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The Wolf of Zhongshan and Ingrates: Problematic Literary Contexts in Sixteenth-Century China

No later than the first half of the sixteenth century, the story about an ungrateful wolf captured the interests and attention of Chinese writers and readers. It offers the following scenario: a wolf, on the run from pursuing hunters in the Zhongshan 中山 area of the kingdom of Zhao, asks a traveling scholar named Master Dongguo 東郭 to be hid in the scholar's book bag. After the hunters have left, the scholar lets the wolf out of the bag. However, as soon as it is safely free, the wolf wants to eat the scholar. The scholar protests and suggests that they should submit their quarrel to the judgment of the first three elders that they meet on the road. They first encounter an ancient apricot tree and an old ox. Both agree that the scholar should be eaten, because their own pitiful experience with their masters has shown them that men are indeed the most ungrateful of all. Next, they meet an elderly man who, after listening to both sides of the story, demands that the wolf prove it can fit into the bag, so that the elderly man can see for himself what happened. The wolf agrees, but as soon as it is tied up and put into the bag as before, the elderly man instructs the scholar to kill the wolf, thereby saving his life.

As pointed out by Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958), this story is the Chinese version of a folk tale about an ungrateful creature that has been very popular in many other Asian and European literary traditions.¹ For centuries, this story has appeared in multiple literary forms such as classical tales, drama, and illustrations in the Chinese tradition. It is still popular today in China in various forms and media such as

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¹ Zheng Zhenduo, “Zhongshanlang gushi zhi bianyi” 中山狼故事之變異, in his *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1927), pp. 8–9. See also Huayuan Li Mowry, “The Wolf of Chung-shan,” in *Tamkang Review* 11.2 (1980), pp. 139–59, for a comparison of the Chinese tale with its Tamil and European counterparts. Yagisawa Hajime 八木沢元 studied other Chinese tales, such as those in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, which involve wolves. See his “Ōkami no bungaku, chūzan ōkami zatsugeki o chūshin toshite” 狼の文學, 中山狼雜劇を中心として, in *Shūkan Tōyōgaku* 集刊東洋學 2 (1959), esp. pp. 47–50.

comic books and prosimetric performances.² “The Wolf of Zhongshan” has also become a Chinese term commonly used to refer to ingrates.

The ways in which the various versions of this story have been commonly read and interpreted in China is an interesting phenomenon. Because of its subject matter and its nature as an animal fable, each version of this story about an ungrateful wolf has invited interpretations associating the fictional story to cases of ingratitude in reality. There is always an urge to find out what lies behind all these “ungrateful wolf” references: who wrote them? Were these insinuations about certain ingrates in the real world? If so, then who were those ingrates?

To illustrate this mode of reading and the problems accompanying it, in this paper I focus on four versions of the story – two classical tales and two dramatic plays – as stated below:³

1. A classical tale titled “Zhongshanlang zhuan” 中山狼傳 (“Tale of the Wolf of Zhongshan”);⁴
2. A longer version of the above, also titled “Zhongshanlang zhuan”;⁵
3. A four-act *zaju* 雜劇 play titled “Dongguo xiansheng wujiu Zhongshanlang” 東郭先生誤救中山狼 (“Sir Dongguo Makes a Mistake in Rescuing the Wolf from Zhongshan,” hereafter referred to as “Dongguo xiansheng”);⁶
4. A single-act *yuaben* 院本 play titled “Zhongshanlang” (“The Wolf of Zhongshan”).⁷

I will discuss how these texts became fixed to a popular narrative that provides linkage to a certain sixteenth-century incident, thus providing the readers with captivating “context.” But how well is this “context” supported by the texts themselves? Is it merely a “story” about the texts themselves? In the frenzied search for the “real context” behind them, have we overlooked other qualities of these texts?

² For versions and adaptations of the ungrateful wolf story, see the appendix, below.

³ The authorship of these four texts is of much scholarly dispute, an issue taken up later.

⁴ See Lu Ji 陸楫, ed., *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海 (1544 edn. based on a microfilm copy kept in the Harvard-Yenching Library), sect. “Shuoyuan 說淵, biezhuān 別傳,” j. 29.

⁵ See Ma Zhongxi, *Dongtian ji* 東田集 (1707 edn.; *Siku canmu* 四庫存目 edn., vol. 41), j. 5, pp. 6a–11a, and in Gu Youxiao 顧有孝, ed., *Mingwen yinghua* 明文英華 (Kangxi edn.; 1687 pref.; *Siku jinhui shu* 四庫禁毀書 series, vol. 34), j. 4, pp. 59a–64a.

⁶ See Shen Tai 沈泰, comp., *Sheng Ming zaju* 盛明雜劇 (*Xuxiu Siku* 續修四庫 edn., vol. 1764), j. 19, pp. 509–21, and also *Leijiang ji* 醉江集 (*Xuxiu Siku* edn., vol. 1764), pp. 262–73.

⁷ *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji* 重刊漢陂王太史先生全集, in *Mingdai lunzhu congkan* 明代論著叢刊 series (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe youxian gongsi; 1976 rpt. based on 1640 edn. kept at Taiwan National Library), pp. 1475–92.

KANG HAI THE SAVIOR AND LI MENG YANG
THE INGRATE: A POPULAR NARRATIVE “CONTEXT”

Rumors about why several versions of the story about an ungrateful wolf appeared in the Ming era all pointed towards an incident early in the sixteenth century primarily involving two literati, Kang Hai 康海 (1475–1541) and Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1529). Kang and Li were both members of the literary circle “The Former Seven Masters” (*Qian qi zi* 前七子), and were well-known for their role in the Ming archaist movement (*fugu* 復古) in literature.

Kang Hai was famously remembered for once saving Li Mengyang from prison by approaching the notorious eunuch Liu Jin 劉瑾 (d. 1510),⁸ an act that some believed resulted in allegations of his associations with Liu and eventually his dismissal from court in 1510. According to some Ming sources, however, Li Mengyang repaid Kang Hai’s kindness with ingratitude. Huang Zuo 黃佐 (1490–1566) mentioned that after Li Mengyang was saved,

[T]hereafter, Kongtong 空同 (Li Mengyang) in return brought harm to Duishan 對山 (Kang Hai) out of jealousy. An informed person then wrote “Zhongshanlang zhuan” to satirize Kongtong. But Duishan never held a grudge against him.⁹

In another account of the incident, He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506–1573) pointed out that it was Ma Zhongxi 馬中錫 (ca. 1446–ca. 1512), according to some a teacher of both Kang and Li,¹⁰ who wrote a classical tale titled “Zhongshanlang zhuan” to insult Li.¹¹ Most scholars agree that Ma’s version was an adaptation based on an earlier, shorter anonymous classical tale of the same title that some believed has been passed down from the Tang or the Song era.

When Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) later quoted Huang Zuo in his comments on the incident, the original line about an informed person writing a “Zhongshanlang zhuan” was changed to “the actors

⁸ For the conditions of the Ming court under Liu Jin and his rise and fall in power, see Frederick Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China: Volume 7, The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988), pp. 405–12.

⁹ See Jiao Hong 焦竑, ed., *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, in *Mingdai zhuanji congkan* 明代傳記叢刊 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1991), j.68, p. 67a. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹⁰ See Jin Ningfen 金寧芬, *Kang Hai yanjiu* 康海研究 (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2004), pp. 74–77.

¹¹ He Liangjun 何良俊, *Siyouzhai congshuo* 四友齋叢說 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 126.

even went so far as to perform “Zhongshanlang zaju” to satirize Xianji 獻吉 (Li Mengyang’s literary name).¹² Faced with the many versions of the Kang/Li incident that he heard, Wang came up with the following conclusion:

The various versions of the incident are as such [that I have presented]. In general, because Master Kang once rescued Master Li and the details about it are not known, [people] compete in using their writing brushes to spread and elaborate on the incident. “Zhongshanlang zhuan” was written by Ma Zhongxi, and the *zaju* was produced by Wang Jiusi. [People] believed that [these works were written] to satirize Xianji (Li Mengyang), and there is a reason behind their believing so.¹³

By the time Wang Shizhen was recounting this incident, Wang Jiusi 王九思 (1468–1551), a close friend of Kang and another member of the “Former Seven Masters,” was considered to have written a *zaju* on the subject. It is uncertain whether this refers to the one-act *yuanben* titled “Zhongshanlang” which is now commonly attributed to Wang Jiusi.¹⁴

In another account, however, that by Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642), it was Kang Hai who was said to have written the “Zhongshanlang” play as an insinuation directed at Li Mengyang.¹⁵ It is commonly believed, though not unquestioned, that Kang Hai wrote the four-act *zaju* “Dongguo xiansheng.”

We know that Kang Hai once read “Zhongshanlang zhuan” based on his poem titled “On Reading the Tale of the Wolf of Zhongshan”:

In my love for living things, I do not make reckonings.
How would I therefore remember that I once saved this wolf?
You laughed at me because I saved the wolf, and it bit me.
[But] it’s all right that animals and human beings each have
their own sentiments and intentions.¹⁶

¹² Wang Shizhen, *Yanshantang bieji* 弇山堂別集 29, pp. 16b–17a, in *Zhongguo yeshi jicheng xubian* 中國野史集成續編 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2000), vol. 11, p. 326.

¹³ *Ibid.* 29, p. 17a [p. 326]. For Wang’s account of the various views, see pp. 324–26.

¹⁴ It could well have referred to the *zaju* version now attributed to Kang Hai. Furthermore, one should note that other than this account by Wang Shizhen, Wang Jiusi’s “Zhongshanlang” *yuanben* was almost never mentioned by any other Ming and Qing critics, a point to which I return, below.

¹⁵ Shen Defu, *Guqu zatan* 顧曲雜談, in *Zhongguo xiqu yanjiuyuan* 中國戲曲研究院, ed., *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1959), vol. 4, p. 207.

¹⁶ Kang Hai, “Du ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ 讀中山狼傳, in his *Kang Duishan xiansheng ji* 康對山先生集 (*Xuxiu siku quanshu* edn., vol. 1335), j. 18, p. 14a.

The fact that Kang Hai admitted, on reading the classical tale, that he had once saved a “wolf” might have initiated previous attempts to search for the specific person involved, and Li Mengyang was obviously the perfect candidate.¹⁷

These Ming accounts form a general narrative: Based on an earlier classical tale of the ungrateful wolf, Ma Zhongxi wrote another longer classical tale. Later, Kang Hai and Wang Jiushi then each wrote a play on the same subject to satirize Li Mengyang for his ingratitude towards Kang. Such an explanation undoubtedly satisfies the curious reader who wants to know on what and for whom the text was written. This was a popular view in Ming and Qing times, and still finds its supporters among some modern scholars.¹⁸

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE “CONTEXT” PROVIDED

The Ming popular narrative about Kang and Li seemingly provides a “context” for the four versions of the story of the ungrateful wolf. Taking the earliest one, a classical tale some believed to have been written in the Tang or Song era, as a source, the Kang/Li narrative then ties the three other “ungrateful wolf” stories to a specific moment in the sixteenth century, and, as well, very neatly to the lives of three writers closely associated with one another.

However, I argue that if we study the four texts carefully, we can find that this specific popular-narrative context is indeed very problematic. The entire narrative centers on the belief that Li Mengyang was an ingrate. However, the relationship between Kang Hai and Li Mengyang is an issue of much dispute.¹⁹ Some scholars have shown

¹⁷ E.g., Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) concluded after reading Kang’s poem that the tale must be a satire directed at Li Mengyang. See his *Chibei outan* 池北偶談 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), p. 348.

¹⁸ For example, see Wu Mei 吳梅, *Zhongguo xiqu gailun* 中國戲曲概論 (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1926), middle *juan*, p. 12, and Yan Dunyi 嚴敦易, “Kang Hai de Zhongshanlang” 康海的中山狼, in his *Yuan Ming Qing xiqu lunji* 元明清戲曲論集 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhua she, 1982), pp. 142–43.

¹⁹ For a summary of the different views, see Jin, *Kang Hai yanjiu*, pp. 59–67, and Ning Zongyi 寧宗一, Lu Lin 陸林, and Tian Guimin 田桂民, eds., *Mingdai xiqu yanjiu gaishu* 明代戲劇研究概述 (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), pp. 89–92. The abundant articles on this issue include Jiang Xingyu 蔣星煜, “Kang Hai Zhongshanlang zaju bingfei wei jici Li Mengyang er zuo, jiantan ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ xiaoshuo zhi zuozhe” 康海中山狼雜劇並非為譏刺李夢陽而作, 兼談中山狼傳小說之作者, in his *Zhongguo xiqu shi gouchen* 中國戲曲史鉤沉 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhua she, 1982), pp. 159–72; Zhang Zhong 張中, “Wei Li Mengyang bianwu, tan Ming zaju Zhongshanlang” 為李夢陽辯誣, 談明雜劇中山狼, *Xibei shiyuan xuebao* 西北師院學報 1982.2, pp. 65–68; Tian Shouzhen 田守真, “Zaju Zhongshanlang benshi yu Li Mengyang, Kang Hai guanxi kao” 雜劇中山狼本事與李夢陽·康海關係考, *Xi’an shifan xueyuan xuebao* 西南師範學院學報 1985.1, pp. 42–46; Ma Meixin 馬美信 and Han Jiegen 韓

that Kang and Li remained good friends after Kang was dismissed, and also that Li was not in office, and therefore in no position to argue for Kang, when Kang was dismissed. Some scholars therefore now prefer to see the *zaju* not as a satire aimed at specific individuals, but as a more general criticism of all who are ungrateful in the human world. We find support for such a reading in the play “Dongguo xiansheng,” in the concluding remarks by the old man that criticize all ingrates, not only those who were ungrateful to their friends, but also others who were ungrateful to emperor, parents, teachers, and relatives.²⁰

However, while it was more commonly agreed that Li Mengyang did not do direct harm to Kang upon the latter’s dismissal from court, some scholars have also pointed out that there were reasons to believe why Li might have been deemed by some of his contemporaries as “ungrateful”: he appears to have downplayed Kang’s role in rescuing him and did not openly defend Kang Hai as many others did.²¹ Therefore, whether Li Mengyang was indeed an ungrateful wolf as presumed in the so-called context of the popular narrative remains questionable.

To complicate things further, the textual relationship between these “Zhongshanlang” texts and the order in which they appeared are not as straightforward as the narrative suggests. Authorship remains an issue of much doubt and dispute, and thus there is a need to reexamine each of these texts more carefully, and many questions need to be asked.

Was the Earliest Version of the Story Written during Tang or Song?

The earliest extant version of the wolf story is an anonymous classical tale titled “Zhongshanlang zhuan,” which scholarship sometimes attributes to an almost unknown writer Xie Liang 謝良 of the Song era, and sometimes to the much earlier poet Yao He 姚合 (781–846).²² However, we must note that the earliest version extant today is found

結根, “Zhongshanlang zaju yu Kang, Li guanxi kaobian” 中山狼雜劇與康·李關係考辨, *Fudan xuebao* 復旦學報 1989.1, pp. 17–25; Wang Gongwang 王公望, “Li Mengyang yu Kang Hai” 李夢陽與康海, *Gansu shehui kexue* 甘肅社會科學 1997.4, pp. 46–50, and his more recent article, “Lun ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ he ‘Zhongshanlang zaju’ bingfei fengci Li Mengyang, jianlun ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ zhi zuozhe ji Li Mengyang tong Kang Hai, Wang Jiushi zhi guanxi” 論中山狼傳和中山狼雜劇並非諷刺李夢陽, 兼論中山狼傳之作者及李夢陽同康海·王九思之關係, *Gansu shehui kexue* 甘肅社會科學 2004.1, pp. 33–36.

²⁰ “Zhongshanlang zaju,” in *Sheng Ming zaju*, pp. 22a–b.

²¹ See Jin, *Kang Hai nianpu*, pp. 64–67.

²² For a discussion on the authorship of “Zhongshanlang zhuan,” see Jiang, “Kang Hai Zhongshanlang zaju bingfei wei jici Li Mengyang er zuo,” esp. pp. 165–72, and Wang, “Lun ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ he ‘Zhongshanlang zaju’ bingfei fengci Li Mengyang,” esp. pp. 33–34.

in a 1544 edition of the miscellaneous collection *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海.²³ We have a mention in the 1520s of an earlier printing of such a tale,²⁴ but otherwise no source suggests its existence before the sixteenth century. It is possible that prior to our earliest extant text of “Zhongshanlang” there were others, but *Gujin shuohai*’s post-Kang/Li date makes one wonder whether it too was part of the trend to read “Zhongshanlang” for its Kang\Li context.

Was the Longer Version of the Classical Tale Written by Ma Zhongxi?

There were also uncertainties concerning the longer version of the tale usually attributed to Ma Zhongxi.²⁵ If indeed written by Ma, then it would probably have been a late-fifteenth- or early-sixteenth-century text. Curiously, the longer version attributed to Ma only appeared in editions beginning from the last decades of the seventeenth and the early-eighteenth centuries.²⁶ In addition, when Cheng Dayue 程大約 (1541–ca. 1616) reprinted “Zhongshanlang zhuan” together with illustrations in 1606, the version he used was the shorter version and he made no mention of a longer version by Ma Zhongxi.²⁷ This suggests that the longer version was probably not widely known, or that it might not have appeared yet (if it had been written later by someone other than Ma Zhongxi).

Previous scholars have compared the two versions of the classical tale and found that the longer version contains an additional 274 characters, and also is more polished and flows better.²⁸ However, to my knowledge, no one has explored which version had a larger influence on the other versions of “Zhongshanlang,” a point that I show is important to our understanding of the dating and the significance of Ma Zhongxi’s long version.

²³ Lu, ed. *Gujin shuohai*, j. 29.

²⁴ Based on Shen Yuan’s 沈源 preface, “Ke ‘Zhongshanlang zhuan’ yin” 刻中山狼傳引, dated 1525, cited in Cheng Dayue 程大約, ed., *Zhongshanlang tu* 中山狼圖, pp. 12a–13b (CSJC, *xubian* edn., vol. 80, p. 33). Shen also mentioned that this tale was not a new story and that its authorship was unclear.

²⁵ See Ma, *Dongtian ji* 5, pp. 6a–11a, and Gu, ed., *Mingwen yinghua* 4, pp. 59a–64a. *Mingwen yinghua* is the earliest known source to have stated Ma as the author. For English translations of this version, see James R. Hightower, in Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present Day* (New York: Grove Press, 1972) 2, pp. 46–52, and Y. W. Ma and Joseph Lau, *Traditional Chinese Stories* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1978), pp. 117–21.

²⁶ See Jiang, “Kang Hai Zhongshanlang zaju bingfei wei jici Li Mengyang er zuo,” pp. 165–68.

²⁷ Cheng, ed., *Zhongshanlang tu*, pp. 27–31. See my appendix for bibliographic information on this late-Ming printing of “Zhongshanlang” with illustrations.

²⁸ See Yagisawa Hajime, *Mindai gekisakka kenkyū* 明代劇作家研究 (Tokyo: Kōdansha,

For example, believing that Ma wrote the “Tale of the Wolf of Zhongshan,” most scholars assume “Dongguo xiansheng” to be an adaptation of Ma’s version. I argue that this is inaccurate because, contrary to common understanding, the play was based upon the shorter anonymous version of the classical tale. To illustrate this point, we may compare the following lines in the dialogue of the ox in the three versions of the story:

VERSIONS (numbered per above list)	TEXT
1. anonymous, sometimes attributed to Xie Liang or Yao He	Whenever the old farmer went somewhere, I would run ahead and pull the cart; whenever the farmer cultivated [the field], I would pull the plough and devote my strength. 老農出, 我駕車先驅; 老農耕, 我引犁效力. ²⁹
2. longer version usually attributed to Ma Zhongxi	When the farmer was in a hurry to go some place, I would draw him in the farm wagon, choosing the shortest route to take him to his destination. When he wanted to plow, I left the wagon and walked before him in the fields to open a way through the weeds and brambles. ³⁰ 彼特馳驅, 我伏田車, 擇便途以急奔趨; 彼將躬耕, 我脫輓衡, 走郊垆以闢榛荆. ³¹
3. usually attributed to Kang Hai	Whenever the old farmer was to go to or return from somewhere, it was I who pulled the cart; whenever the old farmer cultivated the fields, it was I who pulled the plough. 老農出入, 是俺駕車; 老農耕田, 是俺引犁. ³²

It is clear that the play “Dongguo xiansheng” (no. 3) has followed quite closely on the lines in the shorter version of the classical tale. Not only in this passage, but it differs from the longer version in other instances.³³

1959), pp. 167–68; Jiang, “Kang Hai *Zhongshanlang zaju* bingfei wei jici Li Mengyang er zuo,” p. 168; and Wang, “Lun “Zhongshanlang zhuan” he *Zhongshanlang zaju* bingfei fengci Li Mengyang,” pp. 33–34.

²⁹ *Gujin shuohai*, p. 5b.

³⁰ Translation by Hightower, in Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature* 2, pp. 49–50.

³¹ Ma, *Dongtian ji* 5, p. 9a.

³² *Sheng Ming zaju*, p. 17b.

³³ We can find more supporting evidence in the comparison of the three versions. For example, the stage direction of “Dongguo xiansheng” states that the old man clapped his hands and laughed near the end of the play when he heard that Dongguo decided to let go of the

Therefore, I believe that “Dongguo xiansheng” was more likely to have been based on no. 1, the anonymous, shorter classical tale. This adds further evidence to my earlier argument that Ma Zhongxi’s version was not popular and might not even have been available during mid-Ming. Furthermore, it questions the purported context in which Ma Zhongxi and Kang Hai both write their texts in order to insult Li Mengyang.

Did Kang Hai Compose the Four-Act Play “Dongguo xiansheng”?

As mentioned earlier, we know that Kang once read the tale and also wrote about it in a poem. Several decades after his death, a play titled “Dongguo xiansheng” came to be attributed to Kang Hai first in a work titled *Sheng Ming zaju* 盛明雜劇 (1629)³⁴ and then in *Leijiangji* 爵江集 (1633).³⁵ Whether Kang indeed adapted the tale into his play has been disputed most of all during the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁶ Nonetheless, in this case, we do have the authority of Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502–1568), a slightly later contemporary and acquaintance of Kang, who mentioned that Kang wrote a work on this subject:

[Kang Hai] saved people from life-threatening situations several times, and he never hoped for them to repay his kindness. In return, however, those who were rescued by him spread malicious slanders about him. [Kang] therefore wrote “Chachaci” 差差辭 and the “Zhongshanlang zhuan.” Thereafter, those faults [that Kang was accused of] found their rightful attributions.³⁷

The “Zhongshanlang zhuan” that Li mentions here has often been taken as a reference to the *zaju* and not the classical tale. Although this is probable because it is unlikely that Kang Hai would have written a poem to comment about his own tale, one must be aware that it is still an issue that is open to question.

wolf, which is the same as we find in the shorter version of the classical tale. However, in the longer version, the old man only laughed but did not clap his hands. Also, the added dialogue in the longer version was not found in the play.

³⁴ *Sheng Ming zaju*, j. 19, pp. 509–21.

³⁵ *Leijiangji*, pp. 262–73.

³⁶ On debates about Kang’s authorship of *Zhongshanlang*, see Zhu Yingping 朱迎平, “Kang Hai zuo Zhongshanlang zaju zhenyi” 康海作中山狼雜劇斟疑, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 1989.6, pp. 34–37; Liu Zhizhong 劉致中, “Guanyu Zhongshanlang zaju de zuozhe wenti” 關於中山狼雜劇的作者問題, *Wenxue yichan* 1990.4, pp. 132–35; Huang Rensheng 黃仁生, “Mingdai Zhongshanlang zaju santi, jianyu Zhu Yingping tongzhi shangque” 明代中山狼雜劇三題, 兼與朱迎平同志商榷, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 1991.2, pp. 47–52, 75, and Zhu Yingping, “Zaitan Zhongshanlang zaju de zuozhe” 再談中山狼雜劇的作者, *Wenxue yichan* 1992.2, pp. 120–22. See also Jin, *Kang Hai yanjiu*, pp. 80–84.

³⁷ Li Kaixian, “Kang, Wang, Wang, Tang sizi buzhuang” 康王王唐四子補傳, in Bu Jian 卜健, ed., *Li Kaixian quanji* 李開先全集 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2004), p. 800.

Even if Li Kaixian meant to say here that Kang Hai had written the “Zhongshanlang” play, as most believed, it is still noteworthy that Li did not mention Kang’s authorship of it in his first biography of Kang, where he mentioned other works by Kang, including his *zaju* “Wang Lanqing zhenlie zhuan” 王蘭卿真[貞]烈傳 (“A Biography of the Chaste and Loyal Wang Lanqing”).³⁸ It was only later, as Li received more material and wrote a supplementary biography of Kang, that he added this information about Kang’s writing a “Zhongshanlang zhuan.”³⁹ Thus, we may gather that if this play was written by Kang Hai, it was perhaps not widely circulated or known outside Kang’s immediate circle of friends, to the extent that even Li Kaixian did not hear about it until much later. That Li did not mention the “Zhongshanlang” plays at all in his *Cixue* 詞謔 (*Lyrics for Banter*) also supports this point.

Was the One-Act Play Written by Wang Jiusi?

The same uncertainty about authorship also applies to the *yanben* on the same subject written by Wang Jiusi (see item no. 4, in the list, above). No sources during Wang’s lifetime suggested that Wang Jiusi wrote it, and it appeared only very late in a 1640 edition of the complete works of Wang, based on material kept by Wang descendants.⁴⁰ Wang Jiusi’s reputation in drama during the Ming and the Qing eras appears to have come almost solely from his *zaju* “Du Zimei gujiu youchun ji” 杜子美沽酒遊春記 (“Du Fu Buys Wine and Roams in the Spring”; hereafter called “Gujiu youchun”). The “Zhongshanlang” *yanben*, though now commonly attributed to Wang Jiusi, seems not to have been heard of during Ming and Qing, other than the one questionable comment by Wang Shizhen saying that Wang Jiusi had written a *zaju* on the subject.⁴¹ No drama catalogs from this period record

³⁸ Li Kaixian, “Duishan Kang xiuzhuan zhuan” 對山康修撰傳, *Li Kaixian quanji*, p. 762.

³⁹ Li, “Kang, Wang, Wang, Tang sizi buzhuàn,” p. 800. The 1565 date of this supplementary biography is given by Bu Jian in *Li Kaixian quanji*, p. 808. As for the first biography of Kang written by Li Kaixian, we may gather that it was written only slightly earlier because Li mentioned that Kang’s second son, Kang Cen 康稜 (1534-?), was over thirty years old at the time; see his “Duishan Kang xiuzhuan zhuan,” p. 763.

⁴⁰ *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji*, pp. 1475–92. See also Wang Xu 王旭, et al., “ba 跋” (colophon), which explains the sources for the collection, *ibid.*, p. 1493. Wang Xu is a direct descendant of Wang Jiusi by four generations. See Wang Enrong 王恩榮, ed., *Wangshi zupu* 王氏族譜 (Huxian: Yongxing yinshuachang, 1995), p. 5.

In Li’s biography of Wang Jiusi, this play was not listed among Wang’s printed works, suggesting that the work might not have been printed then, or that Li did not even know if Wang had written it; Li Kaixian, “Meipi Wang jiantao zhuan” 漢陂王檢討傳, *Li Kaixian quanji*, pp. 767–68.

⁴¹ We do not know whether Wang Shizhen had mistaken Wang Jiusi as the author of the *zaju* version now attributed to Kang Hai.

Wang Jiusi's "Zhongshanlang."⁴² For example, the seventeenth-century critic Qi Biaoja 祁彪佳 (1602–1645) did not mention it in his *Yuanshan-tang jupin* 遠山堂劇品, which listed Wang's "Gujiu youchun," and also the other "Zhongshanlang" plays written by Kang Hai and other later playwrights. Even the nineteenth-century drama aficionado Yao Xie 姚燮 (1805–1864) only mentioned "Gujiu youchun" and appeared ignorant about the "Zhongshanlang" *yuanben*.⁴³ Therefore, it might be as late as the early decades of the twentieth century that modern scholars readily came to know of the existence of this play.⁴⁴ However, with no evidence suggesting an alternative author, it has been the consensus to attribute this *yuanben* to Wang Jiusi.

"Attributive Authorship": Matching Texts with Writers

To summarize, there is little evidence that the four versions and their authors were necessarily related textually, and that they were all produced within the same short period for a common, specific purpose of insinuating Li Mengyang, as the popular narrative suggests.

What one encounters here is a kind of "attributive authorship." That is to say, uncertainties abound in the matter of authorship, and what we are left with are no more than miscellaneous accounts by Ming and Qing critics attributing texts to authors, sometimes based primarily on what better fitted the life stories of the recipient authors. The way the three "Zhongshanlang" texts are attributed to Ma, Kang, and Wang under a captivating narrative is a good example.

This way of reading a fictional story for some kind of hidden political or personal context is compelling, especially for texts of uncertain authorship –not an uncommon thing in Chinese drama and fiction. In general, the authorship of Chinese drama only became well established from the last quarter of the sixteenth century onward.⁴⁵ For example, it remains disputable whether Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) wrote the famous play "Mingfengji" 鳴鳳記 ("The Crying Phoenix"). A similar phenomenon is seen in fiction as well, most notably in the case of the

⁴² Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Mingdai zaju quanmu* 明代雜劇全目 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1958), p. 86.

⁴³ Yao Xie, *Jinyue kaozheng* 今樂考證, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, vol. 10, pp. 149–50.

⁴⁴ Although Wu Mei and Zheng Zhenduo had earlier discussed the play in their studies in the 1920s, it was perhaps only in the 1930s that it became available to most readers and scholars by Zheng Zhenduo's inclusion of it together with the versions by Ma Zhongxi and Kang Hai in his selection for the world classics series titled *Shijie wenku* 世界文庫. See Zheng Zhenduo, ed., *Shijie wenku* (Shanghai: Shenghuo shuju, 1935–36), vol. 4, pp. 1373–88.

⁴⁵ Wilt L. Idema, "Traditional Dramatic Literature," in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2001), chap. 41, p. 824.

late sixteenth-century novel *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), where multiple candidates have been suggested.

In the case of these “Zhongshanlang” texts, the fact that we are dealing with an animal fable, especially one associated with ingratitude, perhaps makes them especially subject to this type of reading. A few decades later, when the dramatist Chen Yujiao 陳與郊 (1544–1611) wrote a play titled “Yuanshi yiquan” 袁氏義犬 (“The Loyal Dog of the Yuan Family”), also on the theme of ingratitude, it was again widely believed that he had written it to criticize his own ungrateful students.⁴⁶

BREAKING AWAY FROM THE PROBLEMATIC “CONTEXT”: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE TWO “ZHONGSHANLANG” PLAYS

For a long time, the “Zhongshanlang” texts have become secondary to the narrative about them, which dominates our understanding. To break away from the dominant reading, we need to shift the focus from the narrative and the “context” back to the texts themselves, and pay attention to other features, for example, their significance in the histories of the respective genres, and how they compare with later adaptations.

Here, I focus on the two plays – the *zaju* “Dongguo xiansheng” and the *yanben* “Zhongshanlang,” and I discuss how they were appraised by Ming and Qing critics as well as their reputation and status in the history of Chinese drama. Regardless of the many disputes about authorship, as we have already seen, these two plays have been associated with Kang Hai and Wang Jiushi for hundreds of years. Given such a historical context, I will refer to them as Kang Hai’s “Dongguo xiansheng” and Wang Jiushi’s “Zhongshanlang.”

Of the two plays on the subject of “Zhongshanlang,” Wang Jiushi’s *yanben* version is perhaps better known in the English-speaking world because it is available in at least two published translations.⁴⁷ However, during the late Ming, it was Kang’s *zaju* that was favored by literati and was twice chosen for *zaju* anthologies. In contrast, Wang’s

⁴⁶ See Qi Biaoqia, *Yuanshantang jupin* 遠山堂劇品, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, vol. 6, p. 156, and Shen Defu 沈德符, *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), entry on Chen Zugao 陳祖皋 (son of Chen Yujiao), p. 422. It is noteworthy that Chen Yujiao also adapted the “Zhongshanlang” story into a play, which unfortunately is no longer extant; see appendix.

⁴⁷ We have several English translations of Wang Jiushi’s *yanben* adaptation; e.g., James I. Crump, trans., “Wang Chiu-ssu: The Wolf of Chung Shan,” *Renditions* 7 (1977), pp. 29–38, and William Dolby, *Eight Chinese Plays: From the Thirteenth Century to the Present* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), pp. 93–102. In contrast, to my knowledge, the only full English translation

yuanben was never included in dramatic anthologies, and perhaps because it was called a *yuanben* it was kept from *zaju* anthologies.⁴⁸ Also, the play might not have been very well known at that time because it was not mentioned by critics in Ming times and it seems never to have been printed, except its inclusion in Wang's complete works printed around 1640. Nonetheless, it found a way into the history of Chinese drama through its unique dramatic form, which many believe marks the beginning of a dramatic subgenre of one-act short plays.

Capturing the Yuan Flavor: The zaju "Dongguo xiansheng"

In the Ming era, the quality of *zaju* came to be measured against the standard set by writers of the Yuan era, the period generally considered the "golden age," a time in which the genre developed and flourished.⁴⁹ It was a huge compliment for a Ming play to be compared with the likes of Yuan drama. When we see such glowing comments of later critics on Kang Hai's "Dongguo xiansheng," we know for certain that the reception was positive.

In a commentary to "Dongguo xiansheng," Shen Tai 沈泰 (fl. 1629) gave his highest praise. Comparing it with the plays from the Jin and Yuan eras, Shen said that it overshadowed even the reputation of Yuan masters such as Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (ca. 1220–ca. 1307) and Zheng Guangzu 鄭光祖 (ca. 1260–ca. 1320).⁵⁰ In addition, Qi Biaoja praised the play for possessing "a complete and grand spirit" in its arias and having many "striking and bright words" in its dialogues.⁵¹ In these aspects, Qi believed that the play could be placed among the likes of the Yuan dramas "Zhushadan" 硃砂擔 and "Qiaotadui" 喬踏碓, and even surpassed them in quality.⁵²

A modern scholar of Chinese drama, Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887–1964), commented that the play's four acts are tightly knit and that the arias demonstrate the true spirit appropriate to the genre (*bense* 本

of Kang's *zaju* is in an unpublished undergraduate thesis in which both Kang Hai's "Dongguo xiansheng wujiu Zhongshan lang" and Wang Jiusi's "Zhongshan lang" are translated; see Andrew J. Kopecki, "Mr. Tung-kuo Mistakenly Saves the Wolf of Mt. Chung," Honors thesis (Harvard University, 1968), pp. 23–84.

⁴⁸ Its unique form of just a single act, though, might not have been a major issue, as *zaju* anthologies such as *Sheng Ming zaju* did include a number of one-act plays titled as *zaju*.

⁴⁹ On Ming writers' admiration of Yuan drama, see J. I. Crump, "Giants in the Earth: Yuan Drama as Seen by Ming Critics," *Tamkang Review* 5,2 (1974), pp. 33–62, and Iwaki Hideo, "Genealogy of Yuan-ch'ü Admirers in the Ming Play World: Classic Consciousness of Li K'ai-hsien, Hsu Wei, T'ang Hsien-Tsu and Tsang Mao-Hsun," *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* 32 (1977), pp. 13–33.

⁵⁰ See Shen Tai's commentary on "Zhongshanlang," *Sheng Ming zaju*, p. 2a.

⁵¹ Qi, *Yuanshantang jupin*, p. 153.

⁵² *Ibid.*

色). On this basis, Aoki believed that the play so fully matches aspects of Yuan drama that it could not be the work of a writer from after the Wanli period. He wrote, “If it were not written by Kang Hai, then it must be by someone who was learned in and had special understanding of the northern *qu*.”⁵³

There is something noteworthy in Aoki’s appraisal: “Dongguo xiansheng” was not only highly regarded, but it was considered one of the final “upholders” of the dramatic tradition of the northern *zaju* before the genre went through a transformation resulting in the appearance of a new form of *zaju* beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century. According to the general survey of Ming *zaju* by Zeng Yongyi 曾永義 (1941–), while the majority (80.46%) of early-Ming *zaju* obeyed the conventions of Yuan drama, for mid-Ming *zaju* (1536–1567) only a small minority (21.43%), and an even smaller minority (10.11%) of later-Ming *zaju*, continued to do so. The remaining majority of these later ones broke away from the *zaju* tradition in various ways: first, they were no longer restricted to four acts and varied in length from one to eleven; second, they used not only northern tunes, but also southern ones or a combination of both; third, the songs might be assigned to more than one role-type.⁵⁴

Amidst these transformations seen in other contemporary *zaju* of his times, Kang Hai’s “Dongguo xiansheng” closely followed the format and prosodic structure of the *zaju* from the Yuan era. It is made up of four acts each containing a song suite written in a mode and all arias are sung by a single major role, in this case, the *mo* 末 playing Dongguo. But what else in “Dongguo xiansheng” made it a play comparable to its Yuan predecessors?

It may be difficult for us to define what these late Ming critics saw in this play that captures the flavor or spirit of Yuan drama. But we may find some clues in Meng Chengshun’s 孟稱舜 (1601–1684) commentary to the following aria. This aria describes Dongguo’s fear when Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子, the King of Zhao who led his soldiers in hunting, chopped off the shafts of his chariot as a warning to Dongguo that he would suffer a similar ending if he was found to have concealed the wolf from them:

⁵³ Aoki Masaru, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi* 中國近世戲曲史, trans. Wang Gulu 王古魯 (Beijing: Zuoji chubanshe, 1958), p. 159.

⁵⁴ Zeng Yongyi, *Ming zaju gailun* 明雜劇概論 (Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe, 1979), pp. 68–71. See also Xu Zifang 徐子方, *Ming zaju yanjiu* 明雜劇研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 61–62.

To the Tune of “Daodaoling” 叨叨令

I see his all-smiling face turned completely blood-red,
 He raised his dazzling bright sword – ah, that sword is as sharp
 as a razor!
 The smashing blows [of the sword] just keep falling on the rum-
 bling chariot,
 Causing my trembling soul to shudder immediately in fear.
 Alas, how painful this is!
 Alas, how painful this is!
 Even if you are angry and may pout your lips, don’t you inces-
 santly accuse me!⁵⁵

Upon reading this set of arias, Meng applauded, “These few lines greatly resemble [those written by] the Yuan writers.”⁵⁶ The ample use of onomatopoeic words and other forms of descriptive phrases,⁵⁷ which were so often seen in Yuan drama, might have helped this play capture the *jeux d’esprit* of Yuan drama,⁵⁸ especially since this feature was no longer common in Ming *zaju*.

As Meng Chengshun pointed out, the language of “Dongguo xian-sheng” is “of simple elegance and earnest appeal, and yet carries a slight flavor of romance and beauty.”⁵⁹ If we compare the *zaju* to the original classical tale, we find that the first half of act 1 was added material, giving Dongguo (or the playwright himself) a chance to express himself through a series of arias:

To the Tune of “Dianjiangchun” 點絳脣
in the Xianlü 仙呂 Mode

Rushing about all over this world,
 My feet are battered and worn away,
 On the grey donkey I mount.
 Looking back on the years of splendor gone by,
 There is nothing but empty chatter.

⁵⁵ *Leijiangji*, pp. 8a–b.

⁵⁶ See Meng’s commentary in *Leijiangji*, p. 8a.

⁵⁷ Such phrases often escape the understanding of modern scholars. Zhou Yibai’a 周贻白 annotations simply listed these terms as phrases describing the sound, color, and action, without attempting to make further explanations. See his *Mingren zaju xuan* 明人雜劇選 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1958), p. 248, nn. 7–11. See also Dale R. Johnson, *A Glossary of Words and Phrases in the Oral Performing and Dramatic Literatures of the Jin, Yuan, and Ming* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies University of Michigan, 2000), for his interpretations of the terms and their variants from similar terms in the Yuan era.

⁵⁸ Eleanor H. Crown uses this term “*jeux d’esprit*” as a translation for the playful poetry in the *sanqu* of the Yuan era. See Crown, “*Jeux d’Esprit* in Yüan Dynasty Verse,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 2.2 (1958), pp. 182–98.

⁵⁹ See Meng’s commentary in *Leijiangji*, p. 1b.

To the Tune of “Hunjianglong” 混江龍

Those who scheme for kingship and plot for hegemony are truly laughable!
 They float adrift, and take the entire world as their home.
 Memorials of ten thousand words are like their ready-made food and clothing,
 A glib tongue of three inches is their profession.
 Who is weaker, who is stronger – they line up battle formations just like ants.
 Fighting over the sweet and bitter – they created a hoo-ha in government just like bustling bees.
 As soon as they encounter one who calls himself the ruler,
 All they care about are [empty matters like] manipulating ghosts and [trivial stuff like] grabbing the sand,
 How could they be willing to [give up their official position and] associate with the birds and animals?⁶⁰
 Would they say, “Am I not a bitter gourd?”⁶¹
 There are those who go to the East, and run to the West,
 With countless joy;
 There are others who rush about in the morning, and flee at night,
 With short sighs and long complaints.
 When they are out of luck, [all their efforts are as useless as] selling water by the river day after day;
 When their luck comes by, then suddenly flowers are added to brocade.
 You guys suffering from poverty and starving in vain, still use a loose bamboo slip to race a fish dying out of water
 I, facing the west wind, will just enjoy my long journey, patting my lean horse,
 For a little bit of profit,
 Who on this earth will take on such misery!⁶²

Designated as the self-expression of Dongguo, these arias could be read as a Mohist’s criticism of Confucian scholars. One could also very well read them as the playwright’s own criticism of the power

⁶⁰ In *Analects* xviii/6, Confucius said that it is impossible for him to withdraw from the world and associate with birds and beasts. Here, however, Kang Hai took an opposite stand by criticizing the literati who refused to give up their official positions and withdraw from the world.

⁶¹ This line is also taken from *Analects* xvii/7, where Confucius said that he could not allow himself to be treated like a gourd which, instead of being eaten, hangs from the end of a string.

⁶² *Leijiangji*, pp. 2a–b.

politics at court, and of the useless officials who only relied on their glib tongues.⁶³ In fact, the arias portraying Dongguo's weariness with "rushing about all over the human world" and how he had realized that everything was empty might perhaps better fit a dismissed and retired official like Kang Hai (if he indeed was the author) than an aspiring one like Dongguo, who was on his way to gain an official post.

In terms of language, the line "I, facing the west wind, will just enjoy my long journey, patting my lean horse" is worth noting. This is a rather colloquial expression, but inscribed within it are two iconic images, the west wind and the lean nag, which reminds us of the famous *sanqu* song titled "Autumn Thoughts" by Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (ca. 1250–before 1324):

Dry vine, old trees, crows at dusk,
 Low bridge, stream running, cottages,
 Ancient road, west wind, lean nag,
 The sun westering
 The one with breaking heart at the sky's edge.⁶⁴

The intertextual engagement with this masterpiece from the Yuan era was also suggested in a prose line by Dongguo that comes immediately following the end of the second song that we just read: "Alas, it's the late autumn season again!"

Resetting the scene to the late autumn season (which is not in the original classical tale) allows the playwright to allude to Ma's famous song on the season. Ma's "Autumn Thoughts" has long been regarded as one of the masterpieces of Yuan *sanqu* and is well known for its juxtaposition of images created by the terse, almost completely literary, language. The adoption of these iconic images by Ma also appeared to signal a shift in the language of the arias in the subsequent third song in act 1 of the play:

To the Tune of "Youhulu" 油葫蘆
 On the ancient road, the evening crows caw among the hanging willows,
 I see the evening sun just westering
 The freezing geese honk "ya, ya" as they land on the flat sands.
 Yellow dust whirls over the land, as the moaning wind sweeps across [my face];
 Dark clouds cover the fields, as the mists of the wild brushes off [my face].

⁶³ Cf. Zeng, *Ming zaju gailun*, p. 204.

⁶⁴ Trans. Birch, *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 17.

All I can see is the shore of withered grasses reaching to the sky,
 Where can I find any rustic household beyond the forest?
 This stretch of autumn mountains is worthy to be painted.
 I can't stop shedding clear tears on my embroidered gown.⁶⁵

One can feel the glaring presence of Ma Zhiyuan's "Autumn Thoughts" in this song, with borrowed images, such as the ancient road, the crows at dusk, and the westering sun. Unlike the previous instance where only a couple of iconic images were inserted and the vernacular line structure kept, here we witness a shift from the more colloquial language used in the first two songs to a more lyrical and poetic language in this third one, invoking the kind of melancholic feelings experienced by a weary traveler. The playwright's engagement with Ma Zhiyuan's "Autumn Thoughts" might be seen as an expansion and rewriting of the latter. Through this engagement, the playwright picked up from Ma's lines and developed a more literal and elegant linguistic style quite distinct from that displayed in other parts of the play. These arias won special praise by Shen Tai, who commented that "the description of the autumn scenery was the most sorrowful."⁶⁶

However, "Autumn Thoughts" seems so much in the playwright's mind that he slipped into the lyrical mode once again later, at the beginning of act 4. When Dongguo came to the cottage of the old man, the playwright gave another lyrical description of the idyllic scenery, making use of yet another two images in Ma's piece, "low bridge" and "stream running." However, one late-Ming critic pointed out that although the playwright's description of the idyllic scenery of the cottage might appear appealing, it did not seem realistic that Dongguo would have spoken lyrically about scenery, given his precarious situation after both the ox and the tree had sided with the wolf.⁶⁷

Apart from the language of the play, "Dongguo xiansheng" was often also complimented for its structure and well-designed dramatic scenes. For example, in act 2, when Zhao Jianzi and his soldiers searched for the wolf (then already hidden in Dongguo's book bag), Zhao initially wanted to instruct his soldiers to search the bag. Eventually, Zhao was convinced by Dongguo's claim of ignorance about the wolf. Nonetheless, it has added suspense to the story: would the wolf be exposed? would Dongguo therefore be in danger for lying to Zhao? This scene was not found in the original classical tale and was probably an invention by the playwright.

⁶⁵ *Leijiangji*, p. 2b.

⁶⁶ See Shen Tai's commentary, *Sheng Ming zaju*, p. 2b.

⁶⁷ See Meng's commentary in *Leijiangji*, p. 19a.

Wang Jiushi, in his one-act play on the same story, decided to make a change to the scene, turning the threatening statement of a possible bag search to an actual one carried out by the soldiers, but the sequence was shifted, to before Dongguo actually encountered the wolf. By doing so, however, it meant that Dongguo was not in a precarious position at all when his bag was searched because the wolf was not in it then! Such a change resulted in the play losing any sort of tension and suspense that the bag-search scene would have created.

Wang Jiushi made a series of changes in his adaptation of the story, which may be best explained as a conscious effort to differentiate his adaptation from Kang Hai's *zaju*. Most significantly, Wang chose to present the same story in a much shorter structure of just one act. But there are also several other minor changes he made that are equally telling in this aspect. For example, in Wang's version, Dongguo is no longer a scholar on his way to the examination or to gain a position, but one who was invited by the king of Wei to go to his kingdom to teach him the doctrines of the Mohist school. Also, the book bag in the original story and in Kang's version is turned into a bookcase, and the old man is turned into the earth god. None of these changes led to any major plot change, and can only be explained as Wang's effort to be different.

Wang Jiushi's version relies largely on prose dialogues in the narration, and arias played a much more minor role in contrast to Kang's version. While Kang Hai used arias as a vehicle of lyrical self-expression for Dongguo or himself, Wang Jiushi appears to be less interested in the inner state of Dongguo's mind than in the progress of the plot; he relegated arias only to act as supports for the narrative plot and to convey the moral message of the story.

One may therefore argue that the two versions aim at largely different goals: Kang's may be more for the literary values (of a reading text) and also for self-expression, while Wang's version was written with the stage in mind, and leaned towards achieving theatrical effectiveness, a feature that I discuss in greater detail in the next section.

Compared with Wang Jiushi's *yanben*, Kang Hai's *zaju* "Dongguo xiansheng" appears to have been more influential on later plays dealing with the same subject. This may be illustrated in the example of a short play on the same story that is now preserved as a play within a play in Li Yu's 李玉 (1591-1671) "Yipengxue" 一捧雪. The play within a play only contains one act of a suite of six songs, and therefore in its form would appear to resemble Wang Jiushi's one-act play. However, a

close reading would suggest otherwise. It followed not the plot of Wang Jiusi's *yuanben* version, but that of Kang Hai's "Dongguo xiansheng," with the king of Zhao only threatening to search the bag, but not carrying out his threat. It also preserves the unique late-autumn setting of "Dongguo xiansheng" (which is not in Wang Jiusi's version). One may even find traces of lines from "Dongguo xiansheng" in this short play, especially evident in the first aria.⁶⁸

This clearly shows that "Dongguo xiansheng" was still highly regarded in later times, even though we know that several dramatic adaptations were produced after it.

Yuanben and Zaju Amalgamated into One: Wang Jiusi's "Zhongshanlang" Beyond Classified Dramatic Genres

When Wang Jiusi's *yuanben* "Zhongshanlang" captured the attention of early-twentieth-century scholars, it was because of its form, more than its content. In its earliest extant edition, Wang's "Zhongshanlang" is titled a *yuanben*,⁶⁹ thereby associating it with the earlier Chinese dramatic genre of the Jin era. *Yuanben*, literally "texts of the entertainers' guild," usually refers to short farces characterized by coarse and often bawdy humor, which often relied on actors' performances more than the texts *per se* for their effectiveness on stage.⁷⁰ Most scholars now believe that Wang's play had very little in common with the Jin *yuanben*, apart from its short format of a single act. Instead, they believe that the play may be closer to a single act of a *zaju* in its format and prosodic structure.⁷¹ However, containing only a single act also means that the "Zhongshanlang" *yuanben* departs from the convention of the four-act structure of the *zaju*.

Hence, what we have here is an awkward case of a play that does not readily fall into any of the dramatic categories of Ming times. I suggest that it is precisely such a problematic case in genre classifica-

⁶⁸ See Li Yu 李玉, *Li Yu xiqu ji* 李玉戲曲集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 18.

⁶⁹ Lacking any earlier editions for comparison, it is unclear whether Wang has named the play a *yuanben* himself, or that it was done only later by others on its inclusion in his complete works in 1640.

⁷⁰ Wilt L. Idema, "Yüan-pen as a Minor Form of Dramatic Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 6 (1984), p. 68.

For previous studies of the genre *yuanben*, see Hu Ji 胡忌, *Song Jin zaju kao* 宋金雜劇考 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959); Tanaka Kenji 田中謙二, "Impon kō" 院本考, *Nippon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本學會報 20 (1968), pp. 169-91, also included in his *Tanaka Kenji chosakushū* 田中謙二著作集 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2000-2001) 1, pp. 53-94; James I. Crump, "Yüan-pen, Yüan Drama's Rowdy Ancestor," *Literature East & West* 14.4 (1970), pp. 473-90; Hong Zan 洪讚, *Jin zaju yuanben kao* 金雜劇院本考 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1975).

⁷¹ E.g., see Hu Ji, *Song Jin zaju kao*, pp. 71-72.

tion that allows us to fully realize and explore the variety of dramatic forms, the fluidity of generic terms, and the dramatic developments in the mid-Ming.

Trying to fit “Zhongshanlang” into either *zaju* or *yuanben* would imply that these two genres are distinct, which might not actually have been the case then. Dramatic genres might have been more varied than we find them today in anthologies, with their editorial changes. On the one hand, although *yuanben* is commonly associated with the Jin era, there was, however, very little that the existing *yuanben* texts could tell us about the earlier forms since they were all from the fifteenth century or later.⁷² On the other hand, *zaju* since early in the Ming had developed beyond a rigid form to encompass plays with different acts and various musical structures and combinations. As Wilt Idema has pointed out, from the late-fifteenth century onward, the distinction between *zaju* and *yuanben* grew increasingly blurred until the two terms became at times interchangeable.⁷³

At such a time when generic terms became interchangeable and when genres were undergoing other changes, instead of insisting on fitting the play into either of the two preexisting genres of *yuanben* and *zaju*, I suggest it may be more fruitful for us to consider “Zhongshanlang” as a new dramatic form that developed from them. There is no question that “Zhongshanlang” borrowed from existing *zaju* and *yuanben*, and when one does not aim to fit the play into one of these genres, the way it differs from each will not pose a serious problem. Instead, we can focus on how it integrates characteristics of both genres into its new form.

Hu Ji 胡忌 (1931–2005) once commented that the language in Wang Jiusi’s “Zhongshanlang” is too serious in tone – there is nothing funny about the play, and it does not poke fun like a *yuanben* should do.⁷⁴ It is quite true that the story has a clear moral message, which may make the play a little didactic and “serious,” but we should not deny that Wang Jiusi did inject humor into his adaptation of the story, and if *yuanben* is believed to have been a genre displaying stage wit, humor, and effectiveness, then there are certain scenes in the play that may well satisfy these requirements.

One example is the scene following Dongguo’s release of the wolf after they have traveled far enough away from the pursuing hunters. Look at how the wolf responds:

⁷² Idema has discussed the drawbacks of the usual practice of treating the existing 15th- and 16th-c. texts as continuations of Jin-era *yuanben*. See his “*Yüan-pen*,” esp. pp. 54–55.

⁷³ Idema, “*Yüan-pen*,” p. 69.

⁷⁴ Hu Ji, *Song Jin zaju kao*, p. 71.

WOLF: ... (*Bows his thanks*) When shall I ever be able to repay this great kindness you have done me? Should I ever prove ungrateful to you, master, it will be no more than I deserve if the judgments of Heaven and Earth sentence me to gradual dismemberment and death by ten thousand cuts of the knife.⁷⁵

When the wolf later returns to propose to Dongguo its plan to eat him, the stage directions also state clearly that the wolf is “once again to act embarrassed, and kowtows [to Dongguo].”⁷⁶ Clearly, the text was trying to portray the wolf as a human being. Some scholars have noted this feature, but mostly for a different purpose. They focused on the ideological implications of such a portrayal, arguing that this thereby contrasts the wolf’s appearance as a human being with its hidden true nature as an ungrateful beast.⁷⁷ Here, I argue that it is the modern scholars who are perhaps taking the play too seriously. In its own right, this sequence of the wolf mimicking human behavior and action (bowing to Dongguo) is utterly hilarious, and probably even more so when performed on stage.

In terms of stage effectiveness, Wilt Idema has suggested that the visual action may well have been both spectacular and hilarious – with the soldiers of the king of Zhao, the earth god, and his underlings all performing the usual acrobatic routines, and with actors masquerading as the scholar’s donkey, the wolf, the ox, and the apricot tree.⁷⁸ One can imagine that Kang Hai’s *zaju* may largely share similar qualities on stage (except for the earth god and underlings, absent in Kang’s adaptation), but I would argue that Wang Jiushi had clearly shown a keener interest in creating a play for the stage, as is evident in some of his changes.

One example is Dongguo’s encounter with the apricot tree, which is introduced by the following sequence:

(*Wai dresses up as an old apricot tree, and acts standing still.*)

(*Sheng performs the act of pointing to the tree.*)

(*Sheng speaks*) Hey, that looks like someone standing over there in the distance! We can go together to ask him [about our situation].

⁷⁵ *Zhongshanlang*, p. 3b, in *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji*, p. 1480; Zhou, ed., *Mingren zaju xuan*, p. 263. Trans. Dolby, *Eight Chinese Plays*, p. 96.

⁷⁶ *Zhongshanlang*, pp. 4a–b, in *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji*, pp. 1481–82; Zhou, ed., *Mingren zaju xuan*, p. 264.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Zeng, *Ming zaju gailun*, 207; Huang Rensheng, “Lun Wang Jiushi jiqi *zaju* chuang-zuo” 論王九思及其雜劇創作, in *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 1988.2, p. 58.

⁷⁸ Idema, “*Yuan-pen*,” p. 69.

(*Sheng speaks*) But now that I am close, I realize that it is actually an old apricot tree! There is nothing much I can do. I have to ask it.⁷⁹

We also find an identical sequence when Dongguo later meets the ox.⁸⁰ In the above translation I attempt to be as literal as possible in order to capture the stage directions indicated in the Chinese original. What we find here in Wang's version, which is not in Kang Hai's play, is the interest in the humans' actions in representing trees and animals. In fact, the play appears to be meta-theatrical, possibly making fun of its own representations of the apricot tree and the ox on stage. We have very scarce information on the actual mid-Ming theatrical practices, but one can imagine that the sixteenth-century staging employed by a private drama troupe might not be equipped with the elaborate costumes and props needed for a realistic depiction. It could be that the performers playing the roles of the tree and the ox were only cloaked in a simple costume, and perhaps also wore a mask. To the audience, it was probably clear that the performer on stage had a double identity both as a human being (in reality) and as a tree or an ox (in the play). Wang's play appears to capture this limitation in its representation in a most light-hearted way. It is almost telling the audience: "OK, from far away, it may look like a human being, but if you get closer to it (like Dongguo does), you can see that it is really a tree (or an ox)!"

In comparison, Kang Hai's play makes no mention of the aforementioned ambiguity in the recognition of the character's identity as a tree or an ox. In fact, Kang Hai did not even designate which role types should play the wolf, the tree, and the ox, and instead simply marked them as "the wolf/tree/ox enters." Hence, one may say that Kang appeared to be relatively less concerned with the actual practicalities of staging the play.

While the two plays share a story and thus a similar moral message, we can still find that they each have their own emphasis. Kang Hai's *zaju* "Dongguo xiansheng" focuses on literati self-expression (evident in the arias he added illuminating Dongguo's inner state of mind), and the precarious situations (most evident in Kang's invention of the bag search) of the male protagonist, possibly comparing that to the similar situation a mid-Ming literatus would experience in his political career. In contrast, Wang Jiushi's "Zhongshanlang" showed more concern with

⁷⁹ *Zhongshanlang*, p. 5a, in *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji*, p. 1483; Zhou, ed., *Mingren zaju xuan*, p. 264.

⁸⁰ *Zhongshanlang*, p. 6a, in *Chongkan Meipi Wang taishi xiansheng quanji*, p. 1485; Zhou, ed., *Mingren zaju xuan*, p. 265.

how the story could be presented on stage, and is quite clearly less serious in tone than Kang's.

Previous scholars usually believed that Wang Jiusi called this play a *yuaben* instead of a *zaju* only because of its short format – the single act.⁸¹ But I would suggest that Wang might have seen the potential for the story to be turned into a play full of humor and meta-theatrical jokes for the stage, and that he called it a *yuaben* because he believed he was indeed writing in the farcical tradition of the *yuaben*, rather than a more serious dramatic genre like *zaju*, commonly associated with literati self-expression, as we have seen in the preface of his “Gujiu youchun,” the prefaces to “Sheng Ming zaju,” and also in Kang Hai's *zaju* version of the same story.

Of course, there are strong reasons why previous scholars have suggested that Wang's *yuaben* might instead be more similar to a single act of a *zaju*.⁸² The play contains eight songs in the “Shuangdiao 雙調” mode, which is by far the most commonly used in the fourth act in Yuan *zaju*.⁸³ The initial aria “Xinshuiling” 新水令 is followed by a second aria “Zhumating” 駐馬聽 (as in most other plays using this mode), and then leads to a binary form of two arias – “Yanerluo” 雁兒落 and “Deshengling” 得勝令, and a quaternary form of four songs. Such an organization of the eight songs in a song suite is one of the standard prosodic structures of the *shuangdiao* mode,⁸⁴ which Wang had also used in his own *sanqu* songs.⁸⁵ This sets it apart from most *yuaben*, which do not organize songs into a song suite.

As seen above, Wang Jiusi's “Zhongshanlang” seems to meet some qualities and generic requirements of both *yuaben* and *zaju*, but does not readily fit the conventions of either. I offer the following explanation for the somewhat hybrid form. If we consider the existing dramatic forms during the sixteenth century, in which Wang Jiusi was believed to have written his short play, what options did he have? Wang might have seen the farcical nature of the *yuaben* as appropriate for exploit-

⁸¹ See, e.g., Hu, *Song Jin zaju kao*, p. 72, and Zeng, *Ming zaju gailun*, p. 206.

⁸² Crump, “Yüan-pen, Yüan Drama's Rowdy Ancestor,” p. 488.

⁸³ Zheng Qian 鄭騫 records 123 examples. See his *Beiqu taoshi huilu xiangjie* 北曲套式彙錄詳解 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1973), p. 154. Dale Johnson, on the other hand, records 126, in *Yuan Music Drama: Studies in Prosody and Structure and a Complete Catalogue of Northern Arias in the Dramatic Style* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies University of Michigan, 1980), p. 21.

⁸⁴ For two precedents using the same song structure, see Zheng, *Beiqu taoshi huilu xiangjie*, p. 168.

⁸⁵ For Wang Jiusi's three *sanqu* songs that use the same prosodic structure of the eight songs in *shuangdiao* mode, see Xie Boyang 謝伯陽, ed., *Quan Ming sanqu* 全明散曲 (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1993), pp. 944-45, 978, and 983.

ing both the humorous and spectacular theatrical potential elements of the story. For the music, though, Wang seems to have borrowed from what he was most familiar with, the standard northern prosodic patterns that he used in composing *sanqu* songs and also his *zaju*. Wang's choice of a single act could be traced to the *yuanben* format, though one also needs to be aware of similar trends in the development of *zaju* into shorter forms. Once we free ourselves from the preoccupation with the desire to define Wang's "Zhongshanlang" either as a *yuanben* or a *zaju*, we can discuss the play more fruitfully in the development of one-act plays in the Chinese dramatic tradition.

CONCLUSION

For a story like "Zhongshanlang," it is tempting to search for what went on behind the scenes and to find out the identity of "the wolf of Zhongshan" in reality. This continues to be a dominant mode of reading that we still find later, when new adaptations of the story appeared. One interesting parallel is that Cheng Dayue's printing of the illustration of the same story was also believed to be targeted at his bitter rival Fang Yulu 方于魯 (fl. 1570s).⁸⁶

It is, however, important to read such narratives with caution and realize that the contexts, such as they are, often are no more than loosely attached anecdotes. By breaking away from this mode of reading, and its preoccupation with the assumed reality and identity of the ungrateful wolf, as suggested in the popular narrative, we can see, as in the case of the two plays on "Zhongshanlang," that there is much that lies beyond this kind of context. Though drawing from a common source, the *zaju* "Dongguo xiansheng" and the *yuanben* "Zhongshanlang" demonstrate different potentials and possibilities in producing dramatic adaptations of an animal fable. The *zaju* version focused more on its arias for self-expression and perhaps aimed at achieving the literary values of a reading text, while the *yuanben* version fully exploited the theatrical potential and succeeded in what one can imagine was a highly entertaining stage adaptation.

Furthermore, the plays are important to our understanding of two different trends in the development of Chinese drama during the Ming era, and inform us about the reception of Yuan *zaju*. On the one hand, in the case of "Dongguo xiansheng," we have an adaptation that follows the formal requirements of a Yuan *zaju*. This emphasis on using the Yuan model as a yardstick is also evident in the favorable reception of

⁸⁶ See Cheng, ed., *Zhongshanlang tu*, p. 34.

this play in the dramatic criticism of the Ming era. On the other hand, in the case of the *yuanben* “Zhongshanlang,” we have a playwright who experimented with the dramatic form in his adaptation of the same story. This version, in its hybrid form, does not fit into any existing Chinese dramatic genre, and marks the new development of one-act plays from the *zaju* and *yuanben* traditions.

Appendix: A Selected List of Other Adaptations of “Zhongshanlang”

In addition to the four versions of “Zhongshanlang” in classical tales and drama, as discussed in my article, there are other adaptations of this story in various genres. Below is a selected list of them, indicating not only the popularity and the influence of this story among Chinese writers and readers, but also the wide range of forms in which the later adaptations took shape.

Drama

The story of “Zhongshanlang” appeared in at least three other dramatic adaptations. There are two *zaju*, written in a combination of northern and southern *qu* in five and six acts, by Chen Yujiao 陳與郊 (1544–1611) and Wang Tingne 汪廷訥 (fl. 1610s), respectively.⁸⁷

Another anonymous southern play on the subject was recorded in *Nanci xulu* 南詞絃錄.⁸⁸ The play was titled “The Wolf of Zhongshan, the White Gibbon” (“Zhongshanlang baiyuan” 中山狼白猿), but scholars have pointed out that it might be a case of a mix-up between the titles of two plays.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, none of these three later plays survives to the present day.

Illustrations

Apart from illustrations, Cheng Dayue’s special volume devoted to the story of the wolf of Zhongshan also includes other material, such as a reprint of the classical tale “Zhongshanlang zhuan,” and prefaces and colophons to the story.⁹⁰

Lianhuanhua 連環畫 comic books

In the 1950s, the story was widely popularized by adaptation into *lianhuanhua* 連環畫 (literally “linked pictures”) comic books.⁹¹ Other productions of comic books on the same story continued in the following decades.⁹²

⁸⁷ See Fu, *Mingdai zaju quanmu*, pp. 154 and 127.

⁸⁸ See Xu Wei 徐渭, *Nanci xulu*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, vol. 3, p. 253.

⁸⁹ See Zhu, “Zaitan Zhongshanlang zaju de zuozhe,” p. 121. Zhu believes that the play recorded in *Xushi Hongyulou shumu* 徐氏紅雨樓書目 titled “Zhongshanlang ji” 中山狼記 refers to a *chuanqi*.

⁹⁰ Cheng, ed., *Zhongshanlang tu*, pp. 23–33.

⁹¹ See Dong Juxian 董聚賢 and Xu Gan 徐淦, eds., with illustrations by Liu Jiyou 劉繼貞, “Dongguo xiansheng” 東郭先生 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1954).

⁹² E.g., Zhang Yuejian 張岳健 and Cai Zhenhua 蔡振華, *Dongguo xiansheng he lang* 東郭先生和狼 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975).

Prosimetric literature

In terms of prosimetric forms, we know of adaptations of the story into *daxian* 單弦,⁹³ and into *tanci* 彈詞 titled “Dongguo jiulang” 東郭救狼.⁹⁴ The recording of a *daxian* performance of “Zhongshanlang” by the famous Zhao Yumeng 趙玉明 (1929–) is available on compact disc.⁹⁵

The *Zhongshanlang* story as part of other works

The story becomes a play within a play in scene 5 of a 17th-c. *chuanqi* titled “Yipengxue” 一捧雪, by Li Yu 李玉 (1591–1671).⁹⁶ In addition, as pointed out by Wilt Idema, adaptations of the ungrateful wolf made their way into such later works as *Mindu bieji* 閩都別記 and *Shancai Longnü baojuan* 善財龍女寶卷.⁹⁷ In chapter 340 of *Mindu bieji*, the story of “Zhongshanlang” is mentioned as having been performed by Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 (ca. 1587–1646). The intended irony here is that Ruan was a corrupt official and thus in people’s eyes a “wolf of Zhongshan.” The segment ends with Ruan being killed in the real world, thus sharing the wolf of Zhongshan’s fate.⁹⁸ As for “Shancai Longnü baojuan,” the story of “Zhongshanlang” is fully incorporated as part of the life story of the protagonist. While the main plot still holds, many changes are made. For example, it replaces the wolf with a snake demon, the apricot tree with Zhuangzi, and finally, the elderly man with Guanyin of the Southern Sea, who rescues the protagonist by tricking the snake demon back into a small bottle.⁹⁹

⁹³ See Zhongguo quyizhi quanguo bianji weiyuanhui 中國曲藝志全國編輯委員會 and Zhongguo quyizhi Beijing 北京 bianji weiyuanhui, eds., *Zhongguo quyizhi*, *Beijing juan* 中國曲藝志, 北京卷 (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1992) 3, p. 100.

⁹⁴ See Zhongguo quyizhi quanguo bianji weiyuanhui and Zhongguo quyizhi Hunan juan 湖南卷 bianji weiyuanhui, eds., *Zhongguo quyizhi*, *Hunan juan* 中國曲藝志, 湖南卷, *ibid.* 1, p. 129.

⁹⁵ “Zhongguo quyizhi mingjia mingduan zhencangban, daxian” 中國曲藝名家名段珍藏版, 單弦 (Beijing: China Records Corp., 1999), CCD-99/1162.

⁹⁶ See Li, *Li Yu xiqu ji*, pp. 18–21.

⁹⁷ See Idema, “Guanyin’s Parrot: A Chinese Buddhist Animal Tale and Its International Context,” in Alfredo Cadonna, ed., *India, Tibet, China: Genesis and Aspects of Traditional Narrative* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1999), p. 145.

⁹⁸ See Liren Heqiu 里人何求, *Mindu bieji* 閩都別記 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1987) 3, pp. 351–56.

⁹⁹ See *Baojuan chujie* 寶卷初集 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994) 27, esp. pp. 139–59.