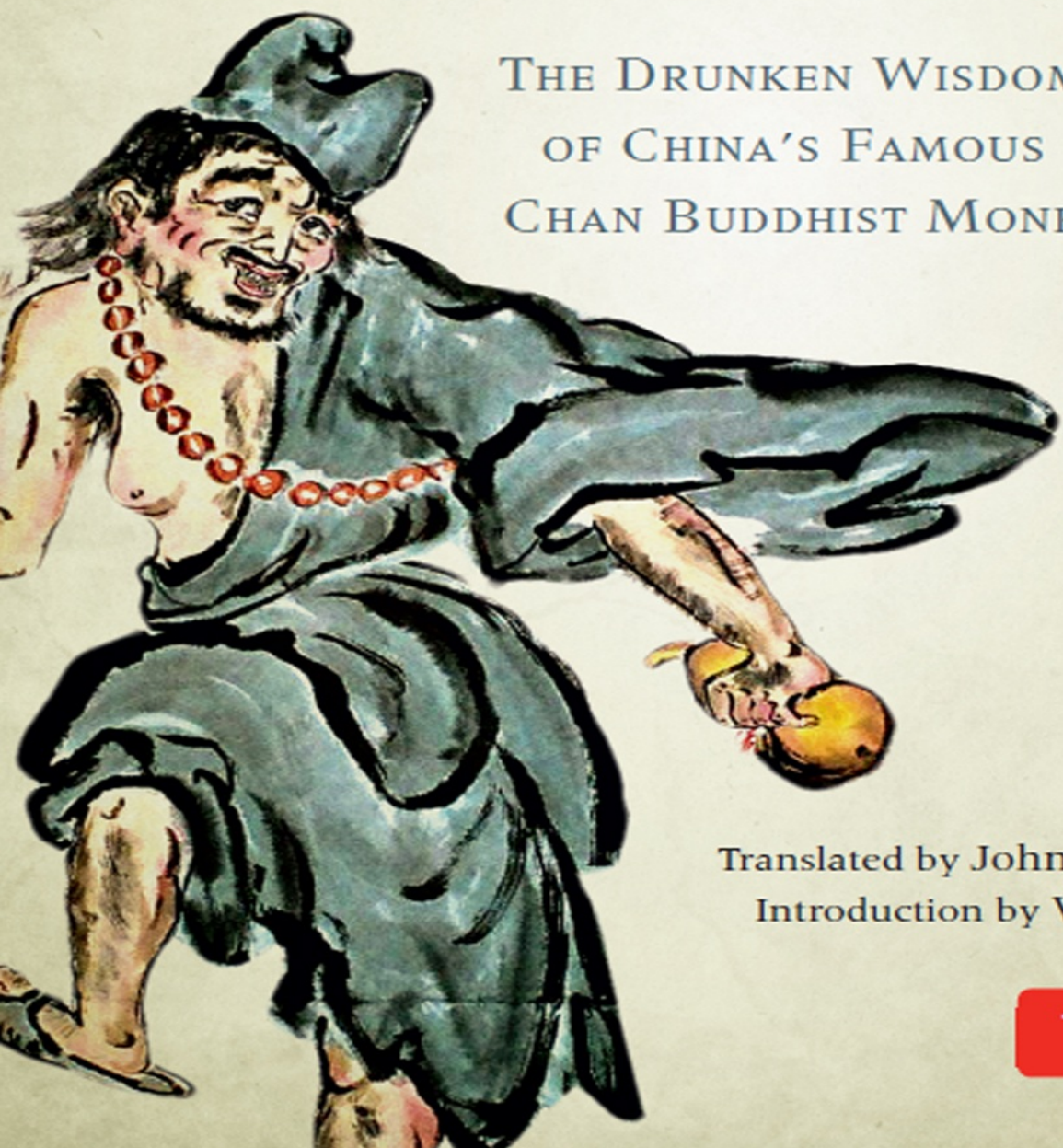


GUO XIAOTING

ADVENTURES OF THE  
MAD MONK  
JI GONG

THE DRUNKEN WISDOM  
OF CHINA'S FAMOUS  
CHAN BUDDHIST MONK

济公全传



Translated by John Robert Shaw  
Introduction by Victoria Cass

TUTTLE

ADVENTURES OF THE

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MAD MONK

JI GONG

# About the Translator

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**John Shaw** during his twenty year U.S. Marine Corps career served part of that time as Chinese/Japanese/Korean interpreter. He was stationed in China for two tours totaling six years and visited China twice after those tours. During his first visit he came across the tales of Ji Gong in a bookstore. After scanning the book, he bought a copy having decided it would be interesting to read. He read the entire book and then thought it would be enjoyable to translate the first half. He immersed himself in this project at a leisurely pace over several years.

## Publisher's Note

During the process of translating this classical Chinese work, John Shaw was fortunate to have the invaluable expertise and input of his wife, Mrs. Sara Janet Shaw, a former professional editor, in all editorial matters. Together they worked as a team to make this manuscript highly accessible and interesting for English readers.

GUO XIAOTING

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MAD MONK  
JI GONG

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## Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

*“Among those whom I like or admire, I can find no common denominator, but among those whom I love, I can; all of them make me laugh.”*

W. H. Auden

THE great Buddhist divinities of China have marked an austere passage through history. Arhats of immense dignity—severe gods of wisdom—left sacred texts; patriarchs founded grand temple complexes so that their doctrines might live; and martyred men and women sacrificed their own limbs in signs of devotion. These lions of the faith are the saints of Buddhism, famed for their miracle tales. But Ji Gong—the saint in this book—is not that saint; and that is not his story. Ji Gong is a god of the streets, a drinker, a trickster, a city magician who lives among shopkeepers and traveling merchants, among the impoverished scholars, street hustlers and courtesan-prostitutes, all with survival tales and hard-luck stories. He is their exorcist, their avenger; he is a streetwise hero, the common man’s patron saint.

Ji Gong was born in Hangzhou, perhaps in the year 1130, during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). However, only one Song Dynasty biographer, Chan Master Jujian, found him worthy of mention, and the Master’s account is mercifully short.<sup>1</sup> Lord Ji studied at the great Lingyin Monastery, an immense temple compound that still ranges solemnly up the steep hills above Hangzhou. The Chan masters of the temple instructed him in the infamously harsh practices of their sect, but failed; the young monk, following in the steps of other great ne'er-do-wells and holy fools of Chinese religions, managed the one distinct accomplishment revealed in this account: he got himself fired. He left the monastery, became a wanderer with hardly a proper jacket to wear, and achieved renown—not in the temples, but in the wine shops.

If this were the only version of this monk’s life, he would have vanished, as did the thousand perhaps millions, of other lowly disciples; but Ji Gong’s story was hijacked. It was claimed by generations of city dwellers—900 years of entertainers and the entertained—who seized on this tale of defiance and trickster humor among the Hangzhou taverns, giving the simple account both life and bulk. Indeed, the full might and weight of the storyteller profession—its multiple clans and guilds, its steely membership practices, and its decades of training starting in childhood—was thrown behind the lore of Ji Gong. The ignominious monk assumed center stage in the cycle of accounts; accounts that multiplied and expanded as city life in China expanded. Later chroniclers gave him many names: Ji of the Dao, the Living Buddha, the Hidden Recluse of the Qiantang Lake, the Chan Master, The Drunken Arhat, Elder Brother Square Circle, Abbot Ji, and his most familiar and suitable rubric: Crazy Ji.

The author of our version, Guo Xiaoting, lived in the late 1800s and into the twentieth century, coming happily to the tales almost a millennium after Ji Gong lived. Guo Xiaoting wrote *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji* in the 1890s, editing the raft of material from popular performances, mimicking in some measure the storyteller’s gimmicks and voice. Nor was Guo Xiaoting embarrassed about his low sources. For another of his works, he bragged that the long performances of storytellers—two-monk stagings were not unusual—were his source.<sup>2</sup> And although many of these sorts of claims are specious

an attempt by intellectuals to evade the charge of producing frothy literatures—this one seems to have been true. *Ji Gong* does, in fact, reveal the world of the Beijing storyteller as the century changed in 1900 where restaurants and theaters offered the tales, and where Guo Xiaoting—in retirement—earned his living.

Thus, though the original tale and early versions of *Ji Gong* tell of Hangzhou life, where the famous Lingyin Monastery presides, the 900-years-later version—our version—though set in Hangzhou, has the look, smells, and—above all—sounds of Beijing. Within Guo Xiaoting's tale and John Shaw's translation, not only does the monk Ji Gong emerge, but so also do the lives and places of Guo Xiaoting's own world. We see the alleyways and temple grounds, the lowlife and high ambitions of the men and women of China of the late 1800s and early 1900s, a curbside capsule of the late Qing Dynasty as it teetered on the brink of collapse.



Six years after Guo Xiaoting published a second installment of the *Ji Gong* tales, the Outer City District Police for the city of Beijing compiled a survey.<sup>3</sup> In 1906 the “First Statistical Survey of the Security Administration” (*Jingshi waicheng xunjing zongting diyici tongjishu* 京師 外城 巡警 總廳 第一次統計書) reported that there were 347 restaurants, 308 courtesan-entertainer halls, 301 inns, 246 teahouses (where operas were performed), and 699 opium dens: all in a single district of Beijing. These were not the only place where people gathered. Temple complexes housed thousands of religious clerics and disciples and offered holiday fairs and popular performances. Grand compounds served the thousands of visiting merchants; they used the extensive banking institutions<sup>4</sup> to monitor their investments. Businesses of all levels dominated the streets of Beijing; at the turn of the century, when *Ji Gong* was published, there were over 25,000 commercial establishments.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the poor numbered in the thousands: soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and programs for temporary employment helped some. The police did not simply observe this activity; Beijing was the most policed city in the world. A network of officers supervised the city through the night in a series of watchmen's contacts. “The beating of drums, bells, and bamboo boards enabled policemen to be part of a sweep through the streets and lanes ... part of an elaborate choreographed system ... that kept officers always within earshot of each other.” Members of the British Macartney mission in 1793 complained of being kept awake by the continuous clapping and clopping.<sup>8</sup>

This was a city of size and scale. Foreigners were astounded; Father Pierre-Martial Cibot thought Beijing “the most peopled in the universe.”<sup>9</sup> The estimates varied from one to three million inhabitants depending on the inclusion of the extensive suburbs. The inns and restaurants, so carefully recorded by security officials, reflected this scale. One restaurant, a “public house” visited by the Scotsman John Beal was “the largest of that sort I ever saw; and could easily contain six or eight hundred people. The room was supported by two rows of wooden pillars ... the great part was filled with long tables, having benches, on each side, for the accommodation of the company.”<sup>10</sup> Traders, artisans, factory workers, bosses and laborers, and the institutions—from temple compounds to marketplaces, big and small—shaped the nature of Beijing. This was a city with a city ecology: a city that had its own order and rhythm, with thriving subcultures of interlocking occupations. To be sure, the Manchu dominated the

capital—laws were becoming increasingly strict on separation of races—but city patterns held the contours of life in Beijing.

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Thus for Guo Xiaoting's audience, *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji* presents a tour of the place, sounds, and customs of Beijing on the brink of the twentieth century. Readers would have been quick to hear the Beijing slang; shopkeepers lived and worked in and among the neighborhood *hutong* (the Beijing term for alley); a sly Daoist monk would be likely to *yuan* (Beijing slang for “cheat,” a word that is at the heart of many plot twists). Red fruit (*hongguo*)—sweetened hawthorn fruit—was a Beijing snack available in the novel; and Beijing buildings, not the palaces or temples, but the *sihefang*—courtyard homes—sheltered the novel's residents.<sup>11</sup> If the city sights and sounds matched the Beijing cityscape, so did the characters. Some were generic city dwellers, but some were clearly northerners familiar to a nineteenth-century reader. Pipe smokers greeted one another in teahouses; pipe smoking was a popular diversion never seen in Hangzhou of the Song Dynasty.<sup>12</sup> A typical Beijing entertainer—the *pingshu* performer—makes his appearance in the novel. This artist was a typical northern “clapper-style” teller of rough-and-tumble tales of heroes and bandits.<sup>13</sup> And if the citizens of *The Complete Tales* were northerners, they were also plain people. A few rich and mighty sit on the narrative outskirts—usually threaten, occasionally to reward; but workaday Beijing is the setting, and Beijing citizens the cast.

Beijing is clearly the common man's city. Though great walled compounds dominated old Beijing, Ji Gong's Beijing is permeable. It is a city with a horizontal sight line; traded goods move through the streets like fish through shoals. When a precious talisman disappears from a friend's keeping, Ji Gong learns of its progress. The talisman was stolen by members of the White Coin Gang, and then sold to the manager of the Old Studio Antique Shop (for 30 ounces of silver); then it is sold to Prime Minister Qin (for 500 ounces of silver!). Finally, it is taken through the gate of Prime Minister Qin's estate and hung in the upper story of a fine pavilion. This slick circulation is managed, Ji Gong is told, “in a matter of a few hours, while you were drinking with your friends.”<sup>14</sup> As goods move, so do travelers. As readers, we are on foot in this vital city; no need for the grander forms of travel. When Ji Gong threads his way through this peculiar urban marriage of Hangzhou and Beijing, we can follow him at a good crisp walk.



Enter the ghost.

His skin was a light sickly purple in color, his eyebrows heavy and long, shading his widely spaced eyes. With his hands he dragged the long chains with which he was bound and the heavy lock that fastened them together. His tangled hair was tied in a loose knot and his beard was like trampled grass.

Prime Minister Qin gazed at him. “Alas!” Yes, it was his adoptive father and patron, Qin Guai, returning home as a baleful ghost!...

“My old father!” exclaimed Prime Minister Qin. “I thought that you would have been in heaven long ago. Who would have thought that you could still be suffering in the underworld!”

Qin Guai answered, “Son, for your father's sake, while you are yet in the world of light occupying your high position, return to the path of virtue before father and son-in-law go

You might expect an evasive view of morality in *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji*, for these characters rely on peasant cunning. But the mournful voice of Qin Guai’s ghost tells another story. Ji Gong has summoned an agent of retribution laced with the terrors of filial guilt. And despite the low humor and humble streets, the moral code of Ji Gong is rigorous, his punishments sure and certain. The retribution meted out in this scene is exquisitely personal. The ghost-father shames the avaricious son; a wrenching humiliation abases the prime minister. Indeed, if the Confucian bureaucracy named itself a moral patriarchy with the Son of Heaven residing at the top, the horizontal landscape of nineteenth-century Beijing had its parallel forms of rectitude. Beijing life occupies, in *The Complete Tales*, a moral landscape, where a harsh and deeply ingrained vision shapes events, although these codes may have varied from what the Emperor recommended.

Ji Gong governs an ad hoc clan of the righteous oppressed. He pulls the threads of karma connections, wrestling the high and mighty out of their compounds. Abuse of office, sexual violence against the weak, humiliation of the ordinary, and even the never-trivial crime of snobbery are always punished. The code is simple: decency. Though none of the characters is grand, all of them are armed with a pitch-perfect sense of probity. Even small gestures are governed by the sense of a refined doctrine. Decorum reaches to the smallest scale: “Even though at first the monk looked like nothing more than a beggar, to save Zhao Yuanwai’s face Li Guoyuan could not do otherwise than go forward to offer a ceremonial greeting.”<sup>16</sup> As with the rites (*li*) of fine society, this is the *li* of the counter-tradition constituting a powerful bond, clan-like and rigorous. Shopkeepers, courtesans, and monks—denizens of Beijing—use the words “sister” and “brother” deliberately. “When Li Guoyuan saw that it was Zhao Wenhui, he immediately went forward, raising his clasped hands in greeting, and said, ‘I have been looking forward to seeing you, Elder Brother.’”<sup>17</sup> These kinship terms color the fabric of the novel; they signal bonds that, once made, are never broken. Loyalty was paramount.

The aristocrats of these clans of the streets are Ji Gong’s warriors. Dyed through and through with righteousness (*yi* 義), they are the moral police of the Beijing streets, the elder-brother patriarchs of the Beijing *hutong*. In reality they are an odd mismatch of bodyguards, martial-arts stage-performers, and bandits. But, of course their mismatch-outsider status is a point of pride, all of them suffering from a failure to know their place in society. These warriors call themselves men and women of the “water-way and greenwood” (*jianghu lülin* 江湖綠林). As outsiders they are proud to know each other by secret signs: an arc made by a weapon, an odd word used in greeting, some trick of appearance; with a simple gesture, kinship is recognized. Ji Gong himself is the chief among his band of defiant rogues. His skills are the most powerful; he is the godly (*shen* 神) version of this cast. But with his magic, low characters, though banished from power, are sanctioned—literally—by an eccentric, though intrinsically lucid, divine authority. *The Complete Tales* make something magical and deeply moral out of the city and its clash of circumstances. Guo Xiaoting, along with the centuries of performers of the Ji Gong epics, manufactured in this book a comic bible, appropriating a saint who was out and about in their midst and clearly available: for, as the Song biographer has told us, Ji Gong was conveniently out of work.



In 1900, the same year that Guo Xiaoting published his second installment of *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji*, the city of Beijing was under siege. The forces of Germany, Japan, England, Russia, the United States, Italy, and France had taken Beijing; they had marched through the massive city gates, taken control of the foreign legation, and seized the Imperial Palace. The army of foreign soldiers had driven out the court; in April of that year, the Empress Dowager fled the palace dressed as a peasant. Nor did the troops stop there; they had arrived to punish the Boxer rebels. These rebels were a band of the displaced poor that had attacked Christian missions “to save China.” Indeed, the Boxers had an implacable hatred of foreigners. Thus, there followed a vicious European response; this was divine retribution. Emperor William II of Germany declared, “Peking should be razed to the ground!” When the troops left for China, he urged his men, “Show no mercy! Take no prisoners.”<sup>18</sup> Nor did the foreign troops raze villages and executed thousands of peasants and peasant soldiers.

Not that this chaos was isolated. As the century ended, massive failures marked China’s political life. In 1894 sections of the empire were ceded to Japan, and Germany in the same decade received sections of Shandong. From the court to the bureaucracy, to universities, to fine estates of educated gentry, all the structures of a well-policed world were in disarray: leading to the year 1911, when 2,000 years of dynastic governance convulsed in failure, toppling like a mountain into revolution and civil war. China was at one of the most terrible tipping points in history.

Within this maelstrom, in 1900, Guo Xiaoting wrote his second installment of *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji*. In these violent years Guo takes us, with apparent insouciance, through an odd-fellow comic narrative. Ji Gong is the curbside comedian of China. He typically plays the fool; temple statues portray him with an idiot’s grin. But from that vantage point he is a master of the fine art of ridicule, as he exposes the grand as grandiose. And if he is a fool, he is a holy fool. Meir Shahar, in his wonderful book *Crazy Ji*, has linked Ji Gong to other lunatic eccentrics in Chinese religion. “Crazy shamans, eccentric Daoists, wild Buddhists, and carefree poets” have all “played an important role in the religion and art of China.”<sup>19</sup> Ji Gong’s madness has obvious method. It invokes the elemental, engaging what Robert Torrance called “the subversive and even anarchical sense of life.”<sup>20</sup> He is a comic hero whose outrageous laughter evokes the sense of nature’s raw authority; *Crazy Ji* conveys a sense of “heightened vitality, challenged wit and will.”<sup>21</sup>

The horrors of 1900 notwithstanding, Ji Gong’s brand of comedy had an audience. Tales of rogues—or *picaros*—was a booming industry. For the entire Qing Dynasty, into the time of civil war of the 1910s and 1920s, readers loved the picaresque. Popular presses in Beijing and Shanghai produced the tales of Monkey, the comical demon-queller from *Journey to the West*; other episodic tales were also popular. *Journeys to the North, to the South and to the East* were available as well.<sup>22</sup> Still more rogues emerged from these original adventures. Pigsy from *Journey to the West* had his own story cycle. The band of heroes from the *Enfeoffment of the Gods* had dedicated readers. Even the magistrate Judge Bao appeared in these story cycles as a comic eccentric, a master of disguise.<sup>23</sup> Of course, readers and listeners thrilled to the epic cycle *Shuihu zhuan*, or *Water Margin*. They knew precisely the weaponry, the costumes, the strategies, and the famous lines of all 108 heroes. When Russian diplomat Egor Petrovich Kovelevskiy perused the bookstores of Beijing in 1850, he found that the “back rows of the (book) shops are usually crowded with novels ... The greatest fame is enjoyed by the old novels, which are reprinted in hundreds of editions.”<sup>24</sup> He was right, as we know from the numbers. Aside from the storyteller scripts and storyteller imitations, there were the smoothly narrated novels, and then there were reprints, sequels, and

spin-offs, with single chapters expanded into new books entirely. This was a good crop to harvest. No wonder Guo Xiaoting came out with *The Complete Tales of Lord Ji*, Part II, in 1900.

The picaresque tales that flew off the back shelves were not always well received by the court, however. Imperial censors, in fact, found the “old novels” to be deeply troublesome. Light-hearted and comical though they may be, novels were considered polluting. Censors looked at fiction and saw rebellion. Novels had a terrible reputation. *Water Margin*, though a favorite throughout the Qing, was subjected to heavy-handed censorship. Ambassador Kovelevsky, in his visit to the Beijing bookstore, may have noticed the numbers, but he did not notice the laws. *The Laws and Codes of the Great Qing* (*Da Qing lǜlì* 大清律例) labeled the book “licentious”; adventure tales undermined that well-ordered cityscape laid out in the police survey. The Qing legal code was clear: “All bookshops that print the licentious story *Water Margin* must be vigorously sought out, and the work prohibited. Both the woodblocks and the printed matter should be burned. In case [it is discovered that] this book is being made, and ... should [an official] himself engrave it, he shall be stripped of office entirely.”<sup>25</sup>

If the officials monitored publishers, they monitored ordinary citizens as well. The reading public for these tales of adventure had an official category: “stupid” (*yu* 愚). Those who bought vernacular texts or who listened to storytellers were called *yufuyufu* (愚夫愚婦)<sup>26</sup>—stupid men and stupid women. The official view was more than demeaning, it was damning. The word “stupid” (*yu* 愚) had the connotation of politically dangerous, as in stupefying, deluding, or corrupting. Officials laced their descriptions of local leaders with such terms, accusing them of *yumin* (愚民), deluding the masses. The empire’s unsavory elements were bracketed together: the practitioners of cults, the malcontents, the tumultuous, as well as the writers and readers of fiction.

This fearful view of popular fiction was not without real bite. Popular fiction and all books were monitored with malign precision. Censors had terrible means at their disposal. When the *Abbreviated History of the Ming History* was published, censors were repelled by some few passages. The author foolishly linked the Manchu people to other “barbarian” peoples. The book itself was quickly suppressed, but the censorship was extended. Those connected with the project were tracked down. The publishers were tried, convicted, and executed, and “those who had merely purchased the book” were punished as well. “Seventy individuals were put to death and their families exiled, their estates confiscated.”<sup>27</sup> This was censorship at an impressive level.

The imperial watchdogs and culture police were a ready posse. Fiction could stir up rebellion. In this, as it turns out, they were right. Readers of Qing fiction were truculent. They mimicked their heroes, used gangster argot, practiced swordplay, and gathered and plotted against the state. Mimicry was not the only issue, however. Heroes of the picaresque were considered gods. Ji Gong, in particular, was an unruly saint. The same Boxer rebels who surrounded Beijing in 1900 practiced the cult of Ji Gong. Missionary observers had seen young Boxer soldiers in cult practices: “After greeting the deities and taking their places respectfully on either side of the altar, the little boys suddenly began to look sickly with red faces and staring eyes; they foamed at the mouth; they began to shout and laugh.”<sup>29</sup> The rituals inspired the Boxers. Northern China was a vast terrain of the displaced and desperate; flood, disease, and imperial incompetence had created an impoverished and unstable population, a mob “hungry, discontented, hopeless idlers,” as the American ambassador noted.<sup>30</sup> This northern mob, however, coalesced through cult practices. Ji Gong and other heroes of the waterways and greenwood gave them divine legitimacy.





Vibeke Bordahl has traced the long histories of “schools”—the specific lines—of storytellers. She has collected performance lineages going back as many as seventy-eight generations. Storytellers of *Wat Margin* passed down their knowledge in one famous clan for two hundred years.<sup>31</sup> The Ji Gong stories have had their own great lineage. From storyteller performances to storyteller scripts, to smooth narratives by Qing writers, to contemporary movies, and then to TV shows, Ji Gong has lasted a millennium. He has, in fact, fared better than Confucius. Not that this is surprising. When the court and its revered texts and malign proclamations were abandoned, the oral tradition survived. Performers retained the lore of Ji Gong in their prodigious memories. Nor was Ji Gong a mere entertainer. Though he may be charged with the crime of comedy, his signature off-kilter view is compelling. Indeed, off-kilter has its uses. His anarchical intelligence offers us a refracted view of a difficult age, an age of corrupted authority and unmoored lives—a world in which the Empress had to flee the city dressed as a peasant. The late Qing was not a time for the great lions of history, but was “a world too numbed for tragedy and too disillusioned for glory.”<sup>32</sup> Comedy sits in that vacuum, providing an apparently blithe view from the sidelines.

Günter Grass revealed that he preferred the style of the “Spanish and Arab picaresque”; the jester version reflects the world “in concave and distorting mirrors.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the picaresque attracts those who live with violence. The talent of the jester for comical escape, offers a model, if not of victory, then at least of survival, as playing the rogue offers useful cover.

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## CHAPTER 1

### ***Military Finance Officer Li visits Buddha and begs for a son; an immortal lohan descends to earth and begins anew the cycle of reincarnation***

THE patchwork robe made for Guang Liang, the newly elected superintendent of the monks at the Monastery of the Soul's Retreat at Linan, was placed on display before daybreak. It was arranged on a high-backed armchair placed on a low platform to the west of the altar before the huge statue of the bodhisatva Guan Yin. In the morning when the sun shone through the door, it illuminated each scrap of precious brocade and every bit of exquisite embroidery with the unusually fine stitching that made the robe a dazzling ceremonial vestment.

The monks had begged for these scraps at the gate of every great family in Linan, the twelfth-century capital of the Southern Song Dynasty of China. The monastery was the most important temple in the empire and, as the monks explained, Guang Liang would some day almost certainly become its abbot when the old abbot was no more. People had gladly contributed not only material, but also money for the sewing, which was done at the finest shop in Linan.

In the first two hours of its showing, most of the monks, with the exception of the abbot, had seen the robe. Soon wealthy matrons would be pointing out their bits of brocade to their friends, but before that could happen, the robe suddenly disappeared. No one knew where it had gone, but all the monks guessed that Dao Ji, the Chan (Zen) monk, had taken it, and he was missing.

Who was this Dao Ji? He was the son of a military officer, Li Maoqun. Li was usually addressed as Yuanwai. Most respected gentlemen were called *yuanwai* in the time of the Southern Song Dynasty. In the fourth year of that dynasty (1131 C.E.), Li was living not far from the capital Hangzhou, more commonly called Linan in those times.

Li was registered as a native of the Tiantai district in Taizhoufu, a prefecture in the east-central portion of the province of Zhejiang. His wife was called Wang Shi, meaning a wife from the Wang family, since women usually continued to be called by their maiden names after marriage.

This couple loved the virtuous life. Li Yuanwai was extremely kind to others and not unduly severe toward the soldiers he commanded. Because of this, his reputation as a good officer was widespread. At home he was pleasant and generous, and outside his home he helped those in danger and relieved those in distress with padded clothing in winter and draughts of medicine in summer. When Li Yuanwai walked along the street, people generally called him Virtuous Li, but a few among them disagreed, saying, "If he is truly virtuous, why is there not a son?"

Li Maoqun overheard this talk, so later, when his wife saw him come home sad and dejected, she asked why he was unhappy. Her husband said, "When I was strolling in the street, almost everyone was calling me Virtuous Li, but among them there were some who said privately, but so that I could hear that, if I were truly good it would not be possible for me to be without a son. I think that heaven has

spirits and the Buddha has his spirits, and if we ask, it is in their power to permit us to have a child.”

“Why not take a second wife or buy two concubines and have a son and a daughter?” urged his wife.

Her husband said, “Oh, my wife, it is wrong to say such words. How could I do such a stupid thing? My wife, you are only approaching forty. You can still give birth to sons or daughters. You and I will purify ourselves by fasting and bathing for three days and then go to the Guojing temple on Tiantai mountain, beyond Yongning village. There we will worship Buddha and beg for a son. If heaven above has eyes, you and I, husband and wife, may still have a child.”

“Very good,” said Wang Shi.

Li Yuanwai selected a date, and with his wife riding in a cart while he rode a horse, they and the party of servants reached the foot of Tiantai mountain. They looked up at the mountain rising up to meet the clouds, its peaks standing erect, the dense forests and the Guojing temple halfway to the top. When they reached the outside of the temple, they saw how large and high the monastery gate appeared. Inside there were two towers, one for the drum and one for the bell. Just beyond was the purification hall for the guests, the hall for reading the sutras or scriptures of Buddhism, and a large building with twenty-five rooms for storing the complete religious library of Buddhism, the *Tripitaka*.

Li Yuanwai got down from his horse. From within, the monks came out to greet the couple. At the great hall they were offered tea. The master of the temple, old Abbot Gong, came himself to welcome them and took them to each place where they were to burn incense. Husband and wife first went to the imposing Hall of Treasures and prayed. They knelt to ask the immortal Buddha to bless them, saying, “As we renew the incense, teach us a thousand times ten thousand times that we may have a son. Buddha, the founder, will manifest his spirit, we will make extensive repairs to an old temple and in fashion a golden image. This is our prayer.” On they went, burning incense at each place.

When they reached the Lohan Hall, containing images of *lohan* (disciples of Buddha), they all burned incense. When they were standing in front of the fourth *lohan*, they saw the image slip from its pedestal. Since the words “fall to earth” when used by Buddhists also means “be born into the world,” the senior priest Gong said, “Your prayer is answered! Your prayer is answered! You will certainly have an honorable son. When the day comes, I will come to wish you happiness.”

Li Yuanwai returned home with his wife and servants. Without knowing it, his wife became pregnant and after some months gave birth to a boy. At the time of the birth, a red light seemed to flash in the courtyard and there was a strong odor of a strange perfume. Li Yuanwai was extremely happy, even though the newborn cried continuously, never ceasing straight through to the third day.

On this third day, just as the relatives and friends in the community came to offer congratulations, some neighbors came in to say that Abbot Gong of the Guojing monastery had come personally to give the official his kind regards and offer his good wishes.

Li Yuanwai went to welcome him and Abbot Gong said, “I can see that you are very happy. Is your son well?”

“From the time he was born, he has cried without ceasing,” Li Yuanwai replied. “I feel very anxious about this. Does the revered monk have some subtle way to cure this?”

Abbot Gong said, “It is easily managed. If you will go into the house and carry your son outside, I will take a look, and then I will understand the cause.”

Li Yuanwai said uneasily, “The child is not yet a full month old. I am afraid it will not be right to carry him outside.”

Abbot Gong said, "There will be no harm. Simply wrap him loosely in a robe. The three lights of the sun, moon, and stars will not harm him."

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As soon as Li Yuanwai heard this reasonable suggestion, he went quickly and carried the child out. The boy, who was born with an attractive face, clear-cut features, and a pleasant personality, was still crying without stopping. As soon as Abbot Gong came over and looked at him, his crying mouth stretched into a smile.

The old monk stroked the top of the child's head with his hand and said, "Do not smile. Do not smile. I know your past history, you coming and I going. How can the great provincial families be confident of their futures?"

The child immediately stopped crying, and the monk said, "May I take a disciple's name and give it to him as a remembrance? He would be called Li Xiuyuan—meaning 'Li who restores those harmed by malevolent influences, either from their own previous incarnations or from the wrongful acts of others.'

Li Yuanwai assented and carried the child inside. A little later the father came out, saying that food was prepared for the monk.

The relatives and friends scattered and soon senior monk Gong also left.

Li Yuanwai hired a wet nurse to assist in caring for the child. The child grew and became strong.

Light is like an arrow, the days and months like a weaver's shuttle. The years passed with the parents hardly aware of them, and Li Xiuyuan reached the age of seven. They had never intended that he should simply gather with the village boys, idly talking and laughing. So his parents decided that his studies should begin. An old graduate, Du Qunying, was hired to teach the boy at the instructor's home. There were two others in the class. One was Han Wenmei, the son of Han Wenzheng, a military man, filial and upright, from Yongning village. The other was Wang Shi's nephew, Wang Zhuan, who lived in Jiuning village. He was the son of Wang Anshi, the commander of a military unit. Wang Zhuan was eight years old.

The three boys studied together and truly enjoyed one another's friendship. Li Xiuyuan was the youngest, but he never forgot what had once passed before his eyes. He advanced rapidly as he studied and surpassed ordinary students in talent. Master Du thought this remarkable, and often said to people that he had waited long for such a talent as that of Li Xiuyuan.

When he reached the age of fourteen, Li Xiuyuan had great skill in reciting passages from the *Four Books* of the philosopher Confucius, as well as the *Five Classics*, and numerous works of other ancient Chinese philosophers discussing Confucianism. Together with the two others, Wang and Han, he was constantly composing poems and reciting them in a loud voice.

That year they were thinking of taking the provincial examinations as degree candidates. But Li Xiuyuan's father fell sick and could not get out of bed. He was in a serious condition, too ill to be aware of what other people were doing. Someone sent for Wang Anshi, his wife's younger brother, to come to his bedside.

Li Yuanwai said, "My dear brother, I will not be long in the world of men. Your nephew and your older sister will need you to take care of them. Xiuyuan cannot always be a student. I have made arrangements for him to marry a girl of the Liu family in the Village of the Thousand Gates. She has no one living in her immediate family. I depend upon you, younger brother, to manage everything regarding this."

Wang Anshi said, "Husband of my older sister, let your heart be at rest and take care of your illness."

You need not instruct me further. I will take care of the matter myself.”

Li Yuanwai also said to Wang Shi, “Dear wife, I am fifty-five years old now and so cannot be said to be dying young. After I die, above all things take care of our boy and teach him to become famous. Even though my soul is beneath the dreadful Yellow Springs, I will be joyous.”

Finally he gave Xiuyuan several sentences of instruction, but alas, his heart was in turmoil and his mouth and eyes closed in death. As soon as Li Yuanwai died, the family wept together.

Officer Wang helped with all the details of the bereavement. Since Xiuyuan remained in mourning he could not take part in the examinations. That year Wang Zhuan and Han Wenmei both obtained their *Xiucai*, or bachelor’s degrees, and both families were congratulated.

In the home of Wang Shi there was an upper room that the family called the meditation tower. There, a record was kept of the family’s financial and other affairs up to each year’s end. This would be written in the form of a table and offered up to heaven together with the bills of account, without hiding the truth and keeping nothing back. There Li Xiuyuan began to develop an interest in the study of Daoism. The practice of this religion often included elements of herbal medicine, alchemy, numerology, exorcism, and black magic. Whenever he saw one of the Daoist scriptures, he would read it through without stopping.

Two years passed, and his mother fell sick and died. Li Xiuyuan wept for her alone. Officer Wang helped and managed the funeral arrangements.

Until the age of eighteen Li Xiuyuan continued to like Daoist books. When in that year his mourning was completed, he changed from his mourning clothes and immediately left home. He had been contemplating the red dust of mortality, his broken world, and his various problems. All the affairs at home were being taken care of by his uncle and did not need his attention. Li Xiuyuan went to the family grave, burned some sheets of paper spirit money, left a note for Officer Wang, and then immediately went away.

When Officer Wang had not seen him for two days, he sent a man to look for him. The man did not find the nephew, but he did find the note. Officer Wang opened the note and read, “Xiuyuan has left. You need not look for him. In some other year we will meet and you will know the result.”

Because Officer Wang knew that his nephew had recently been going to the Anguan temple in the neighborhood to study Buddhism and Daoism, he sent someone there to look for the boy. However, the people at the temple had not seen him. Wang also sent men to put up white placards in various places. On them he had written that any person who came with Li Xiuyuan to his home would be given one hundred ounces of white silver in reward; and any person who knew where the boy actually was and sent a letter about him would be given fifty ounces of silver. After three months, Uncle Wang and his people still had no idea where Xiuyuan had gone.

After Li Xiuyuan had broken contact with his home, he wandered aimlessly to nearby Linan. When he had spent all his money, he went into a temple and asked to leave the world. The monks there, however, did not dare to keep him because he was obviously a runaway from a good family.

Li Xiuyuan next went to the Monastery of the Soul’s Retreat that occupied a large tract of ground facing the city from across the West Lake, considered to be one of the most beautiful spots in China. There he asked to see the master of the temple.

The abbot, Yuan Kong, a Buddhist of the ninth degree, was aged and feeble, but his mind was still strong and his understanding profound. When Xiuyuan was brought before him, the old monk knew

once that the youth was the reincarnation of the golden-bodied *lohan* who subdues tigers and dragons. *Lohan* were commonly believed to be powerful spirits of former teachers of Buddhism, filled with infinite compassion. However, in order to enter Nirvana, the state of having attained enlightenment and the freeing of the self, these *lohan* had to pass through countless reincarnations because of the burden of their human faults.

The abbot could not change the direction of the boy's destiny, but he could help him with his teaching. The abbot was master of nine different schools of Buddhism. He, therefore, was able to train a disciple in whichever of these denominations seemed most suitable. After observing Xiuyuan's natural gifts and disposition, the old man decided that the boy should become a Chan monk, "Chan" being the Chinese pronunciation of "Zen" in Japanese. The abbot named him Dao Ji, meaning "salvation through Buddhist wisdom." He would no longer use the name Xiuyuan.

Chan Buddhism stressed meditation, but it also laid great emphasis on using insight and rational thinking to solve problems and find practical solutions. Chan monks during the Song dynasty had already earned a reputation for challenging Buddhist rules and ignoring conventional social behavior.

Even in tranquil courtyards bright with flowers,  
You dare not say all's well. Though walls and gates  
Be higher than the tallest tall man's head,  
Malicious spirits that may hear such words  
Will fly like locusts to invade each quiet spot.

Confucian duties, Daoist spells  
And Buddha's promise of release from karma's chains  
Together share the minds of thoughtful folk.

Both heaven and hell with countless gods and demons  
Mirror the earth in all its vast complexity.  
Souls of the dead roam ceaselessly  
Until they may be born on earth once more.

On earth among the living, wandering monks of Chan  
Respect what seems the best in every discipline,  
Yet mock pretense and all external trappings  
And work mysteriously to gain their ends.

The prevailing practice in the Monastery of the Soul's Retreat was more conservative, however, and many of the monks felt that this Chan novice was pursuing ideas contrary to their own. It was inevitable that he should be criticized, and even taunted. Once, while meditating, he remained so long in concentration that he became confused and disoriented. As a result, some of the others began to call him Ji Dian, meaning "Mad Ji." Thereafter the rumor persisted, and even spread beyond the monastery, that he was indeed insane.

In spite of efforts to destroy his reputation, he afterward became known as Ji Gong by many people.

outside the monastery. During some earlier dynasties, "Gong" had been the title of a duke. Thus, when people called him Ji Gong, it was very much like calling him High and Noble Lord Ji. It was a title reserved for those most revered and appreciated.

As for the young Dao Ji, he passed through his three years of training, ignoring the taunts. He received his certificate and became a full-fledged monk. Even then, however, he was not accepted by the other monks, and his isolation from them grew.

Here and there about the monastery Dao Ji observed that individuals had little hoards of money that they had kept from the offerings of the visiting faithful. This all too common practice of subtracting a percentage of everything that fell into one's hands was called a "squeeze." The monks used their squeeze for new robes or sandals, or for some extra food beyond the day's single meal.

Every few days Dao Ji would take the money from one or two of the little hoards and disappear from the monastery. He would spend the money in restaurants dining on dishes made with meat and fish and drinking wine, all of which he particularly loved. When people used to say to him that monks should eat only vegetarian meals, he responded with half-concealed mockery, saying, "The founder of Buddhism left us a verse which goes, 'Some improve their hearts but neglect their mouths; others help their mouths but neglect their hearts.' If I only improve my heart but neglect my mouth, then I would be failing to maintain my body and so be ungrateful to Guang Liang, the superintendent of the monks, who is like my father and mother who gave me this body."

After a day or two in the city, he would return and, except for attending the noon meal, he would usually spend his time studying alone in the upper part of the Great Memorial Pagoda.

Shortly before this period, the superintendent of monks was transferred to another temple. The monks chose one of their group, Guang Liang, to be the new superintendent. He ranked next to the abbot in authority. Guang Liang was just a little bit fat from the tidbits he snatched between meals, and his smooth, moon-shaped face had a look of calm and benign authority. However, Dao Ji knew that the new superintendent was a man without learning and that there was certainly nothing holy about him. Dao Ji could see nothing in him except an ambitious desire to control the great Monastery of the South Retreat.

The old abbot who had been Dao Ji's teacher was a wise and saintly man. The thought that Guang Liang would one day take the place of the abbot was intolerable to Dao Ji. When the costly silk patchwork robe was placed on display before being presented to Guang Liang by the monks, Dao Ji waited for his chance. When no one was watching, he stole the robe and pawned it. That night he feasted in the city. In the morning he returned and pasted the pawn ticket high on the monastery gate.

When Superintendent Guang Liang saw that the robe was gone, he sent the monks looking for it everywhere. The monks were not permitted to paste announcements or anything else on the monastery gate, so when some of them saw the piece of paper pasted high on the gate, they removed it. When they saw what it was, they took it to redeem the robe. Guang Liang meanwhile went to the master of the temple, the abbot, and complained: "The crazy monk in this temple is not peaceful and virtuous according to our rules. He constantly steals all the monk's clothing, money, and other things. These actions call for severe measures! We must control him now and punish him for his offenses!"

The master of the temple, Yuan Kong, countered: "Dao Ji has no stolen goods in his possession; he cannot be punished. What you should do is carry out a secret investigation and, if there is evidence of theft, bring him to me."

Superintendent Guang Liang dispatched two acolytes to keep Ji Gong under secret observation.



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