these ingredients in different proportions. On the level of the individual story, it is impossible to absolutely distinguish a record of oral narrative from an imitation of that mode, but comparison of a wide range of stories sharing similar motifs allows examinations of the shared and individual interests of the men who wrote them down, and, albeit with the mediation of those recorders, the people who told them. In terms of belief and disbelief, or fiction and nonfiction, the tales inhabit a gray area: the most widely shared opinion among their authors and readers appears to have been that ghosts are a topic

⁸ On the *zhiguai* tradition at its foundation, see Company, *Strange Writing*. On the Qing tradition and its relation to oral story-telling, see Leo Tak-hong Chan, *The Discourse of Foxes and Ghosts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998) 39–76. See also the discussion of the nature of the genre in Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*, 14–24.

⁹ Judith Zeitlin discusses the reception of *Liaozhai* in her *Historian of the Strange* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 34–41, most famously by Ji Yun in the comments recorded by his student Sheng Shiyuan in the colophon to *Guwang tingzhi* (one of the sub-collections of *Yuewei caotang biji*.)

about which humans like to fabricate stories, but that at the same time actual ghost encounters do occur.

In the Qing there were two peaks of production of this genre, one in the late Qianlong-early Jiaqing reign (c. 1790–1805) and another in the Guangxu reign (c. 1875–1895). I draw heavily on both periods.¹⁰ Other than those collections, I consult pre-eighteenth century *zhiguai*, drama, vernacular fiction, and newspaper articles to a lesser extent. I argue that the classical tale provides a unique generic space, in which the problems of fear and sympathy for the suicide ghosts and their victims can be explored.

Kinds of Death, Kinds of Ghosts

Although they share the motif of seeking out substitutes, the different means of death have some distinct narrative patterns. Drowned ghosts, because they haunt the places they died, are identified with the outdoors, whether natural bodies of water or manmade wells or garden ponds. Drowning is not gender-specific, and may be an accident as well as suicide. Drowned ghosts are identified with a mysterious, malevolent force of nature; thus they are often incompletely anthropomorphized, seen as dark vapors or hands grasping from the waters, an aspect of the water itself.¹¹ The loss of the corpse in the element which is the cause of death and the failure at proper burial contribute to fearful image of the ghost. When anthropomorphized, the seeking of substitutes is often through trickery, with the ghost producing an attractive illusion which lures the victim into the waters, or they may simply drag their victims down. The victim does not necessarily decide to die.

Ghosts of childbirth are of course all female, and they travel to find their victims, who are indoors, in the birthing chamber. They are not suicides at all, but are associated with a very impure and disturbing form of death. In some

¹⁰ The primary collections I draw upon are, from the seventeenth through the early eighteenth century, Qian Xiyan, *Kuai yuan* (*The Garden of Cleverness*, 1613); Zhang Chao (1650–1709), ed. *Yuchu xinzhì* (*New Records of Yu Chu*, started circa 1683, completed c. 1700); and Pu Songling (1640–1715), *Liaozhai zhiyi* (*Liaozhai's Record of Wonders*, published 1766); from the Qianlong era: Yuan Mei (1716–1798), *Zi bu yu* (*What the Master Would Not Speak Of*, 1788); He Bang'e, *Yetan suilu* (*Occasional Records of Conversations at Night*, 1791); Yue Jun, *Ersi lu* (*Hearsay Accounts*, published 1792); Zeng Yindong, *Xiao dou peng* (*The Small Bean-Trellis*, 1796); Ji Yun (1724–1805) *Yuewei caotang bijii* (*Notebook from the Thatched Cottage of Close Scrutiny*, 1800); in between the two periods, Liang Gongchen, *Beidong yuan bilu* (*Record from the Northeast Garden*, 1866); from the Guangxu era: Zhu Yiqing, *Mai you ji* (*Collection for Dispelling Sorrows*, 1874); Pan Lun'en, *Daoting tushuo* (*Roadside Tales*, preface 1875); Xu Feng'en, *Lantiaoguan waishi*, also known as *Licheng* (*The Outer History of Orchid Court*, 1879.); Yu Yue (1821–1906), *Youtai xianguan biji* (*Miscellany from the Immortal's Abode at Youtai*, preface 1880); Li Qingchen (?–1897), *Zuicha zhiguai* (*Tea-drunken Accounts of the Weird*, 1892); Xue Fucheng (1838–1894), *Yongan biji* (*Notebook from the Common Studio*, first ed. 1897); Cheng Lin, *Cizhong renyu* (*Conversations in the Midst*).

¹¹ For examples, see “Shuigui,” *Zuicha zhiguai* (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chuban she, 1990), 2.134; “Shuigui yijia,” *Zi bu yu*, 22.431.

ways they are more like the demons who cause disease than the other suicide ghosts, because they cause physical agony without the need to persuade their victims to choose death. Although these ghosts travel, there is some suspicion that they will plague the household where they died, so death in childbirth can become a family curse.

Hanged ghosts are spatially more similar to ghosts of childbirth, perhaps because they also are primarily female. They travel to find their victims at a moment of crisis, which usually happens indoors. Their persuasion of their victims is not spatial, in that it is not key to lure the other to a perilous place, although sometimes there is an illusion to incite a victim to insert her head into the noose. In some other cases they engineer family conflicts which inspire thoughts of suicide.¹² More often they directly induce the wish to die, taking advantage of emotional distress. Similar to the childbirth ghosts, although the ghosts can travel, the legacy of a woman who died by hanging creates a polluted space in the domestic sphere.¹³ Rather than being associated with a treacherous space, a hanged ghost's powers are often concentrated in an object, the rope by which she had died.

Reeking of blood, the rope is both the embodiment of her death and the vessel of her power to persuade another to die, but it is also a means by which she can be foiled, because it can be taken from her, leaving her helpless.¹⁴

The traits of these three kinds of ghosts reveal different conceptions of perilous places and times: the drowned ghost is linked to a place and dangerous to travelers outdoors, while the other two are themselves travelers who come indoors to take advantage of physically or psychologically vulnerable moments. Thus childbirth and hanged ghosts are female figures who come from outside to interact with the women inside the household without familial sanction, a class of females, whether ghost or living, regarded with particular anxiety.¹⁵ There are also different relations of the ghost to the mind and body of the victim: the childbirth ghost causes death without interacting with the mind of her victim; suicide ghosts who depend on illusion (mostly

¹² See the case of a ghost committing a theft for which a daughter-in-law is blamed. *Youtai xianguan biji*, 8.12b. A ghost causes the discovery of a female servant's adultery, leading to a suicide attempt, in *Yuewei caotang biji*, (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1994) 4.149, story 145.

¹³ See for example Ji Yun's account of a female servant's ghost lingering in the room where she hung herself, which impels the family to keep that room locked. *Yuewei caotang biji*, 4.149, story 145. Wang Mingde also notes the tendency for repetition of hanging to occur in the same place in the opening comments of "Ji yigui" in Zhang Chao, ed., *Yu Chu xin zhi* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1985) 13.250.

¹⁴ Examples include "Yigui," *Mai you ji*, (Chongqing: Chongqing chuban she, 1996) 10.176; "Liu Qiuya," *Ershi lu*, 1.10; "Gui you san ji guo ci gui dao nai qiong," *Zi bu yu* 4.65. Wang Mingde sees a link between the remnants of the rope, or another physical object, and the tendency for hangings to repeat at a particular place. "Ji yigui" in Zhang Chao, ed., *Yu Chu xin zhi* 13.250.

¹⁵ Compare the portrayal in popular fiction of matchmakers, door-to-door vendors, or Buddhist and Daoist nuns.

the drowned ghosts, but a few hanged ghosts) trick the mind and senses, but the victim does not consciously choose death; and suicide ghosts who depend on persuasion (most hanged ghosts and a few drowned ghosts) must have the victim's consent to die.

All of these ghosts are labeled with a compound of their means of death and the word *gui*, ghost: *shuigui* or *nisi gui* (water ghost or drowned ghost), *changui* (ghost of childbirth), and *yigui* or more colloquially *diaosi gui* (hanged ghosts). They can be contrasted with the demons of disease, also labeled with the word *gui*. Although they are envisioned in somewhat similar ways, as uncanny figures looming at the bedsides of sufferers of malaria or the plague,¹⁶ they are not assumed to be themselves victims of the disease which they spread. This is related to the ambiguity in the term *gui* itself, which includes both ghosts which were once human and demons who never were. Another common use of the word *gui* is in a more comical, jocular sense, for people with an addiction or an unfortunate condition, such as *jiugui*, alcoholic, and *yangui*, opium addict.¹⁷ Ghosts seeking substitutes are at the same time both victims and perpetrators; thus they are an embodiment of the contradictory meanings of the term *gui*.

Comparison with the demons of disease reveals the larger context: according to the ancient tradition of demonic medicine, all physical and psychological ailments (anachronistic as that distinction may be) can be explained as the products of ghosts and demons.¹⁸ A ghost is a way of envisioning disease as an external force which can take over the victim. Disease can be seen either as a moment of splitting, when suddenly there are two presences, victim and an outsider, where there should be just one self; or as an inappropriate combining of two beings, external and internal, as in the moment of possession.¹⁹ In the case of the suicide ghosts, this splitting or combination reflects the complicated relationship between horror at the cause of suffering and sympathy for the one who suffers: the two are given in some ways two distinct identities, but those identities are not stable, as one knows that the object of sympathy may well in the further offstage development of the narrative become the source of horror.

¹⁶ See for example "Nue gui," *Zi bu yu*, 7.140.

¹⁷ Usage of *jiugui* is attested from the Song, HYDCD 9:1379. Such addicts are sometimes literally made into ghosts in tales in which even after death they cannot give up their addictions. For one example, see "Yangui," *Yijiong baibian* in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan congkan*, (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1973) 32:6.49a–b. *Qionggui* poverty demon or poor devil, stands on the borderline between the two types. In earlier traditions they were like the demons of disease, the source rather than the victims of poverty; but in later usage this becomes a derogatory term for someone poor. See HYDCD 8:464–465.

¹⁸ Paul Unschuld, *Chinese Medicine: A History of Ideas*, 34–45, 216–28. See also Michael Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 58–88.

¹⁹ Strickmann refers to ideas of "like calling to like": unhealthy corpse-demons outside of the body summon similar beings within the body, 73–74.

History of the Motif

The suicide ghosts are a specific case of the general fear, widely shared across many cultures, that people who have died prematurely and unhappily are likely to become dangerous ghosts. This unspecified danger predates the specific explanation of seeking of substitutes. The motif can be observed gradually taking shape in the literary tradition in the period of the Song through the Ming. The strange, largely allegorical Tang tale by Liu Zongyuan (773–819), “Li Chi zhuan” seems to depict a female ghost inciting suicide (both by drowning and hanging), but she is not seeking a substitute.²⁰ The drowned ghost seems to be the most ancient of the three types, already present in the Southern Song collection *Yijian zhi*.²¹ In an anecdote in the *Jin shi* (fourteenth century), the mother of a man who just has decided to hang himself for loyalty dreams she sees three figures hiding in the rafters. Her son identifies them as ghosts, saying, “My intentions are already hanging in the rafters; your dream reveals this in advance.” It is not clear, however, whether the three ominous figures are seeking substitutes.²²

The term usually used for seeking substitutes, *taoti*, appears in the Ming play *Yun pi ji*, in joking dialogue about ghosts howling around the shop of a quack doctor.²³ In the late Ming collection *Kuai yuan*, the author Qian Xiyan uses *taoti gui* as a title for a group of seven anecdotes, without feeling any need to gloss the term.²⁴

Liaozhai zhiyi's story under the title “Yigui” is not a tale of seeking a substitute, but of another kind of repetition, which seems an ancestor, in spirit if not in chronology, of the seeking of substitutes. A young scholar lodging away from home spies on a young woman who carefully makes herself up, ties her belt and does her hair, only to hang herself. It turns out this is a ghost who had hanged herself in this room in the past. *Liaozhai* comments, “To feel so wronged that one hangs oneself is indeed bitter! Before she was a person and

²⁰ Liu Zongyuan *ji*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2:481–483. Translated in Karl S. Kao, *Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 190–192. See Li Jianguo's discussion of the tale, *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1993) 1:351–354.

²¹ The story “Jiangbao wangmu” implies it is a drowned ghost from whom the protagonist's character rescues him, although it is not entirely clear. *Yijian jiazhi*, 4.4996. A clearer example of ghosts of drowned monks enticing another monk into the water is “Lingzhi si gui,” *Yijian jiazhi* j.20.

²² “Pucha Qi zhuan,” *Jinshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 8:24.2703–04. Yuan Mei quotes this anecdote in his argument that martyrs' ghosts are sometimes involved in the cycle of substitution. “Liu Rushi wei li,” *Zi bu yu*, 16.304.

²³ *Hanyu da cidian*, 11:34. Qiu Ruiwu, *Yun pi ji*, in Mao Jin, *Liushi zhong qu*, 6:3427.

²⁴ Qian Xiyan, *Kuai yuan* (microfiche in the Van Gulik collection) 13.10a-15b. For another seventeenth-century example, there is a hint of substitution and repetition in the epilogue to Song Maocheng's (1569–1622) version of the Du Shiniang story, the source of the more well-known Feng Menglong (1574–1646) *huaben*. Du Shiniang threw herself in the river in disappointment at her lover's faithlessness. After Song

was unaware, afterwards she was a ghost and was still not enlightened, but the hardest to bear was the moment when she finished putting on her makeup and tightened her sash. Therefore after she was dead she had forgotten everything else, except for this moment and this place. Still doing over again what she had done is the only thing she could not forget.”²⁵ The tale is simple in plot, but vividly narrated, as the observer’s assumption that this is a runaway woman preparing to meet a lover is swept aside in dread. His voyeurism, peeping at a woman making herself beautiful, is transformed into sympathy. It is a vivid evocation of grief and fear in response to the death of a stranger, which remains unexplained. She embodies relentless recurrence in herself, rather than passing it on to other people. The figure of the male observer of the drama of repetition appears again in the popular plot of the interrupted suicide, discussed below.

The idea of seeking of substitutes is hinted at in earlier stories, and seems fairly well-developed by the seventeenth century. As is often the case, however, the quantity of these written stories may in part be related to the sheer quantity of *zhiguai* published, and cannot be taken to prove that the idea was not popular in the oral tradition earlier.

The Interrupted Suicide and the Outside Rescuer

One of the most popular stories about substitute-seeking ghosts relates their failures. As with any ghost story, the *zhiguai* describing the ghost of a suicide is usually related by a survivor. Thus the tales are usually depictions of thwarted attempts to seek substitutes, although successful attempts may be presented at the margins.²⁶ However, commonly the ghost is not exorcised at the end, so the possibility of future success is not excluded. This is a crucial difference from many other kinds of ghost stories: the majority of *zhiguai* end with the strange being either satisfied, through successful revenge, or eliminated. In many of the stories of ghosts seeking substitutes, however, the possibility of repetition is the essence of horror. This gap between the general

has written her story she appears to him in a dream, angry that he has revealed the facts of the story and her poor judgment, and threatens him with illness. After actually falling ill, he puts the story aside, but later takes it up again and finishes it. Soon after, one of his maids dies of drowning. However the maid’s reenactment of Du Shiniang’s death is implied to be punishment of Song; this is personal revenge in the guise of substitution. Du Shiniang already made it plain in her dream that she had been promoted to the status of a local goddess, rather than merely a resentful ghost. Song Maocheng, “Fuqing nongzhuan” as a source for “Du Shiniang nuchen baibaoxiang,” *Jingshi tongyan* #32, reprinted in Tang Zhengbi, *Sanyan liangpai ziliao* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980) shang: 353–354. Du Shiniang was in control of her dramatic, public suicide, and remains an individual rather than part of an anonymous cycle of substitution.

²⁵ Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi (huijiao huihu huiping ben)*, Zhang Youhe ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978) 6.780–781.

²⁶ See, for example, “Shui gui sao,” *Zi bu yu*, 2.42.

case, assumptions about how the cycle of substitution usually functions, and the specific narratives which are actually told is a fruitful field of inquiry. Narrative focuses on the exception to the rule, even when the rule itself is strange. A ghost successfully finding a substitute is the assumed narrative in the background of the interrupted suicide plot, but it is apparently less often a story deemed worthy of being recorded, unless one knew or loved the victim, or unless there is another element in the story to make it remarkable.

The tale of a third person interrupting a ghost's attempts to take a substitute recurs with increasing frequency from the seventeenth through the late nineteenth centuries (which again may reflect the increasing volume of published and surviving *zhiguai* tales as well as the popularity of the motif.) The frequent recurrence of the pattern in collections of divergent styles convinces me that this is a popular oral folktale type with many recorded variations, rather than the product of a single lineage of textual imitation, although individual versions may be literary manipulations of the theme. The constants of this story type are that an outsider, usually male, through his courage or through coincidence manages to foil a ghost, usually female, and save a victim, also usually female. The variations on the pattern are many. Where and when the man first discovers the ghost (whether on the road going to seek her victim or already in the act), the social class of the rescuer, his relationship to the woman he saves (sometimes he is a stranger, sometimes he is a kinsman or friend of the family), the means of rescue, and the degree of the ghost's culpability for the potential death all vary.²⁷ The tale can also be related with different degrees of literary elaboration.

There is the potential for multiple perspectives in the tale of the interrupted suicide. The rescuer views the situation from the outside, and can see both sides of the drama, ghostly and earthly. The victim and the ghost may or may not speak for themselves, either in direct or indirect quotation. Sometimes the would-be victim recalls the ghost's beguilements after he or she has been disenchanted, offering readers a glimpse of a different psychological state. All of these views of the encounter between the suicide ghost and the would-be substitute reveal ideas of the human interior.

Qian Xiyan's seven substitute-seeking ghosts are all drowned ghosts, of either unspecified (hence presumably male) or specifically male gender, who may seek substitutes of either gender. For example, in the second story, a *xi-*

²⁷ There is a brief study of 16 examples of this story type in Gu Xijia, "Qingdai biji xiaoshuo zhong de yigui shouzu xing gushi," *Minjian wenhua* 1999.2, 52–55. Other examples of the "interrupted suicide" not discussed in the body of the paper include *Cizhong renyu* 2.3a, in which a farmer accidentally traps the ghost who had almost incited his wife to hang herself by splashing her with blood from a minor wound (this story was drawn from the pages of the newspaper *Shen bao*), 4.2b–3a.

ucai named Shen from Yicheng goes to Jinling to take the exams in 1576. He is lodging near the Qinhuai river, and at night overhears two drowned ghosts conversing. One of them states that the next day he will have a chance to seek a substitute. The next day, he is able to call out and prevent the man described from being dragged into the water. That night, he overhears the ghosts again; the failed ghost complains that “the first-place candidate Shen” had saved his victim. The next year, Shen indeed takes the first place in the exams.²⁸

This story is the earliest discussed in this article, both in terms of the reported date of the events and the date of publication. There are differences and similarities with later stories. All the participants involved are male. Interest lies in the prophecy fulfilled, as much as in the interrupted suicide per se. There is no concern with the psychological state of the potential victim.

In the multi-authored collection *Yu chu xin zhi* (published early Qing, but including late Ming material), Wang Mingde’s presentation of an interrupted suicide story is framed as a treatise, “On Hanged Ghosts.”²⁹ It begins with a skeptical introduction to the belief in the seeking of substitutes, and follows the narrative with a prescription of how to prevent such haunts. In contrast with Qian Xiyan’s stories, it includes more of the elements of the interrupted suicide narrative that recur in the Qianlong era and later. The narrative itself reads:

In my village there was a family named Zhang who had barely enough to feed themselves. The husband went to bed first, and the wife was still working on her handwork. A thief took advantage of the dark of night to cross the wall and come to steal. He hadn’t dared come in yet, but instead waited outside the window. He saw a ghost woman beside the bed, facing the wife of the house first happily and then in tears, bowing and kneeling again and again. The wife looked sideways at her several times, and suddenly let out a long sigh, her tears pouring down. The thief was surprised, and watched intently. The wife got ready the cloth noose, but still seemed unable to bear going through with it. Only when the ghost woman redoubled her pleas did she hang herself. The thief panicked and cried out loudly, but the husband snored on as if he heard nothing. The thief had no way to save her. It happened that there was a bamboo pole beneath the eaves. He took it and threw it through

²⁸ “Taoti gui #2,” *Kuai yuan* 13.11b–12a. The first story in the series is very similar, but the subject of the prophecy is the unborn child of a pregnant woman spared by a ghost. “Taoti gui #1,” *Kuai yuan* 13.10a.

²⁹ See the discussion of this collection in Hou Zhongyi and Liu Shilin, *Zhongguo wenyan xiaoshuo shigao*, 2:188–191. If it is the same Wang Mingde, he is from Xuzhou, and committed suicide when the Qing troops took that city. Shu Hede et al, eds., *Qinding shengchao xunjie zhuchen lu*, in *Siku quanshu* 456:9.10b.

the window frame, striking the ghost woman. Only then did the husband awake. The thief cried out for him to open the door, and helped to take her down and save her. At this point the woman did not know why she had tried to die, the husband did not know who it was who had been shouting at the door, and the thief had himself forgotten he was a thief. Afterwards, they each told each other the details. They dug into the wall beside the bed to look, and found in the center beam the top of a rope which had been used in hanging someone. Although it was rotted to the point of hardly existing, the traces were very clear. From this one can see that the stories spread in the world are not necessarily baseless fabrications.³⁰

No single story is either entirely typical or atypical; this one also contains both shared and distinctive elements. The ghost is simply identified as a “ghost woman,” with no indication why the observer decides she is a ghost. Referring to her as *guifu* and the human woman as *benfu* (the original wife, or the wife of this place) underlines the interchangeability of the two. The interaction between ghost and would-be substitute is dramatic but wordless. There is no account of the woman’s own memory of the persuasion and emotion transfer which took part between the ghosts and herself. In contrast with stories discussed below, although her family is under chronic financial stress, there was no specific conflict to trigger the ghost attack. The emphasis on a dangerous place seems to take the place of a dangerous emotional moment as a contributing factor for the suicide.³¹

A thief is transformed from a violator of the household to a protector against greater violation. In the end of the story, his attempted break-in is not punished, and instead he takes part in the attempt to come to the bottom of the mystery. This story seems attractive precisely because of this paradox of double violation; the figure of the thief as rescuer reappears in later tales and dramas.³² Another form of redemption of a male who violates another man’s home happens in the tale of a peeping tom, who rescues the neighbor’s wife with whom he has been enamored, and is cured of his immoral tendencies

³⁰ Wang Mingde, “Ji Yigui” in Zhang Chao, *Yu Chu xin zhi*, 13.250–51.

³¹ The spatial analysis of the hanged ghost in this version is made more clear in Wang Mingde’s prescription for preventing a suicide from becoming a haunt: after a hanging, one should mark the place under where the death took place, press it down with a hard object, and then dig up the earth around the area, until one finds a small object, somewhat like a bone. If this is destroyed, there will be no more hangings there.

³² “Jiang gui,” *Xiao dou peng* (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1997) 11.551–52. *Yijiong baibian*, in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan*, series 32, 9:1.17a–17b. This motif also appears in Hunan local opera. David Johnson, “Actions Speak Louder than Words: the Cultural Significance of Chinese Ritual Opera,” in David Johnson, *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: Mu-lien Rescues his Mother in Chinese Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California, 1987, 24.

by the experience.³³ The tale variations seem to be a result of thought experiments, imagining the circumstances whereby a man might look into another man's home.

Here, for contrast, is a tale of an interrupted suicide from the late nineteenth century:

When Ge Feixiong, from Xie village in Dinghai,³⁴ was poor, he had no livelihood. According to the customs of Dinghai, when one is making offerings for someone who is ill, a lot of wine and food must be provided. That which is arrayed on the table is called the upper banquet, intended to make offerings to the gods; that which is placed on the ground is called the lower banquet and is intended to make offerings to the ghosts. The offered meat of the upper banquet is eaten by the master himself; the lower banquet is divided among beggars, who are allowed to get full and drunk before they leave. All those who make offerings would follow the instructions of fortunetellers. Therefore all the beggars would daily inquire at the door of the fortunetellers; when the time came they would all gather, and Ge also went along with them.

One night when he had finished eating, it was already late, with only pale moonlight. Ge walked alone, rather drunk. Suddenly he saw a woman walking slowly on the path ahead. Ge suspected she was sneaking out for an illicit liaison, and tried to follow her. They reached the door of a house. Without the door opening, she entered. Then he knew it was a ghost, and went outside the door to eavesdrop. Right then the wife and sister-in-law were insulting each other; when they were finished it was quiet. Ge was concerned there had been a change and urgently knocked on the door. When he entered the wife had already gone upstairs and the sister-in-law was still sitting angrily downstairs. Ge told her what he had seen. She was terrified, and asked Ge to come upstairs with her. Ge went up with her. The woman he had seen before raced out, ran into Ge, and fell down the stairs. When he looked back, she had vanished. When they looked in at the wife, she was hanging in the rafters. Fortunately it had not been long, and when they saved her she woke. She earnestly thanked Ge.³⁵

³³ "Qingyi nügui," *Yetan suilu*, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988) 4.170.

³⁴ In Zhejiang.

³⁵ *Youtai xianguan biji*, 5.6b.

This story too is relatively sparsely narrated, with little reported speech. The protagonist of the story is a named individual, referred to honorifically as “jun,” in contrast to the anonymous figures who often serve as rescuers. The ethnographic opening, describing equivalents between human social classes and orders of supernatural beings which Arthur Wolf explored in his anthropological work on a later period, is atypical and not an essential part of the interrupted suicide plot.³⁶ It suggests that by moving among the beggars and eating the food meant for ghosts, Ge Feixiong is already in a marginal category, and thus more likely to interact with ghosts. He assumes that a woman walking alone at night can be up to no good, but he is wrong about the nature of her violation.³⁷ The entrance of this suspicious figure gives Ge the license to eavesdrop, and then intrude into another man’s house. In contrast with the previous stories, two contributing causes of the suicide attempt are apparent to Ge, the entrance of the ghost and the quarrel between the two women. The direct interaction between the ghost and the would-be victim is neither witnessed nor recounted. Whatever the nature of the disagreement between the women, the daughter of the house does not wish her sister-in-law lasting harm, and both seem to appreciate the male intervention. Although it is clear that their quarrel nearly lead to disaster, overt condemnation of either of the living women is absent here.

In this kind of story the male observer gets an unexpected glimpse of two normally hidden worlds, the realm of ghosts and other men’s inner quarters. The chance observer gets to correct two kinds of wrongs, the ghost preying on an innocent woman, and the household conflicts which would drive women to commit suicide. This kind of tale seems to express a cultural wish that these secret injustices, in women’s lives and in the supernatural world, could be redressed by any ordinary male with courage, common sense, and a sense of decency, even such a dubious figure as a housebreaker. It provides comfort, saying that such deaths can be prevented. Yet like any tale of a coincidental rescue, the story emphasizes the fear that many women will not be saved from their private demons.

Tales of men accosted by substitute-seeking ghosts, although less common, provide a useful contrast. A tale in *Yetan suilu* (1779) narrates a completed suicide, with both ghost and victim male. When the farmer Shi Two, who had

³⁶ Arthur Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in Wolf, ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.)

³⁷ Similarly, in a case when the substitute-seeking ghost is male, the observer suspects the victim of having an affair. The male ghost in this case has already somewhat compromised his gender identity, because his obsession with an actor was the cause of his suicide. “Mou taishi gui qiu dai,” *Lantiaoguan waishi*, (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1996) 4.119.

travelled to the city to sell his goods, is staying at a dilapidated temple, he overhears the conversation of two male ghosts in the adjoining room. After complaints about the loneliness and discomfort of their condition, one ghost says he already has the permission of the local god to seek a substitute, and when Xu Four comes, he will have a chance. The next day a barber named Xu really does arrive to stay in the haunted room, and ignores warnings to stay elsewhere. After a humiliating conflict with a customer, he is inconsolable. That night Shi overhears an apparently one-sided conversation, as Xu's rage becomes despair. First he says, "Although this is a bitter moment, how could I choose this path?" But later he says, "If it can be like this, then I can die without regret!" When Shi looks in at dawn, he sees one figure hanging in the rafters, and another in white standing before it, twisting the hanged man's feet with both hands. Shi runs away in terror, and Xu is dead by the time he returns with reinforcements.

Emphasis here is on the predestined nature of the exchange: the ghost knew ahead of time when Xu would be vulnerable to thoughts of suicide, and even an outside observer does not alter the situation.³⁸ Shi has different kinds of perception of hidden worlds, human and otherwise; he eavesdrops twice and looks through the window once. These moments of perception supply different glimpses of singleness and doubling in the conflict with the suicide ghost. When Xu is choosing death, Shi hears only his single voice, persuaded by another inaudible voice; but when he looks in, the death already in progress, he sees two bodies. The precise nature of the transaction between the two remains mysterious.³⁹ This is a tale with a fair amount of elaboration; as a result, both ghost and victim give voice to their suffering. The lower-class milieu of the tale, suggesting a relationship of ghost-inflicted suicide to powerlessness, whether male or female, is suggestive. Does the fact that Xu is allowed to die, with less active interference from the observer than in the tales of rescued women, suggest that a man is allowed more self-determination, even to destroy himself?

As stated before, most of the narratives are content with interrupting a single suicide. But some go further in resolving the ghost's situation, or even questioning the underlying assumptions of the quest for a substitute. First, there are tales in which the ghosts voluntarily and without outside intervention refuse to claim potential substitutes, and as a result eventually escape their situation. Examples appear in Qian Xiyan's seventeenth-century work and in a mid-nineteenth century collection. In the former, ghosts refuse to take more

³⁸ The motif of eavesdropping on a conversation about plans for seeking substitutes appears in three anecdotes in *Kuai yuan*: 13.10a, 13.11b, 13.13b.

³⁹ "Shi er," *Yetan suilu* 6.204.

lives than the one allotted as substitute, thus refusing to prey on the only son of an elderly mother, or on pregnant women. One later example of a drowned ghost simply grows soft hearted. In another, a suicide ghost in the form of a monk, suddenly recalling the pain of his own suicide, rescues his would-be victim. These ghosts are finally promoted by Shangdi to become local gods or *tudi* of the region, suggesting another route out of the status of a ghost.⁴⁰ It is striking that all of these figures of rewarded self-restraint are male.

Sometimes the outside rescuer does more than interrupt a single suicide. In one case in *Zi bu yu*, a man interrupts a ghost on the road before she even reaches her victim, and steals her rope. This ghost had once quarrelled with her husband and committed suicide, and now has heard of another woman on the brink of the same decision. She proposes to her fearless interlocutor that he have her husband's family perform rituals for her, suggesting this might offer her release; instead he enlightens her with a poem, which tells her it is vain to look for substitutes, since she is trapped in her situation by her own desires. If she wishes to leave, she can leave.⁴¹ Here the ghost is a flawed figure who is still capable of being instructed. The pathology of the cycle of substitution is located in the ghost, rather than a potential victim, but curing the ghost rescues both.

A tale in *Er shi lu* (1792) is even more straightforward in questioning the rationality of the concept of ghosts seeking substitutes. A scholar, Liu Qiuya, was in the habit of reading late at night, and he often heard a neighbor woman weaving at the same time. This sets a scene of normative industriousness and gender separation: each is doing the work appropriate to his or her station, and they are not interacting in inappropriate ways. One night he spies a woman attempting to hide an object outside the neighbor's house. He picks it up, discovers it is a hanged ghost's reeking rope, and keeps it. He hears his neighbor sighing, and then weeping, over her weaving. Peeking in, he sees the hanged ghost kneeling before her, pleading desperately. Evidently persuaded, the neighbor woman loosens her belt and prepares to hang herself. Overjoyed, the ghost leaps out the window to retrieve her rope; as she cannot find it, her victim hesitates. The ghost comes to beg Liu for the rope, first trying to terrify him, then to seduce him, and finally telling him straight out that she must have it to free herself from torment and be born again. Liu replies, "If that's the case, then the seeking of substitutes will never end. How could I cause the death of the living, in order that the dead might live? Who created

⁴⁰ This transformation is parallel to that of Xue Fucheng's grandmother Madam Chen, discussed below. *Kuai yuan*, "Taoti gui #5," "Taoti gui #6", 13.13b–15a. "Nigui ziba," *Beidong yuan bi xulu, Biji xiaoshuo daguan yipian*, 8:2.5a–5b. "Yinian jietuo," *Beidong yuan bilu sanbian, Biji xiaoshuo daguan yipian*, 8:4.8b.

⁴¹ "Gui you san ji guo ci gui dao nai qiong," *Zi bu yu* 4.65.

the laws of the underworld? Who carries them out? This causes the living to suffer unexpected disasters, and ghosts also suffer endless cruelty. How can this be allowed? I must write a letter to the infernal authorities, discussing this principle, and overturning this precedent, so that you may live.” He indeed writes such a complaint, and burns it so the ghost can take it back with her. With his letter in her hand, she leaves happy, and the neighbor woman is also found to be well.⁴² Here the fault lies not in the ghost, but in the entire system. The moral sense, determination, and rhetoric of an elite male is sufficient to reform the status quo. We shall see similar arguments in elite discussions of this lore in non-narrative genres. However, comparison of many accounts of interrupted suicide reveals that resolution and exorcism which extend beyond a single suicide are more the exception than the rule.

Janet Theiss argues that in the mid-Qing the woman who commits suicide to preserve her chastity is transformed from a “heroic martyr to an object of state charity.”⁴³ The period in which she observes this change is closely contemporary with the popularity of the “interrupted suicide” plot in the Qianlong era. Tales and government policy may share a view of female suicides as potentially prey to irrational impulses, needing rescue by a rational male, whether as part of the bureaucracy or a passerby.

The Perspective of the Victim

In comparison with other genres like drama or vernacular fiction, *zhiguai* tends to be narrated from a single point of view, that of the (usually male) human who has an encounter with the strange. Other perspectives are usually present only as reported speech. As a result, in the interrupted suicide tales, the perspective of the male outsider is more dominant than that of either the suicidal woman or the ghost. Nevertheless, after interruption or chance rescue, the would-be victim sometimes looks back at the experience. Her psychological experience is often complex, because the victim’s decision to commit suicide is seldom entirely caused by the ghost. There are almost always other underlying causes, other sorrows or angers, which give the ghost the opportunity to act. This is typical of the understanding of ghosts in the Chinese tradition: ghosts take advantage of those who are physically or psychologically vulnerable already, so internal and external causes of disease, madness, or even suicide are never entirely distinguishable. This mixture of motives can be depicted both from the outside, in the observations of strangers, and from the inside, in the potential suicide’s recollections.

⁴² Liu Qiuya, “*Ershi lu*, 1.10.

⁴³ Theiss, 68.

This overlap between madness and the demonic is in contrast to the medieval European case: if suicide was concluded to be the result of temptation by the devil, then the departed's corpse would be punished and his property forfeit, but if it was madness, his family could still inherit.⁴⁴ This made distinguishing the two a matter of intense judicial interest, in contrast to the Chinese case, in which the answer to the question, "is this a ghost or madness, external or internal?" is usually "yes."

In the stories discussed above, although the ghost is sometimes seen pleading with her victim, her actual words are not overheard. This is a conspicuous silence: what did the ghost say which came so close to inciting someone to die? The cunning persuasions of the ghost is half a seduction, but, from our modern perspective, this tale type is a compelling vision of depression or other self-destructive mental illness. In one exceptional case of interrupted suicide in which the seducing ghost is a man, the woman who avoids death puts it in the context of a deep depression after her husband has departed on a distant journey. She felt there was a little voice whispering in her ear, telling her that the sorrows of life were no match for the pleasures of death. Moved, she fell into his trap, and felt that she lost control of herself.⁴⁵ This moment of loss of control is essential; it is at this point that repetition occurs, and the individual self is lost. The persuasion is usually oral and gestural, with the ghost kowtowing, begging, and wheedling. One modern version (supposedly a recorded folktale) has the ghost simply repeating, in rhyme, "It is better to die, better to die, the world of light isn't as good as the world of the shades. Living in the world you suffer from evils, better to be in the shades without troubles. Better to die, better to die, to die is simply better than to live."⁴⁶ This is the simple and seductive message of the ghosts: death is better than the troubles of life. Their rhetoric does not seem in itself sophisticated or persuasive; its success can be taken either to reflect the malevolent influence of ghosts, or the susceptibility of outraged women to this particular message. Revealingly, sometimes the would-be victim does not perceive the ghost at all, either as an apparition or a voice; she perceives the ghosts' persuasions as her own sense of being wronged, and it is only the outsider who recognizes it as an external force.⁴⁷

The ghost offers a rational explanation for an apparently irrational act, and in doing so divides both rationality and irrationality, and culpability and lack of culpability, between two bodies. The ghost is rational, acting deliberately

⁴⁴ Georges Minois, *History of Suicide* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 74.

⁴⁵ "Mou taishi gui qiu dai," *Lantiaoguan waishi*, 4.119.

⁴⁶ "Gui rou," Wen Yansheng, ed., *Zhongguo guihua* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 205.

⁴⁷ See for example "Dianshi," *Cizhong renyu*, 4.2b–3a.

to achieve a particular goal, while the victim is in a heightened emotional state, which blurs judgment. This is what makes the suicide pact similar to a demonic sexual seduction.⁴⁸ The ghost knows exactly what she is doing, and may indeed be sanctioned by higher supernatural authorities; the victim is blinded to consequences. Both seek release, but only the ghost can achieve it through this means.

The moment of loss of will to an outside force, so crucial to the narrative, is at the same time indescribable: after hesitation, in an instant the victim simply gives in. This is the same whether viewed by an outsider observer or remembered by a rescued victim. This is the limitation of the explanatory power of the substitute-seeking ghost. There is an interesting contrast between different kinds of loss of the self in the persuasions of the suicide ghost and tales of spirit possession: the victim is persuaded by the ghost's words and gestures, and finally repeats the ghost's most fatal gesture, but does not start speaking with the voice of the ghost. Yet with possession too there is a clear before and after, with an unclear transition between the two: someone suddenly begins to speak with a voice other than her own, but did she willingly surrender, or was she conquered?

The substitute-seeking ghost and her/his victim are linked figures of sympathy and fear. Although the cycle of seeking substitutes and despairing deaths seems unending, the individual ghost is permitted release, albeit at the expense of her fellow sufferers. Neither the successful nor the thwarted suicide solve the underlying problems, the household dilemmas and quarrels which make young women susceptible to the persuasions of ghosts. Like suicide itself, successful substitution is an escape and change for one individual without final resolution for herself or anyone else. The tale of substitution acknowledges the suffering of both women and ghosts, and deplores the futility of the cycle.

The entire idea of ghosts seeking substitutes is a tacit acknowledgment of the stresses women endure in the family system. The potential victims are nearly always young wives, in conflict with either husbands, sisters-in-law, or mothers-in-law. These are women at their most powerless point in their life course, away from their natal family, but not yet mothers-in-law themselves. This is precisely the same period of high stress which Margery Wolf describes in her study of female suicide in Taiwan in the twentieth century.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ There is a revealing parallel between the suicide ghosts and the development of ideas of sexual parasitism in late imperial fox stories. Foxes have sex with humans for the sake of their own advancement, rather than lust; it is humans who have lost control of their desires. However, it is usually human males who lose control in the tale of the demonic seduction. See Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 183.

⁴⁹ Margery Wolf, "Women and Suicide in China," in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 123.

Stories of suicide ghosts address a kind of suicide neglected by the law. The women who are susceptible to these ghosts are neither chastity martyrs whose actions will be celebrated, nor are they criminals. In comparison with the suicides who figure in the forensic literature, these attempted suicides are indeed worthy of sympathy; their reasons for suicide are quarrels with family members, rather than shame over a genuine crime like an adulterous affair.⁵⁰ They are in a moral and legal gray area. These are not stories of abusive familial situations, nor of insubordinate young women. Rather the causes of despair are characterized as quarrels and misunderstandings, which are seldom described in any detail, and rarely involve a clear assignment of blame. The interrupted suicide narratives do not want to blame either the family or the woman herself for the act; hence the need for the ghost.

Given this avoidance of blame, one can imagine how the narrative of the ghost seeking a substitute would be useful not only to the family trying to explain a suicide, but to a woman rescued from her failed suicide attempt. Rather than claiming her own feelings of rage or despair facing the people who had elicited these emotions, she could offer a narrative in which she was more victim than perpetrator.⁵¹ Claiming such a narrative might not be entirely false: a woman contemplating suicide might well think of models, of other people, remembered or imagined, who had committed suicide.⁵² Those figures might assume a certain vividness when awakening from the unconsciousness of near suffocation.

The idea of hanged ghosts as particularly dangerous can have a cultural effect opposite to this distancing from family conflicts; women can view becoming ghosts as a possible means to take revenge. There is also a mundane aspect to viewing suicide as revenge on one's foes: if it is proven in court that the suicide was coerced, there will be legal repercussions for the parties deemed responsible. According to McCormack's survey of court cases, revenge suicides were an important category.⁵³ Ghosts wearing red were thought to be particularly powerful. Both Ji Yun and Lu Xun, in their respective cultural worlds of the Qianlong and the late Qing/early Republican periods, refer to

⁵⁰ Compare the analysis of court cases of suicide that argues that shame is a principal cause of female suicide, Hsieh and Spence, 33.

⁵¹ In her study of suicide among women in Taiwan, Margery Wolf argues that a woman surviving a suicide attempt would likely be regarded with antipathy by those against whom the suicide was perceived to have been directed. Margery Wolf, "Women and Suicide in China," 113.

⁵² In an essay on suicide, Li Dazhao argues that some cases of multiple suicides in one family which people interpret as the work of vengeful ghosts are actually the results of imitation. Li Dazhao, "Lun zisha," 529.

⁵³ McCormack, 39. Ji Yun includes a story of a suicide who, on the brink of death, wants his family to move him away from his master's house so that his master will not have any legal trouble. He ends up surviving. *Yuewei caotang biji*, 13.692.

women deliberately putting on red clothes before they hanged themselves, in the hope of becoming especially potent haunts.⁵⁴ However, this aspiration is described in terms of revenge on the individuals who wronged her, rather than the generalized harm of seeking substitutes; it is the calculations of *bao* rather than substitution.⁵⁵ In the classical tale, although this possibility is admitted, it does not commonly appear in the narrative proper; it seems left to the vernacular novel.

Paula Zamperini, in her work on vernacular fiction, particularly the late Qing novel *Haishang mingji si da jingang qisshu*, discusses women deliberately committing suicide to take personal revenge as ghosts.⁵⁶ Similarly, the character of Dong Lanqing in the *tanci Tian yu hua* (completed 1651) was a young widow mistreated by her mother-in-law until she hangs herself. She seeks to take revenge on her mother-in-law, rather than simply seeking an arbitrary substitute.⁵⁷ This more personal story, as opposed to the anonymous encounter, is more common in the vernacular than in the classical tale. A classical tale often narrates a brief encounter between otherwise unconnected individuals, but the vernacular novel demands larger patterns of destiny and interpersonal relationships. The polyvocal vernacular novel can focus in a more extended way on the woman's perspective facing death, and even after death. Thus Zamperini's work focuses on suicide as an act of passionate self-expression, whereas the suicide ghost plot deals with the intersection between the individual self and an anonymous cycle.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Yuewei caotang biji*, 13.701. Lu Xun, "Nudiao" in *Qiejieting zawen mopian*, *Lu Xun Sanshinian ji* (Hong Kong: Xinyi chubanshe, 1967) 30:162.

⁵⁵ The two types are combined in a tale in which a the ghost of an angry wife causes a prisoner in her husband's care to commit suicide, prompting his removal from office. "Guiqi suoming," *Beidong yuan bilu sanbian*, 6.1b–2a.

⁵⁶ Paola Zamperini, "Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction," in *Passionate Women*, 77–104.

⁵⁷ Tao Zhenhuai, *Tian yu hua* (Zhongzhou: Zhongzhou chuban she, 1984), 1: 2.86–87.

⁵⁸ The death of Yuanyang (Faithful) in the Gao E chapters of *Hong lou meng* is also more typical of the vernacular fiction than the classical tale tradition. Qinshi, who had in a now-nonexistent version of the text hanged herself from shame when her adultery with her father-in-law was discovered, appears to Yuanyang who is in despair after the death of her mistress, Grandmother Jia. It is Qinshi who offers Yuanyang instruction in how to hang herself. There is no suggestion that Qinshi is released, or that she is preying on Yuanyang. Rather this seems a transmission of a female tradition; Yuanyang had already decided to die, and Qinshi was merely instructing her. Yuanyang's suicide is interpreted as defiant self-expression. The echo of the suicide-seeking ghost is part of Gao E's difficult transition from an illusory world of romance and sensuality to one of morality; it links a death for shame to one applauded as a death for loyalty and chastity, Qinshi as the figure of excessive, erotic passion to Yuanyang, who refuses all attachments to men. The figure in Yuanyang's dream, who introduces herself as Keqing, Jinghuan's younger sister, is literally seeking a substitute to take over for her in her office managing the love-deluded. This is a somewhat more benign form of "seeking of substitutes" in which those who die prematurely, usually of illness, are assumed to have taken up desirable posts in the heavens, but there is a kinship to the suicide ghosts the way that other worlds are pressed into service for explanation of troubling deaths. *Honglou meng* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chuban she, 1988) 3:1526–1527.

In contrast with the revenge tales, rage is absent in the tales of the interrupted suicide. The victim, as she is persuaded by the combination of her familial stresses and the ghost's blandishments, is depicted as despairing and weeping; the ghost usually bears no particular malice against her would-be victim, but expresses eagerness and glee at her own potential release, and anger only after she was been thwarted. The violence the ghosts commit is impersonal, rendering all women with suicidal thoughts interchangeable.

The gap between different generic treatments of the suicide ghosts reveals the flexibility of the material: the classical tale primarily displays elite male concerns and fears facing female suicides, whereas the vernacular genres may present other perspectives. The anonymity and the relative opaqueness of the victim's thoughts seem to impose great intellectual limitations on the genre of the classical tale, but the same features also allow for different operations of sympathy. The tales can express sympathy for the dilemmas of women without undermining any specific household. The lack of understanding of what goes on in the mind of the suicide victim allows both outside observer and reader a different exercise of the moral imagination than the more verbose and polyphonic vernacular genres. The classical tale indicates that there are some things which are not understood. The focus on small, anonymous stories allows for conception of problems in ordinary households, where women and their families were neither extraordinarily virtuous nor extraordinarily wicked.

Substitute-seeking Ghosts and the Work of Grief and Memory: Beyond the Anonymous

In his work on ghosts in medieval Europe, Jean-Claude Schmitt argues that there are two kinds of ghost stories: those which work to promote the cosmology of heaven and hell, and those which do the personal work of grief and memory.⁵⁹ The same is also true of ghosts in the Chinese case. We see the ghost as an expression of personal loss and attachment in one of the most common kinds of ghost story, in which a recently dead soul visits his or her often distant loved ones in a dream to announce his or her death, allowing the ones left behind closure and confirmation of an enduring, supernatural connection. Most importantly, both living and dead get a chance to say goodbye.⁶⁰ The ghosts of strangers can also serve to help with grief facing an inexplicable death, for example in the story of reincarnated ghosts seeking debts as an explanation

⁵⁹ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 52–58.

⁶⁰ Examples are common in both the classical tale and vernacular fiction. Cases from some of the best-known novels include Guan Yu appearing in Liu Bei's dream in *Sanguo yanyi*, or Qinshi appearing in Xifeng's in *Honglou meng*, chapter 13.

of infant mortality. Two of Qian Xiyan's tales about young boys claimed by drowned ghosts seem to be offering grieving parents some explanation. In the first, the grieving family tries to summon the boy's soul; they are told by the medium that their son is happy in the watery realm, and his parents should not worry about him. However, an apparition of the boy returns to his old home, searches for his old toys, and leaves sobbing.⁶¹ The contradiction between the medium's report and the manifestation captures the tensions between parental grief and desire for comfort.

The tales I have discussed so far are placed at a certain distance from their narrator: the characters involved may be anonymous or named, but the events are not presented as personal experience, and the potential suicides are not intimates of the authors. One of the interesting things about *zhiguai* as a genre, however, is that collections can contain personal memory alongside other people's stories. Thus it can either be one of the most detached and anonymous, or one of the most personal of genres. Xue Fucheng (1838–1894), in his collection *Yong'an biji* (earliest surviving edition 1897), includes two tales of completed suicides which illustrate the use of the idea of the substitute-seeking ghost in trying to come to terms with personal loss.⁶²

The first tale involves a plague of hanged ghosts in his mother's natal family, the Gus of Wuxi.⁶³ Back in the beginning of the Yongzheng era (c. 1723, more than a century before Xue was born) a Daoist standing by the Gus' gate sees seven hanged ghosts of unspecified gender enter their door. He warns the family that if he is not employed to exorcise the ghosts immediately, seven people within the household will hang themselves, but he is ignored. Indeed, over the next 70 years, six people, both men and women, commit suicide. Each of them has his or her own reasons: for an unmarried daughter, a dispute with her fiancée's family over wedding expenses, for a young married couple, a dispute with his mother, and for a married couple, a disagreement between the two of them.

It is into a family with this sinister tradition that Xue's maternal grandmother, Madam Chen, marries. In the early morning, she often hears a bird singing something that sounds like local dialect for "go into the side room." She has an old wet-nurse with the gift of seeing ghosts (a recurring figure in Chinese

⁶¹ "Taoti gui #3, #4", *Kuai yuan*, 13.12b–13a. Qian Xiyan was at this time grieving for his own lost sons, which suggests a hidden motivation for recording such tales.

⁶² Xue Fucheng served Zeng Guofan as a clerk, and then worked on foreign relations under Li Hongzhang, in his late years even travelling to Europe. It is intriguing that a man of his cultural position also made original contributions to *zhiguai*. See the biographical note in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Reprint Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991), 1:331–332.

⁶³ This location in the family structure may be significant in and of itself: men will admit things going on in their *waijia* which they would never narrate about their paternal family.

folklore), who often observes a hanged ghost pacing outside the door. Many years later the nurse warns the family to be very careful, because the ghost has been acting very cheerful and pleased with itself, knowing its opportunity was drawing near. One morning Chen sends the nurse to buy flowers, and when she returns her mistress has already hanged herself in the side room. This was the 27th day of the seventh month of 1803; the exact date, uncommon in more anonymous *zhiguai*, marks this as a story close to the narrator.⁶⁴

Because these events all happened so long before Xue was born, one assumes he has received this narrative from his mother and her relatives. One can imagine this idea of a family curse as constructed later, to help explain a great burden of grief. It is conspicuous that Madam Chen's story, although so much more detailed in other respects, completely omits any suggestions of other motives for her death. She is the only one of the seven who had no reason other than the family curse. She is shown as an irreproachable daughter-in-law, neither angry nor depressed, and thus a pure victim. Somewhat like the woman in Wang Mingde's tale, it is her location in this household more than her emotional state which makes her vulnerable. Her direct interactions with the ghost happen off stage. This reticence is understandable given that she is such close kin to those who tell the tale; those who transmit the story may indeed include the same kin with whom she might have quarreled, or who might have had an obligation to save her.

The redemption of this problematic figure, a grandmother who might become a predatory ghost, becomes even clearer in the end of the story and in the continuation in the following tale. Soon after her death, someone in the family dreams of her explaining that she has asked Shangdi to expel all the hanged ghosts from their locality, so from then on no one in the area hanged him or herself. Far from perpetrating violence, she acts to eliminate it. This transformation into a protective spirit (which can often happen to the victims of violent death in the Chinese tradition) is carried further in the next anecdote.⁶⁵ Xue opens by acknowledging that according to legend ghosts of those who die of hanging become haunts where they died, but contends that this is not always the case. After Chen died, the family often glimpsed her coming and going from the family shrine; this manifestation implies her continued role as an ancestress, rather than malevolent haunting. The room where she hanged herself is converted to a kitchen (rather than being locked and abandoned), and later, in another reversal of haunting into protection, she warns them of a fire about to break out there.

⁶⁴ "Yigui weisui," Xue Fucheng, *Yong'an biji*, (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1999), 6.213.

⁶⁵ One prominent example of a tormented woman who becomes a benevolent goddess is the privy spirit Zigu. Ma Shutian, *Zhongguo minjian zhushen*, 275–76.

Further developments of Chen's story reveal the potential resentment of a suicide by those who survive. After her death, the family was impoverished. His maternal grandfather had died young, leaving another grandmother of Xue's, Madam Hou (I assume this is a later wife of Xue's grandfather, and there is no hint in the text as to which, Hou or Chen, is Xue's biological grandmother) and two daughters (one of them Xue's mother). They supported themselves with needlework. Madam Hou had been bedridden for nine years. She often railed, "Since she hanged herself for no reason, she's left me behind to suffer in a hundred ways, wanting to die but unable to. If her spirit is still sentient, why can't she take me with her?" One night she dreamed of a woman who told her that after her death she had often returned to her old home to protect the family. She said she had begged Shangdi to protect her family, but the Gu family was fated to decline. Fortunately, Hou had a good fate, and would see her grandson (i.e., Xue) succeed. She said that Hou still had 30 years to live, and massaged Hou's chest. She recovered, and never resented Chen again. Here, far from being jealous of her successor, or inciting a despairing woman who longs for death to follow her, Chen saves Hou's life.⁶⁶ When the author himself was eight years old and visiting his maternal relatives, he fell very ill; doctors gave him up for dead. Yet after a vision of a woman who resembled Chen sprinkling him with water, he recovered. Seventy-seven years after her death, Chen was granted rank because of the career of one of her descendants of Xue's generation.⁶⁷

A figure of familial memory who could have been entirely negative, the woman who committed suicide to leave another woman to deal with the burdens of her family and widowhood, is transformed into a rescuer of the line. Xue seems to be a recipient here of lore from the female side of his family, who have made Chen into both victim and savior. There is no male observer here, save the grandson in the distant future. Xue's own fevered dream as a child is incorporated into the family legend. Both deploying and reversing the idea of ghosts seeking substitutes allows the Gu family to have it both ways: Chen's suicide is explained by an anonymous figure in a cycle of repetition, but she herself breaks that cycle, maintaining her name and her identity in her family, and insuring family continuity (albeit only through descendants of other surnames). By the time Xue records the tale the Gu family has died

⁶⁶ Compare Ji Yun's similarly positive portrayal of the relations between his dead and living mothers. *YWCT* 5.224.

⁶⁷ "Shuling hehu jiaen," *Yong'an biji*, 6.215. An inexplicable death of a beloved female kinswoman, the sister of the author's uncle by marriage, young, beautiful, and newly married, is explained rather differently in *Shouyi zhai kechuang biji*, as personal revenge of a ghost for wrongs in a previous life. This is another way to explain the suicide of the apparently untroubled and blameless, focusing on the history of the individual soul rather than the anonymous cycle of substitution. 2.24b.

out, and he wants to buy land to continue their sacrifices; preserving some of their family lore seems to be an expression of the same impulse.

A story about a drowned ghost recorded a few pages later in the collection reveals similar processes of grief and rationalization. Here the protagonists are not a family, but a trio of male friends, all Xue's colleagues as clerks of Zeng Guofan.⁶⁸ After Zeng Guofan died, two of them accompany the funeral boat, one in the same boat as the coffin, the other in his own boat. Thus they are in a liminal space in two ways, not only traveling by water, but accompanying the dead. One friend, Li Hongyi, notices that the other, Tang Huanzhang, seems different than before, often saying he did not have long to live. When Li presses him to explain, he hesitates and makes meaningless answers. One night Tang went back to his own boat, but is nowhere to be found the next morning. One of the boatman reports hearing a voice saying, "Master Li sent this boat to pick up Master Tang" and a splashing sound, but when they check they found that Tang is not on the other boat either, and that indeed a boat was never sent to pick him up. They conclude that a drowned ghost has used this trick to lure him to his death.⁶⁹ The corpse is eventually found. Before their third friend, Xiao Shibei, got word of Tang's death, he had a vision of him soaking wet in a dream. When asked why he had come, Tang said, "I don't know why I slipped and then fell, I reached the bottom, and I can't get out." Xiao woke and got news of Bocun's death the next morning.⁷⁰ Although Tang is not redeemed and transformed the way Madam Chen was, his last appearance in the narrative is as a ghost who despite his distress still remembers his friends and comes to say goodbye, preserving some aspects of his humanity rather than becoming a haunt himself.

In our cultural context, we would read this as a man suffering from depression (perhaps related to his powerful patron's death?) who already hinted to his friend that he was going to commit suicide. When he does, his friends construct their own culturally coherent explanation for his death. Even Tang's comment in the dream could be a description of a plunge into a psychological rather than a physical abyss. Yet in the end, both medical descriptions of mental illness and tales of predatory ghosts reveal a fundamental kinship, as both are attempts to explain the mysterious actions of other people, who have left us behind without an explanation. Both place the cause outside of the lost one's intention and control.

⁶⁸ Both Li Hongyi and Xiao Shibei are prominent enough to have biographies in official historical sources; of the three friends, only Tang, the suicide, is absent.

⁶⁹ There is a parallel anecdote in which a sedan chair is the means for a drowned ghost to trick an older woman into coming to the water; but in this case as well, the woman was suffering from a depression first. "Shuigui taoti yong jiao," *Yijong baibian*, 6.22b.

⁷⁰ "Shuigui jiamao shanban chuan," *Yong'an biji*, 6.7a.

In contrast with these tales of personal loss, sometimes the substitute-seeking ghosts are markers of specific national and historical memory. The famous Ming loyalist courtesan Liu Rushi becomes a hanged ghost seeking substitutes in a Qianlong anecdote, and in another of Xue Fucheng's stories, the former Taiping officials drowned in a pond in an official residence north of Nanjing become predatory drowned ghosts in the years after the suppression of the rebellion.⁷¹ Since Liu Rushi's death, the chambers where it had happened were kept locked, but in 1780 someone lodging there decided he needed the space to house his concubines. One of his concubines narrowly escaped the ghost's attack, but the other and her two maids fall victim. The multiple deaths imply that an exact arithmetic of substitution is not at work here. The room is locked up as before, and there are no further anomalies. In Xue Fucheng's story, he himself lives near the haunted pool in 1871, and hears strange noises outside the windows, which he learns to ignore. Yet in 1874, a servant of the succeeding official is almost seized by a drowned ghost by daylight, and the official's middle-aged nephew actually does drown. However, there was another cause for the nephew's death: he had just received a letter from home telling him of the death of a son. The ghost preyed on him because of his grief. A few months later, the official resigns his post because of an illness; it was this decline which allowed the ghosts to be so bold. Xue appreciates how much more under control the ghosts were when he was there, and they merely made noises outside his window. The tale implies that former rebels still lie in wait, ready to cause difficulties whenever the present authorities weaken.

In some ways the loyal courtesan and the rebels are figures with opposite historical meanings, and the tales take place at very different chronological distances from the original deaths, the former more than a century later, the latter only a decade. Yet both tales involve both failed and successful quests for substitutes, and both encounters are resolved by avoidance rather than exorcism, suggesting that dark historical memories still linger.

Critiques of the Suicide Ghost

The interrupted suicide plot is an attempt to control a frightening specter that also reinforces the image of this horrifying figure. Such stories demonstrate the sinister power of the ghosts over vulnerable individuals, but also reveal that that power has limitations. As we saw in the tales from *Zi bu yu* and *Er shi lu*, and in a different way in Madam Chen's story, some stories go further in questioning the assumptions of the seeking of substitutes. This kind of critique also appears outside of narrative, revealing the problems elite thinkers had with the logical and moral implications of the cycle of substitution.

⁷¹ "Liu Rushi wei li," *Zi bu yu*, 16.304. "Shuigui baizhou la ren," *Yong'an biji*, 6.6b.

Critique seems to accompany tales of the seeking of substitutes from early in the history of the motif. In his introductory remarks to the tale of a thief interrupting a suicide introduced above, Wang Mingde calls the idea of substitute-seeking ghosts a tale to “beguile the world and fool the multitudes.” The editor of the collection, Zhang Chao, also appends a comment stating he does not believe in this idea. “If this is the case, then does that mean that this kind of ghost has a fixed roster, which can neither be added to nor decreased? This is really incomprehensible.”⁷²

Ji Yun, one of the writers who made the most sustained attempt to rationally explain the supernatural, also questions the belief:

Hanged ghosts and drowned ghosts seeking substitutes are seen frequently in *xiaoshuo*. But those who cut their throats⁷³ or poison themselves, and those who die of fire or suffocation, have since ancient times never been known to seek substitutes.

Why is this? The Han peak of Jehol bears a striking resemblance to an old monk sitting in meditation, and many travellers climb up to see it. Recently someone fell from the peak and died. Since then occasionally people from the town went mad for no reason, and ran up to the peak and threw themselves off the plummet down. Everyone said this was the ghost seeking substitutes. They hired a monk to do rituals to appease it, but it had no effect. Only when the local official guarded the peak with soldiers did it stop.

When a ghost who committed suicide waits for a substitute, it is because he values life lightly. If he lost his footing and died, this was not because he valued his life lightly. If he was beguiled by a ghost and threw himself down, this is even less because he valued life lightly. If he must wait for a cycle of substitution, what reason is there for this? I say this might be revenge, or it might be a mountain demon making problems, and seeking offerings to enjoy. One cannot use a blanket explanation of ghosts seeking substitutes.⁷⁴

Ji questions the logic behind the belief, and its application to a particular case, but stops short of discrediting the general concept. He questions the motivation of a ghost: if he himself did not intend to die, why would he be set on killing others?

⁷² Wang Mingde, “Ji Yigui,” *Yu Chu xin zhi* 13.250–51.

⁷³ In contrast, Zhang Chao, in his comment to Wang Mingde’s story, lists those who commit suicide by cutting their own throats as among those who seek substitutes. *Yu Chu xin zhi* 13.251.

⁷⁴ *Yuewei caotang biji*, 13.707, story 169.

The commentary to He Bang'e's *Yetan suilu*, which is usually relatively morally conventional, asks after the story of the suicidal barber and the overhead ghosts discussed above: "That karmic curses from the past are foreordained, and can in the end not be escaped, is perhaps sometimes the case. But in the infernal world, they release this ghost to kill a man and replace itself, and the one who dies will again seek a substitute, will this revenge ever come to an end? Moreover once the ghosts have the permission of the local authorities, can they do whatever they want, without any supervision from the infernal officials? Is the infernal official just sitting around receiving bribes from ghosts? This is infuriating!"⁷⁵ Like Liu Qiuya in the anecdote discussed above, the commentator is troubled by endless repetition, and the attempt to control the motif by having the ghost attain permission to seek a substitute results instead in a view of infernal justice as corrupt.

In comparison with these earlier critiques in the context of judgments on *zhiguai* tales, in the 1870s, an editorial in the *Shen bao*, one of the first influential Chinese newspapers, chooses these ghosts as a site of contention. At a historically and generically significant point for negotiations between Chinese and Western concepts of the supernatural, in some ways this editorial represents a new elite discourse on the supernatural, but in other ways it is a continuation of traditional elite critiques of popular beliefs. Like the earlier critics, this anonymous author seems troubled that the suicide ghosts do not fit well into ideas of either individual revenge or universal justice. This essay opens boldly, "China and the outside world are a single world, with the same yin and yang; but overseas they do not believe in fate, and thus there are no ghosts and gods. In China all believe in it, and thus they gradually come to believe that such things really exist." Although all nations share one natural world, cultural differences create different supernatural worlds. The idea that ghosts and gods are products of human belief does not render them powerless; precisely as such they can be extremely destructive. It shifts the onus of this destruction from the ghosts themselves to the human mind, and particularly the minds of other classes. The premise that ghosts have a psychological origin is of long standing in China,⁷⁶ and particularly popular in the Qing. The introduction of a whole class of people who apparently neither believe in nor encounter ghosts merely confirms it.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "Shi er," *Yetan suilu* 6.204.

⁷⁶ The classic statement is in Wang Chong's *Lun heng*. "Whenever there are ghosts in heaven and earth, they are not produced by the spirits of the dead; they are all summoned by people's thoughts." Wang Chong, "Ding gui pian," in Huang Hui, ed., *Lun heng jiaoshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 3:22.931.

⁷⁷ Compare a story of haunting by a snake spirit, in which the conclusion asks why no foreigners residing in China or overseas are ever troubled by such creatures. "It is evident that if one believes in them, they exist; if not, they don't." "Bisui yiju," *Shen bao* 12/27/1877, 22.13837.

The essay goes on to point out logical flaws in the conception of these wronged dead. In a sense this is an expansion of earlier critics' questions. Why does one only hear of drowned ghosts in lakes, rivers, and wells, but never on the open seas? (From our perspective, this discrepancy reveals a distinction between known and unmarked cultural landscapes.) There must have been someone who drowned first to begin the chain of ghostly substitutions, but what explains that first death? Why does the person who dies of poisoning seek a substitute while the one who dies of medical malpractice take no revenge on the doctor? Similarly, when a woman dies in childbirth, she is believed to cause the death of childbearing women in her own family; why doesn't she seek out women in the incompetent midwife's family? In a revealing comment, the author contends if the god in charge of fate really demands that the wronged dead kill other innocents, it would be better if China, like foreign places, had no such god, and it has already been implied that the Chinese have the power to decide this. This is a general challenge to the idea of the ghosts and spirits, apparently choosing the suicide ghosts as a weak point to attack.

The author concludes that in China, in contrast to the West, one relies on heaven's justice more than the law on earth. The last cases, the unrepentant quack and midwife, cause the essay to take an unexpected turn to the practical, suggesting human order taking over where the divine order has apparently failed. Some unjust deaths at least could be avoided by better training of doctors and medical supervision of midwives. This, rather than their own ghostly revenge, is the way to deal with the problem of the wronged dead.⁷⁸ Insistence on justice and rationality in the other world turns to plans, on a much smaller scale, for justice in this one. There is an interesting disjunction between the two halves of this argument. The flaws of the idea of substitute-seeking ghosts are pointed out, but the proposed solution addresses only the injustice which is most easily controlled, professional incompetence rather than familial sorrows. Some of the most frightening ghosts, like the hanged ghosts, are still not exorcised. This style of argument about the supernatural is reminiscent of Ji Yun, and the concern with heavenly illogic or injustice resembles that in the commentary on *Yetan suilu*, but to suggest changes in public policy based on such arguments is a departure.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Actually, I have yet to see narrative examples of ghosts who died of poison seeking substitutes. Ji Yun listed them as among the kinds of ghosts who do not seek substitutes. The example from the play *Yun pi ji*, which jokes about substitute-seeking ghosts around a quack doctor's office, is a jest which is not fulfilled within the plot. Qiu Ruiwu, *Yun pi ji*, in Mao Jin, *Liushi zhong qu*, 6:3427.

⁷⁹ "Lun shefa yi jiu wangsi," SB, 11/3/1876, 17.11001. See discussion of this essay in the context of the *Shen bao*'s overall coverage of the supernatural, Huntington, "The Newspaper, *zhiguai*, and the Sorcery Epidemic of 1876," in Wei Shang, ed., *Dynastic Decline and Cultural Innovation: From Late Ming to Late Qing and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Series, forthcoming).

Although the *Shen bao*'s editorial presents new grounds for questioning the idea of suicide ghosts, and reaches new conclusions, tales of substitute-seeking ghosts still appear in its pages, as well as in *zhiguai* collections of the same era.⁸⁰ Although generic frames have changed, as in the earlier collections, critique of the idea of these ghosts can coexist alongside stories about them. This inconsistency can be explained by the differing generic nature of narratives as opposed to theorizing about the supernatural. The substitute-seeking ghosts are a reflection of popular culture, in the sense of culture shared by all levels of the society. Classical tale collections represent elite narration and mediation of popular material (but note that in this sense of "popular," "popular" does not necessarily mean "someone else's stories," as we saw in the case of Xue Fucheng.) Publishing theories about the supernatural, whether in comments on narratives or in separate essays, is a more exclusively elite activity, which finds the substitute-seeking ghosts harder to digest.

Reenactment

The role of the suicide ghost in performance traditions provides a useful contrast with the ghosts in narrative. The hanged ghost was a popular figure on the Chinese stage. In particular, although not directly related to the main plot of Mulian rescuing his mother from hell, scenes of a ghost seeking a substitute became a popular section of the performances of that material. The manifestations of the motif in different regional drama traditions is a complex topic awaiting further research. It is significant that the scenes of the hanged ghost David Johnson describes in his survey are all in their own ways interrupted suicide plots. The victims are largely women who have been falsely accused of adultery, hence sympathetic figures, but in more extreme duress than the women having more ordinary quarrels with their in-laws in the classical tale. Their rescuers tend to be gods or spirits, rather than the mortal intruders of the *zhiguai* tales.⁸¹ This difference may be related to the needs of both drama and religious ritual. There is a suggestive parallel between the main plot's exploration of themes of female guilt, pollution, and redemption, and the suicide ghosts.⁸² To perform the Hanged Woman's story in the context of the Mulian opera serves as exorcism, offering closure for this frightening figure; but it is in the nature of ritual exorcism that the same horror and closure must be repeated again and again.

⁸⁰ For example, "Nigui taoti *Shen bao* 3/1/1878, 22.14228; "Nigui bian ta" *Shen bao* 10/29/1883, 39.26740.

⁸¹ Johnson, "Actions Speak Louder than Words," 20–24.

⁸² See also Beata Grant, "The Spiritual Saga of Woman Huang: From Pollution to Purification," in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual*, 226 and *passim*.

The most prominent appearance of the suicide ghost in modern literature is likely Lu Xun's account of the Hanged Man and the Hanged Woman in Shaoxing opera productions of the Mulian story which he saw as a child. Ghosts, with all the different senses of the word, are often on the borderline between horror and comedy, especially in the vernacular and performance traditions. The link between the two may be entertainment. In the productions Lu Xun experienced, the Hanged Man is a sheer display of acrobatic prowess, hanging himself from various parts of his body, while the Hanged Woman is a subject of fear and sympathy. The gender division between the comic and frightening ghost is striking.⁸³ She, too, had been a mistreated child bride who finally hanged herself; she hears the sounds of weeping, another woman ready to kill herself.⁸⁴ The Hanged Woman is a particularly visually arresting figure; in Lu Xun's memory she is beautiful, if frightening. In other local drama traditions she is often depicted with a long, trailing tongue, an exaggeration of the protruding tongue in the actual corpse of someone who has been hanged.⁸⁵ It is possible that this kind of ghost is popular on stage precisely because of the opportunities for vivid costuming.⁸⁶ In the classical tale, revelation of this horrific face is often reserved for the moment when a thwarted ghost tries to frighten the man who interrupted.⁸⁷ It is a momentary, terrifying apparition, as opposed to the more pleasing forms ghosts who are persuading their victims use; but in drama, this imagery is central. Illustrating the continuing appeal of the figure, Lu Xun's essay (in combination with another essay on the Wuchang, with which it is frequently linked) has in turn been adapted into a modern play.⁸⁸ Lu Xun writes about these performances from a perspective of nostalgia and distance: he is introducing something local to a national readership, and a childhood memory to a changed world.

The themes of systemic injustice to women and old patterns taking over individual fates expressed in the classical tale are explored further in the deployment of the suicide ghost motif in the modern novella and film *Raise the Red Lantern* (the original novella under the title "Wives and Concubines").

⁸³ A vengeful female ghost can, however, sometimes also be a source of comic entertainment on stage. The ghost of Yan Poxi in the popular *kunqu* scene *Huo zhao san lang* uses some of the trappings of the ghost seeking a substitute, she is taking personal revenge. The inconsistency that she is pursuing her lover Zhang Sanlang, rather than Song Jiang who killed her, is perhaps related to the substitute-seeking tradition. That her hapless prey is played by the *chou* (clown) character reveals the mix of horror and comedy. Performance by actors of the Shanghai *kunqu* troop, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, fall 2000.

⁸⁴ Lu Xun, "Nudiao," 157–164.

⁸⁵ Dr. Robert Huntington (forensic pathologist), personal communication, fall 2003.

⁸⁶ This was suggested to me by Li Jianguo, who himself recalled seeing the hanged woman on stage as a child in Shanxi. Li Jianguo, personal communication, fall 2002.

⁸⁷ For example, *Gui you san ji guo ci gui dao nai qiong*, "Zi bu yu" 4.65. "Liu Qiuya," *Ershi lu*, 1.10.

⁸⁸ Wang Yansong, "Wo, zai huangtan zhong zhaoxun meihao: 'Wuchang nudiao' daoyan shouji," *Zhongguo xiju*: 2001.11. Thanks to Tian Min for this reference.

In the novella, the presence of the tradition is overt; in the film it is suggested implicitly. In both versions, the deaths of former concubines have created a haunted place in the household, which exerts an irresistible fascination and horror for the heroine Songlian. In the novella, it is a well where women in earlier generations have been drowned; in the movie, it is changed to a locked room where women have been hanged. The ghosts in these places are, however, unlike the women in the interrupted suicide plot, women guilty of adultery, and they are executed, rather than suicides. Most importantly, in comparison with the *zhiguai* treatment of the motif, the modern novella shows the encounter with the ghost through the eyes of the would-be victim throughout. The traditional complex interaction between psychic distress and affliction by ghosts is reinterpreted through the extended narration of interiority modern fiction makes possible.⁸⁹

In the novella, the growing influence and presence of the well is developed in two ways, in Songlian's own encounters with it, and in her conversations with others about the dark family secrets it embodies. At the point of her first encounter with the well, the oppressive cold that she feels when she looks down in her reflection in the well is a traditional sign of the presence of a ghost. However, the emphasis is on looking at, and later losing, her own reflection, which reinterprets the loss of self of the suicide plot.⁹⁰ Once the reflection of her eyes is obscured by a leaf in the well, she actually sees a pale hand in the water and hears voices calling her to come down.⁹¹ The disturbing presence of the ghosts links Songlian and the third concubine Meishan, with Meishan standing between the roles of victim of the earlier ghosts and predatory ghost inciting Songlian to follow in her footsteps. More than once Songlian hears Meishan performing Peking Opera arias linked to female suicide, first "The Hanged Woman" and then a version of Du Shiniang's story, standing by the fateful well.⁹² In a variation on the theme of substitution between ghosts and humans, both Meishan and Songlian at different times joke that the ghosts in the well resemble themselves. When Songlian asks Meishan to teach her how to sing the Du Shiniang aria, Meishan asks if she wants to commit suicide, and offers to teach her how to do that, mimicking the instruction of the substitute-seeking ghost. Immediately after this dialogue, they talk about the

⁸⁹ For an example of the use of suggestions of a drowned ghost in a contemporary novel, see Tu Huai-zhang, *Renyang* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2003) 318–319, 327. Again, the influence of the ghost is combined with other reasons for despair; interestingly, on one occasion it is a woman who rescues a man from the ghost.

⁹⁰ Su Tong, *Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas*, Micahel S. Duke trans. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 21–22. Su Tong, *Su Tong wenji: hunyin jijing* (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 113–114.

⁹¹ Duke, 53–54. Su Tong, 132–133.

⁹² Su Tong, 118. Duke, 31.

ghosts in the well, and Meishan says, “One of them was you and one of them was me.”⁹³ Meishan is eventually discovered with a lover and thrown in the well, and Songlian goes mad, repeating that she will not jump.

In the film, the presence of the ghost tradition is preserved in some pieces of dialogue retained word for word from the novella. Mentions of ghosts and the fatal room are often at pivotal points in the plot, such as the conversation between Songlian and her husband at the beginning of the autumn section of the film. In contrast with the novel, ghosts are present only in what the characters say; for example, Zhuoyun comments that Songlian’s color doesn’t look good when she returns from discovering the room of the hanged women. In a conversation with Meishan in which she says “People are ghosts, and ghosts people,” Songlian then wonders whether it would be better to die by hanging, suggesting the influence of the ghost. After Meishan dies, Songlian lights the lanterns in her room and plays a record of Meishan singing opera, convincing the servants of the household that Meishan’s ghost is haunting them, creating another kind of complicity between the dead woman and the living one. Songlian does not speak in the final scene, but she is dressed again in the schoolgirl’s clothes in which she first arrived, wandering like a ghost who cannot turn corners to find her way out, enclosed within the family’s walls.⁹⁴ The absence of overt ghosts makes it clear that the fatal flaw is in the human relations and customs of the house. In both novella and film, unlike in the classical tale, the cycle of substitution is both completed and interrupted: one woman fulfills the cycle, and the other goes mad trying to resist it, ending up another kind of ghost. There is no male intervention to rescue anyone; on the contrary, the men enforce the power of the ghosts. The film asks whether either defiance or rescue would have been possible.

Conclusion

The analysis of substitute-seeking ghosts in this paper has depended on a series of dichotomies: on the more concrete level, between the living and the dead, men and women, and the classical tale and other genres; and on the more abstract level, between justice and injustice, the explicable and the inexplicable, sympathy and horror, and, finally, the individual case and repetition. As always with yin/yang analysis, there is a complicated interplay between each pair of terms, as each contains the possibility of the other.

The idea of the suicide ghost is based on a related but slightly different calculation of exchange than the usual mechanics of karmic revenge and reward. A life is traded for a life, but not that of a murderer for the murdered, which

⁹³ Su Tong, 145. Duke, 73.

⁹⁴ Zhang Yimou, *Raise the Red Lantern*, Orion Pictures, 1991.

closes a circle. Rather, reflecting the nature of suicide, life is traded for life, but the roles of victim and perpetrator are mixed, and the two figures meet in the anonymity of a shared act, rather than a particular history of wrongs done.

The conjoined pair of the suicide ghost and her would-be victim explore a space of horror and sympathy which is left out of other discourses on suicide, which try to distinguish black and white areas of praise and blame. The ordinary women and their relatively ordinary ghost counterparts glimpsed in these stories provide a useful supplement to tales of idealized chastity martyrs or shamed adulteresses. The motif reveals both a fear of a wandering female stranger, who could also be seen as revealing the unguessed dark and violent side of the women who remain within their households, and a sympathy for another female stranger, suffering behind another family's walls, which can be extended to the women within one's own household.

This tale type also reveals late imperial Chinese ideas of interiority by examining powerless individuals at a moment of crisis. Because of its spare narrative style and tendency to focus on a single point of view, in some ways *zhiguai* allows the least room for exploration of the human interior of any of the narrative or dramatic genres. But perhaps precisely because of the lack of poetic arias of introspection or extended passages describing thought or emotion, the tale of the failed suicide attempt and failed quest for a substitute dramatizes an interior struggle in a unique way. The wish to die is given a physical form observed from the outside, and a voice recalled in retrospect. The tale provides a glimpse of the hidden, but it also delineates what cannot be known: what really happens at the moment of decision, when the ghost's persuasion is successful, and the balance between the ghost and the other causes of suicide. These lacunae can sharpen both horror and sympathy.

The narratives posit the idea of an endless cycle of suicide and substitution, but never depict more than one link in the chain, meaning one encounter between ghost and would-be substitute. This is partially due to the narrative constraints of the *zhiguai*. Interest is in the point where the recurring gesture of taking one's own life and the particular stresses on one individual meet. An individual's sorrows might possibly be effaced, to simply become part of a pattern. But it is the moment of that possible erasure which is of interest. The successful rescue attempts to confront both, the cycle of substitution and individual grief, but of course the story reminds us that reasons for committing suicide also keep repeating themselves.

Glossary

bao	報	shuigui	水鬼
changui	產鬼	taoti	討替
diaosi gui	弔死鬼	Tian yu hua	天雨花
Er shi lu	耳食錄	tudi	土地
gui	鬼	Wang Mingde	王明德
Haishang minggi si da jingang qishu 海上名妓四大金剛奇書		Xue Fucheng	薛福成
Ji Yun	紀昀	xun	殉
Jin shi	金史	yangui	煙鬼
jiugui	酒鬼	yetan suilu	夜談隨錄
Kuai yuan	獐園	yigui	縊鬼
Li Chi zhuan	李赤傳	Yijian zhi	夷堅志
Liaozhai zhiyi	聊齋誌異	Yong'an biji	庸庵筆記
Liu Zongyuan	柳宗元	Yu chu xin zhi	虞初新志
Mulian	目連	Yun pi ji	運甓記
nisi gui	溺死鬼	Zhang chao	張潮
Shenbao	申報	zhiguai	志怪
		Zi bu yu	子不語

References

- Campany, Robert. *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Cao Xueqin. *Honglou meng*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chuban she, 1988.
- Chan, Tak-hung Leo. *The Discourse of Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth Century Chinese Storytelling*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.
- Cheng Zhixiang. *Ci zhong renyu. Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo shiliao huibian*. vol. 26. Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1981.
- Gu Xijia, "Qingdai biji xiaoshuo zhong de yigui shouzu xing gushi," *Minjian wenhua* 1999.2, 52–55.
- Hanyu da cidian*. Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chuban she, 1990–1993.
- He Bang'e. *Yetan suilu*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988.
- Hsieh, Andrew and Jonathan Spence. "Jindai yiqian de zhongguo shehui de zisha xingwei yu jiating de guanxi." In Lin Zongyi and Arthur Kleinman, eds., *Wenhua yu xingwei*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990.
- Hummel, Arthur. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*. Reprint Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991.
- Huntington, Rania. *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Series, 2003.
- . "The Newspaper, *zhiguai*, and the Sorcery Epidemic of 1876." In Wei Shang, ed., *Dynastic Decline and Cultural Innovation: From Late Ming to Late Qing and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Series, forthcoming.
- Ji Yun. *Yuewei caotang biji zhuyi*. Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1994.
- Jin Pengchang. *Shouyizhai kechunag biji* and *Kechuang erbi. Suxiang shi congshu* 14–16. Reprint: Guangzhou, 1890.
- Jinshi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.
- Johnson, David. "Actions Speak Louder than Words: the Cultural Significance of Chinese Ritual Opera" in Johnson, ed. *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: Mulien Rescues his Mother in Chinese Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California, 1987.
- Kao, Karl S. *Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and Fantastic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

- Lau, Joseph S.M. "The Courage to Be: Suicide as Self-Fulfillment in Chinese History and Literature," *Tamkang Review*, vol. 19, 715–734.
- Li Dazhao, "Lun zisha" in *Li Dazhao wenji*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984. 2:517–537.
- Li Jianguo. *Tang wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu*. Tianjin: Nankai University Press, 1994.
- Li Qingchen. *Zuicha zhiguai*. Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1990.
- Li Wai-ye. *Enchantment and Disenchantment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Liang Gongchen. *Beidong yuan bilu sanbian, Biji xiaoshuo daguan yipian*.
- Liu Zongyuan ji*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979.
- Lu Xun. "Nudiao" in *Qiejieting zawen mobian, Lu Xun Sanshinian ji*. Hong Kong: Xinyi chubanshe, 1967, 30:157–164.
- Ma Shutian, ed. *Zhongguo minjian zhushen*. Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 1997.
- McCormack, Geoffrey. "Suicide in Traditional Chinese Law," *Chinese Culture: A Quarterly Review* Vol.32.2, June 1991, 33–47.
- Minois, Georges. *History of Suicide*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Pan Lun'en. *Daoting tushuo*. Hefei: Huangshan sushe, 1996.
- Qian Xiyan. *Kuai yuan zhiyi*. Preface 1614. Microfiche in the Van Gulik Collection.
- Qiu Ruiwu. *Yun pi ji*. In Mao Jin, *Liushi zhong qu*, 12 vols. Taipei: Kaiming shudian, 1970, 6:3391–3526.
- Schmitt, Jean-Claude. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Shen bao*. Reprints of the 1872–1887 issues. *Zhongguo shixue congshu* reprint edition. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1965.
- Shu Hede et al, eds., *Qinding shengchao xunjie zhuchen lu* in *Siku quanshu* 456.
- Song Maocheng. "Fuqing nongzhuan," reprinted in Tang Zhengbi. *Sanyan liangpai ziliao*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980. Shang: 353–354.
- Strickmann, Michel. *Chinese Magical Medicine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

- Su Tong. *Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas*, Micahel S. Duke trans., New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993.
- Su Tong. *Su Tong wenji: hunyin jijing*. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993.
- Tang Yongzhong. *Yijiong baibian*. Preface 1849. *Biji xiaoshuo daguan congkan*. Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1973. vol.32.
- Tao Zhenhuai. *Tian yu hua*. Zhongzhou: Zhongzhou chuban she, 1984.
- Theiss, Janet. "Managing Martyrdom: Female Suicide and Statecraft in Mid-Qing China." In Paul Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet Zurndorfer, eds. *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Tu Huaizhang. *Renyang*. Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban she, 2003.
- Unschuld, Paul. *Chinese Medicine: A History of Ideas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Wang Chong. Huang Hui, ed. *Lun heng jiaoshi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995.
- Wang Yansong, "Wo, zai huangtan zhong zhaoxun meihao: 'Wuchang nudiao' daoyan shouji," *Zhongguo xiju*: 2001.11.
- Watson, James L. "Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society: Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy," in Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Wen Yansheng, ed. *Zhongguo guihua*. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991.
- Wolf, Arthur. "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Wolf, ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.
- Wolf, Margery. "Women and Suicide in China," in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke eds. *Women in Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- Xu Feng'en. *Lantiaoguan waishi*. Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1996.
- Xue Fucheng. *Yongan biji*. Printed under the same cover as Niu Xiu, *Gusheng*. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1999.
- Yu Yue. *Youtai xianguan biji*. Shanghai: Chaoji shu zhuang, 1910.
- Yuan Mei. *Zi bu yu*. In *Yuan Mei quanji* vol. 4. Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji chuban she, 1993.
- Yue Jun. *Ershi lu*.

- Zamperini, Paola. "Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction" in Paul Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet Zurndorfer, eds. *Pasionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China*. Leiden: Brill, 2001. 77–104.
- Zeitlin, Judith. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Zeng Yandong, *Xiao doupeng*. Printed together with *Yeyu qiudeng xulu*. Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1997.
- Zhang Chao, ed. *Yuchu xinzhishi*. Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1985.
- Zhang Yimou, *Raise the Red Lantern*, Orion Pictures, 1991.
- Zhu Yiqing, *Mai you ji*. Printed together with *Xie duo*. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1996.