THE "ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM" (*SHISHI YUANLIU*) AND ILLUSTRATED HAGIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES IN MING CHINA

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ABSTRACT: The fifteenth-century *Origins of Buddhism* (or "Origins of the Śākya Clan," *Shishi yuanliu* 《釋氏源流》, hereafter SSYL) narrates the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni and the history of Chinese Buddhism in four hundred illustrated episodes, each occupying one page in the "picture-above-text" format. This article examines the compilation strategy of SSYL and its broader impact on Chinese book culture during the Ming dynasty. A highly selective collage that is both polemical and syncretic, SSYL propagates a grand vision of Buddhism that draws on the realms of genealogy, hagiography, and historiography. Beyond its great significance to East Asian Buddhism, SSYL also represents an important milestone in the development of Chinese publishing, particularly significant to the emergence of illustrated accounts of "origins" (*yuanliu* 源流 and *chushen* 出身) in anthologies, encyclopedias, and literary works that present cultic traditions as rooted in the life stories of revered patriarchs.

KEYWORDS: Hagiography, Buddhism, Ming, illustrations, Zhenwu, Lü Dongbin, print culture

<LEVEL 1>1. INTRODUCTION

The *Origins of Buddhism* (or "Origins of the Śākya Clan," *Shishi yuanliu* 《釋氏源流》, hereafter SSYL) is a fifteenth-century illustrated compilation that couples the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni with summaries of the Buddhist teachings and a pseudo-historical survey of Buddhism in China (fig. 1). As Suey-Ling Tsai highlights, SSYL is a syncretic collage of canonical and popular sources which seems to have been designed to serve didactic, ritualistic, and aesthetic functions.[1] Stretching over four hundred episodes, SSYL is considered the most extensive illustrated hagiography of the Buddha in late imperial China. Its popularity and wide circulation during the Ming and Qing dynasties spurred the production of several editions and

[1] Suey-Ling Tsai, *The Life of the Buddha: Woodblock Illustrated Books in China and Korea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 244–246. To my knowledge, Tsai's book is the most thorough academic study of SSYL to date.

adaptations in China, Korea, and Japan, making SSYL arguably the most influential illustrated narration of the Life the Buddha in East Asia prior to the nineteenth century.[2]

釋氏源流卷上

大報恩寺沙門釋 寶成 編集

釋迦垂迹 一

釋迦者梵語也華言能仁即娑婆世界化
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通圓智湛照道絕形識之封理顯生滅之
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Figure 1: Episode I.1 of the 1556 edition of SSYL. Reprint in Shi Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu* 《釋氏源流》(Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2009).

[2] Tsai, *The Life of the Buddha*, 12–13, 243–244; John Jorgensen, "Infiltrating the Hermit Kingdom: The Penetration of Chinese Buddhist Texts into Seventeenth Century Korea," *Foguang Journal of Buddhist Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 153–210.

Beyond its significance to East Asian Buddhism, SSYL also represents an important milestone in the development of Chinese print culture. This article examines SSYL vis-à-vis other illustrated hagiographies and narratives of “origins” (*yuanliu* 源流 and *chushen* 出身) in Ming book culture. After a general analysis of the structure and content of SSYL, I reflect on the compilation’s ties to other illustrated hagiographies through the close reading of two episodes from SSYL featuring the immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 and the god Zhenwu 真武 (also known as Xuanwu 玄武 and Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝). Turning to the realm of commercial publishing, I look at the trope of “origins” in daily life encyclopedias (*riyong leishu* 日用類書) and narrative texts (*xiaoshuo* 小說, “novels”). Considering the significance and impact of SSYL on Chinese book culture, I argue that SSYL’s structural, thematic, and visual compilation strategies are indicative of a broader shift in Ming narration (“religious” and otherwise) wherein the life stories of revered figures have become increasingly central.

Since the arrival of Buddhism in China, the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni played a pivotal role in shaping the Chinese hagiographic imagination. As Julia Murray demonstrates, textual and pictorial biographies of cardinal Chinese figures such as Confucius and Laozi were deeply indebted to depictions of the birth and Life of the Buddha, especially since the Tang dynasty.[3] The Life of the Buddha provided a narrative template and paradigm, as well as a rich reservoir of hagiographic tropes and visual motifs for producers of hagiographies (including writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers). At the same time, the Life of the Buddha was integrated into longstanding Chinese historiographical and encyclopedic modes of writing. As Bernard Faure notes, “In China, the story of the Buddha’s Life was reorganized on a taxonomic or encyclopedic basis, ‘formatting’ the biography of Śākyamuni in a way that partly countered the narrative tendency asserted in the first ‘complete’ Indian biographies. […] Thus a characteristic feature of Chinese sources, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, is their attempt to integrate the life of the Buddha into Chinese history, fortified with a strong emphasis on specific dates.”[4]

The term *Shishi* 釋氏 in the title of the work reflects an attempt to present this compilation as a genealogy of the Buddhist community. Although *Shishi* could refer to the Buddha Śākyamuni himself, it is most likely understood here as referring to the monastic

[3] Julia K. Murray, “The Evolution of Pictorial Hagiography in Chinese Art: Common Themes and Forms,” *Arts Asiatiques* 55 (2000): 81–83.
[4] Bernard Faure, *The Thousand and One Lives of the Buddha* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2022), 179. See also Faure’s fascinating discussion on the Life of the Buddha as a narrative and paradigm in East Asia in parts 2 and 3 of this monograph.

community, whose members take the surname Shi 釋 as their own when they join the fold. Presenting this chronological compilation as a genealogy no doubt had its advantages; as John Kieschnick argues, “lineage history didn’t only fill a need of the historian to demonstrate his proud family history; it also produced a grand but tidy narrative of interconnected stories, combining the two great passions of all Chinese historians, biography and chronology.”[5]

In his insightful study of Daoist primers, Vincent Goossaert notes that the term *yuanliu* 源流 was used extensively in China in the preceding centuries in texts depicting the origins of an individual, a religious school, or a ritual tradition.[6] The crafting and transmission of these “origins,” that is, the impetus to systematically narrate and widely circulate this “history” as reflected in the term *yuanliu* 源流 in the title of SSYL, lies at the heart of its project. My translation of the title of SSYL as “Origins of Buddhism” reflects my view of this compilation as an attempt to present a grand narrative of Chinese Buddhism as rooted in the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, yet encompassing a much larger history populated by numerous individuals, texts, and practices, predominantly of Chinese origin. As such, it is a narrative tailored to meet the cultural expectations and religious needs of Ming audiences, lay and clerical alike.

<Level 1>2. A Brief Introduction to SSYL

The first edition of *Shishi yuanliu* was produced in Nanjing by the monk Baocheng 寶成 (fl. ca. 1425) at the Dabao’en monastery 大報恩寺 in 1425.[7] The compilation is comprised of four hundred episodes divided into two volumes (*juan* 卷), all following the “picture-above-text” (*shangtu xiawen* 上圖下文) format wherein each episode occupies one page divided into two registers almost identical in size, with an illustration occupying the top register and a text box taking up its lower half. This page layout puts constraints on the length of the text in each episode in order to adhere to the limited space in the lower register (accommodating eighteen columns of characters).

[5] John Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 159.

[6] See Vincent Goossaert, “Daoist Primers and Identity, 1340–1900,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 83, no. 1 (2023): 77–111.

[7] According to Tsai, who examined the original 1425 edition of SSYL, an imprint is kept at the Monastery of the Western Garden 西園寺 in Suzhou and a lithographic reprint made by Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽 (1881–1968) was published in 1935; Tsai, *Life of the Buddha*, 248.

SSYL is not an original retelling of the Life of the Buddha and the history of Buddhism but rather a highly selective compilation drawing on earlier sources.[8] Baocheng composed the first episode in each volume and the postscript, whereas all other episodes are adapted from over one hundred different canonical and apocryphal sources, most of which are dated from the Tang or later. The sources consulted in the first volume, focusing on the Life of the Buddha and the establishment of Buddhism in India, are primarily Mahāyāna sources; Baocheng devotes eight episodes in the first volume to eight Mahāyāna sūtras, two of which are of Chinese origin.[9] The sources for the second volume were all produced in China. Among them, the most frequently quoted are collections of biographies of eminent monks, collections of miracle stories, and "transmission of the lamp" chronicles.[10] However, Baocheng also quotes non-Buddhist Chinese sources, from works of Chinese historiography and Confucian classics to Daoist scriptures, such as the *Liezi* 《列子》 and the *Book of Transformations of Zitong* (*Zitong huashu* 《梓潼化書》).

Baocheng was well positioned to embark on such an elaborate compilation project. As Tsai highlights, during Baocheng's time, the Dabao'en monastery already had a long and robust tradition of textual production and housed an extensive collection of Buddhist texts, including the Buddhist canon and recent Buddhist publications, as well as the Daoist canon.[11] Notwithstanding Baocheng's stated reliance on earlier sources, he quotes selectively and profoundly modifies the source texts, as the case studies below demonstrate. While Baocheng's editorial choices can be regarded as necessary to adhere to the constraints of the page layout, his reworking of the texts is substantive and strategic.

The first edition of SSYL was quickly followed by a second, revised edition by the same author in the following decade (circa 1434–1436). Baocheng maintained its "picture-above-text" format but introduced various changes to the text.[12] The immense popularity of SSYL spurred the production of another edition five decades later, titled *Shijia rulai chengdao*

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[8] See a summary of the contents of SSYL in Emmanuelle Lesbre, "Une Vie illustrée du Buddha (*Shishi yuanliu*, 1425), modèle pour les peintures murales d'un monastère du XVe s. (Jueyuan *si*, Sichuan oriental)," *Arts Asiatiques* 57 (2002): 72–87.

[9] These sources include, for instance, *Shijia pu* 《釋迦譜》 (T2040), *Yinguo jing* 《因果經》 (T189), and *Zhuangyan jing* 《莊嚴經》 (T187), among many others.

[10] Including, for instance, *Gaoseng zhuan* 《高僧傳》 (T2059) and *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 《續高僧傳》 (T2060), *Fayuan zhulin* 《法苑珠林》 (T2122), *Chusan zangji ji* 《出三藏記集》 (T2145), *Fozu tongji* 《佛祖統紀》 (T2035), and *Jingde Chuandeng lu* 《景德傳燈錄》 (T2076), among others.

[11] Tsai, *Life of the Buddha*, 39–42.

[12] Tsai hypothesized that these alterations were instigated by the Great National Preceptor Zhiguang 智光; see Tsai, *The Life of the Buddha*, 12–13.

yinghua shiji 《釋迦如来成道應化事蹟》.[13] This edition was produced during the Chenghua reign (1464–1487) and carries an imperial preface dated 1486. The terms *yinghua* 應化 and *shiji* 事蹟 (referring to miraculous manifestations and their traces) are noteworthy for their growing significance as key hagiographic concepts in Chinese writing during the Ming.[14] While the content of this edition remained largely the same, it dropped the “picture-above-text” layout of the first two editions in favor of a full page of text followed by a full-page illustration (of twenty-three characters in twelve columns), thus doubling the length of the entire work. From the reader-viewers’ perspective, this shift to full-pages of text and illustration loses the *imagetext* effect of the two early editions.[15] The *Shijia rulai chengdao yinghua shiji* was originally produced as black and white woodblock prints, though colored copies of this edition that seem to have been colored in manually also survive.[16]

The popularity of SSYL did not wane in the following century. In 1556, a new set of woodblocks based on the 1425 edition of SSYL was produced in Chaozhou 潮州 prefecture in Guangdong province by the monk Jingyong 淨用 (fl. ca. 1556) and two assistants (Jingchuan 淨川 and Zhiliang 志諒, mentioned in the colophon at the end of each volume). Tsai suggests that the woodblocks of this edition were used continuously for over a century.[17] Like the 1425 edition, the first volume of the 1556 edition concludes with a postface by Baocheng, a glossary of Sanskrit terms used in the first volume, the details of the printing of this edition, and a list of donors. The second volume likewise ends with a glossary, followed by the details of the publisher, and a list of donors who sponsored this printing. According to the list of donors, the majority of funds for this production came from Buddhist monasteries. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that among the two lists of donors, several hailed from Fujian and one specifically from Jianyang county in northern Fujian—a major publishing center in late Ming where

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[13] See a reprint of this edition in Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu*, in *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan er bian* 《中國古代版畫叢刊二編》 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), no. 1. See also Lokesh Chandra and Sushama Lohia, *Life of Lord Buddha; Compiled by Monk Pao-Ch’eng from Chinese Sutras and Illustrated in Woodcuts in the Ming Period* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, Aditya Prakashan, 2010).

[14] Chandra and Lohia claim that *yinghua* is understood to be the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term *nirmāṇakāya* which stands for “the Buddha incarnate, the transformation body, capable of assuming any form (for the propagation of Buddha-truth)”; see Chandra and Lohia, *Life of Lord Buddha*, 11. However, I find this conjecture unconvincing; the term *yinghua* and its variations were by then used extensively in Chinese writing to describe the repeated reincarnations or manifestations of deities, particularly in Daoist hagiographies.

[15] My use of the term *imagetext* refers to an integrated unit of written and pictorial components, that is, a mixed medium of representation whose consumption combines the acts of reading and viewing. The term *imagetext* was coined by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[16] A colorful copy of this edition is held at the Library of Congress (https://www.loc.gov/item/2012402109/).

[17] Tsai, *Life of the Buddha*, 105–125.

numerous illustrated hagiographic compilations were produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, although more than half of the donors listed here were associated with Buddhist temples, one donor was a Daoist priest (Yang Ying 楊英, from the Prefectural Daoist Registry 道紀司). This 1556 version printed in Guangdong seems to have been the most widely circulated and read in Ming China. It is this edition that I analyze in the sections below.[18]

<LEVEL 1>3. A REVISIONIST VISION OF CHINESE BUDDHISM: SSYL’S SCOPE AND COMPILATION STRATEGY

SSYL follows a chronological arrangement divided geographically between the two volumes; Volume I takes place in India, whereas Volume II is entirely focused on China. Although the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni is central to the compilation and occupies the largest number of episodes, SSYL situates the Life of the Buddha within a broader universal story that begins before Śākyamuni (one in a long succession of incarnations) and ends almost two millennia after the supposed time of parinirvāṇa. As Emmanuelle Lesbre notes, alongside the episodes making up the Life of the Buddha, Baocheng also includes in Volume I materials that have no direct connection to his life story, such as important sūtras and liturgical texts, ritual rules, and introductions to Buddhist doctrines.[19] Bernard Faure notes that the attention dedicated in Volume I to the Buddha’s preaching and conversations with disciples deviates from the prevalent tendency to overlook the preaching period in most classical biographies of the Buddha.[20] Particularly notable in this regard is the compilation’s focus on reverence and ritual practice, from the worship of relics and cleaning of statues to the recitation of Mahāyāna sūtras and incantations (*dhāranī*).[21] SSYL attempts to tie the origins of Buddhist practices and institutions, from relic worship to the founding stories of important temples, to the Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni. This emphasis on practice also underlies the introduction of new episodes into the Life of the Buddha intended to legitimize new rituals and traditions that emerged in medieval China. These materials highlight the intended role of SSYL as a vehicle for Buddhist

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[18] The volume I consulted is a facsimile of the 1556 edition published by Jingyong; see Shi Baocheng 釋寶成, *Shishi yuanliu* 釋氏源流 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2009). For information on later Ming-Qing editions, see Tsai, *The Life of the Buddha*, 203–239.
[19] Lesbre, “Une Vie illustrée du Buddha,” 84.
[20] Faure, *The Thousand and One Lives of the Buddha*, 181.
[21] Faure, *The Thousand and One Lives of the Buddha*, 181.

knowledge and its attempt to meet the shifting horizon of expectations of its fifteenth-century readers.

The second volume is entirely devoted to the history of Buddhism in China from the Zhou to the Yuan dynasty, viewed through the lens of Chinese historical memory. This chronological overview celebrates Buddhism’s triumphs as a religion and as a community in China, from the conversion of political figures, through winning debates against Daoist priests in court, to the efficacy of Buddhist rituals and the miraculous abilities of its clergy. In its push to drive its message home, it presents a revisionist history wherein even the staunchest critics of Buddhism in court (e.g., Han Yu 韓愈, 768–824) and prominent Daoist figures (e.g., Lu Xiujing 陸修靜, 406–477) acknowledge the superiority of Buddhism.[22] Despite the compilation’s underlying polemical stance, the second volume is also profoundly syncretic in its historical approach, themes, and source material.

The first five episodes of Volume II narrate events that predate the spread of Buddhism in China, among them the arrival of the news of the birth of the Buddha to the court of King Zhao of the Zhou dynasty 周昭王 in the twenty-fourth year of his reign, following a series of auspicious signs.[23] The next three episodes likewise embrace a Chinese perspective in discussing the rise of Buddhism in India before it reaches China, quoting selectively from the *Zhoushu yiji* 《周書異記》 and, markedly, from non-Buddhist sources like the *Liezi*. The appropriation of local deities and Daoist gods is particularly noteworthy. Episodes II.3 (“Zitong hears the Buddha,” Zitong wen fo 梓潼問佛) and II.5 (“Zitong encounters the Buddha,” Zitong yu fo 梓潼遇佛) describe two encounters of the Divine Lord Zitong (Wenchang 文昌) with Buddhism in his previous incarnations. The stated source for both episodes is the *Book of Transformations of Zitong* (*Zitong huashu* 《梓潼化書》, DZ 170), a revealed autobiography of the god transcribed through a spirit medium in the twelfth century.[24] Both episodes claim a Buddhist connection in China centuries before its known arrival, arguing that Zitong converted

[22] Episode II.163, “Han Yu Seeks Instruction” (Han Yu canwen 韓愈參問), recounts an exchange between Han Yu and the meditation master Dadian 大顛 (732–824), adapted from *Shishi jigulüe* 《釋氏稽古略》 (T2037). Episode II.49, “Forsaking Daoism to Become Monks” (Badao weiseng 罷道為僧), adapted from the *Guanghongming ji* 《廣弘明集》 (T2103), shows Lu Xiujing and other Daoists converting to Buddhism.

[23] The exact dating of the birth of the Buddha in Chinese historiographical record was an issue of intense debate among Buddhist historiographers in China, not merely for the sake of historical record keeping, but also due to the liturgical ramifications of the dates of the life of the Buddha, its role in the debate over the relationship between the Buddha and Laozi, and its significance in predicting the onset of future eras in Buddhist eschatology; see Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China*, 25–36.

[24] On the god Zitong and the *Book of Transformations*, see Terry F. Kleeman, *A God’s Own Tale* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

to Buddhism in previous lives. The appropriation of two other Daoist deities, Zhenwu and Lü Dongbin, will be discussed in further depth in the sections below.

As part of his attempt to present a general survey of Buddhism in China, Baocheng discusses different Chinese Buddhist schools (including the Chan Southern and Northern Schools, Tiantai, Huayan, and Pure Land sects) without clearly siding with a single sect or lineage, though the attention given to Chan far outweighs the other schools. Despite their airs of historicity, none of the episodes offers a full biography or hagiography of any Buddhist figure. Biographical details are often offered at the beginning of an episode by way of introduction, but they are not its central concern. Instead, the episodes in Volume II offer memorable anecdotes or notable moments that support the compilation's overarching missionary agenda. In other words, rather than drawing a complete history, Volume II is composed of a series of representational incidents attesting to the achievements and expansion of Buddhism in China.

Among these chronologically-arranged anecdotes, we find a handful of recurring themes, most noteworthy of which are (in descending order of frequency) converting rulers and high officials to Buddhism (43 episodes), Buddhist monks making miracles (38), summaries of Buddhist teachings and scriptures (20), divine revelations and miraculous assistance of Buddhist divinities (15), conversion of common laypeople (13), debates with Daoists (12, including three episodes featuring the burning of Daoist scriptures), dreams (10), the origins of Buddhist rituals (7), accounts of Buddhist monks attaining enlightenment (7), the miraculous efficiency of reciting *sūtra*s (7), Buddhist clerics bringing rain (6), historical or biographical sketches (5), relics (2), and journeys through the netherworld (2). In episodes featuring laypeople, protection and personal salvation emerge as central themes. It is not only Buddhist deities and clerics who offer aid, but also the Buddhist scriptures; in these episodes the interaction with Buddhist texts—particularly the acts of recitation or copying Buddhist scriptures—protects from harm (human and demonic alike) and prolongs one's life. This miraculous efficacy of the Buddhist scriptures clearly echoes popular lore; as Shih-shan Susan Huang shows, Yuan-Ming illustrated versions of the *Diamond Sūtra* praise the inherent power (*jingli* 經力) of the *sūtra* as a numinous tool that can extend life and offer protection.[25]

[25] Susan Shih-shan Huang, "Illustrating the Efficacy of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Vernacular Buddhism," *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2018): 40–47, and an extended discussion of this issue in Huang's book *The Dynamic Spread of Buddhist Print Culture: Mapping Buddhist Book Roads in China and Its Neighbors* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 711–752.

Furthermore, laypeople remain the center of attention even in the many episodes showcasing the miraculous works of Buddhist monks, who are praised for their services to individual laypeople (e.g., healing) as well as lay communities (e.g., subjugating illicit spirits and bringing rain). These tales of the miraculous in the second volume of SSYL echo longstanding conventions of *zhiguai* 志怪 tales (especially “records of magical efficacy”, or *lingyan ji* 靈驗記, and “tales of magical responses,” or *ganying zhuan* 感應傳).[26] This approach to the miraculous is more than simply a stylistic choice; SSYL follows an entrenched tendency in Chinese Buddhist historiography to find meaning in the marvelous, assess it, and harness it to the historian’s theological and cosmological conceptions.[27] In this respect, the miraculous tales making up the second volume of SSYL take part in a larger theological-hagiographical project.

<Level 1>4. Visual Characteristics of SSYL

The “picture-above-text” format of SSYL draws on an existing tradition in Buddhist book culture that can be traced back to medieval China, if not before.[28] In her monumental work on Buddhist print culture, Shih-shan Susan Huang analyzes several types of “picture-above-text” usages in Buddhist texts, including single-sheet prints discovered in Dunhuang that seem to have fulfilled devotional and instructive functions, as well as *sūtra*s printed by commercial publishers during the Song.[29] As Lucille Chia shows, the “picture-above-text” format became increasingly popular in Chinese print culture after the Song, reaching its peak in late Ming commercial publishing.[30] Unlike the division of the page in SSYL into two equal halves, in late Ming commercial publications the illustrated upper register occupied a smaller portion of

[26] On Buddhist *zhiguai* tales, see Robert F. Campany, *Signs from an Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012).

[27] Kieschnick highlights the attempts of Buddhist historians to evaluate, explain, and make sense of supernatural events as they incorporate them into their writing. As Kieschnick notes, “Buddhist historians distinguished themselves from compilers of fabulous stories (*zhiguai* 志怪), who collected and transmitted stories, usually without comment.” See Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography*, 69.

[28] Murray, “The Evolution of Buddhist Narrative Illustration in China after 850,” in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850–1850*, ed. Marsha Smith Weidner (Lawrence, KS, and Honolulu, HI: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, and University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994), 136–137, and 146–147, n. 44. Probably the best-known early example of a printed *imagetext* work in China is the illustrated *Diamond Sūtra* discovered in Cave 17 in Dunhuang, currently held at the British Library. Early Buddhist examples of “picture-above-text” layout include Tang prayer sheets and illustrated versions of the *Guanyin Sūtra*, likewise recovered in Dunhuang, whereas a more contemporaneous example to SSYL is the Ming-dynasty *Fodingxin da tuoluoni jing* 《佛頂心大陀羅尼經》. See Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 164–189.

[29] Huang, *The Dynamic Spread of Buddhist Print Culture*, 127–139, 240–243

[30] Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th–17th Centuries)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 40–42.

the page, leaving more space for text (fig. 10 and 12). The narratorial role of the illustrations in the top register has also diminished in late Ming "picture-above-text" publications, wherein the illustrations complement the text below but often add little information, if any. In SSYL, however, the illustrations carry both iconic and narratorial significances.

The illustrations in SSYL take the form of what Julia Murray calls "emblematic monoscene" wherein each image depicts one representational key moment in the story that appears in the bottom register (and in several cases two or three scenes from the story, or "emblematic multiscene").[31] While a few episodes sport illustrations that can be described as iconic (e.g., portraits of the Buddha and other divinities), nearly all the illustrations in SSYL are narratorial. Many of the illustrations are dynamic, featuring lively interactions between different figures (human, divine, and demonic), violent scenes (battles and executions), and dramatic events (e.g., the monk Xuanzang facing demons and wild beasts in Episode II.85, or the burning of Daoist books in Episode II.199). Visual cues in the illustrations of SSYL largely follow established conventions; for instance, the composition of the images reflects hierarchical relationships, with the highest-ranking figure portrayed larger than the others. Although natural landscape provides the setting for many of SSYL's episodes, the collection also dedicates considerable visual attention to architecture and material artifacts.

The production of SSYL took place during a vibrant period for illustrated hagiographies in Chinese book culture, in Buddhism and beyond.[32] SSYL's texts and images respond, both implicitly and explicitly, to competing hagiographic works. In the penultimate episode of SSYL, Baocheng openly condemns the competing Daoist pictorial hagiography *Illustrated Explanations of Lord Lao's Eighty-One Transformations* (*Laojun bashiyi hua tushuo* 《老君八十一化圖說》) and *Scripture on Lord Lao Converting the Barbarians and Becoming the Buddha* (*Laojun huahu chengfo jing* 《老君化胡成佛經》) for promoting the claim that Laojun is the center of the cosmos and the Buddha is merely one of his incarnations.[33] In this context, it is vital to highlight Vincent Goossaert's important distinction between an "historical" Laozi (Li Er 李耳) who according to Daoist hagiography authored the *Daodejing* 《道德經》, and Laojun, the last of the Three Pure Ones (Sanqing 三清) to emanate from the primordial

[31] Julia Murray, "The Evolution of Buddhist Narrative Illustration in China after 850," 126. This form of visual composition is also referred to as "synoptic illustration" by Vidya Dehejia (quoted by Murray on pp. 126–127).
[32] Interestingly, Baocheng hails from Siming, Ningbo, Zhejiang province, the hometown of Zhang Kai 張楷 (1398–1460), who composed an illustrated hagiography of Confucius, *Kongzi shengji tu* 《孔子聖蹟圖》. See Lesbre, "Une Vie illustrée du Buddha," 70.
[33] Tsai, *Life of the Buddha*, 97–102.

Dao.[34] It is the latter view which fueled the abovementioned Daoist polemical claim which SSYL sought to delegitimize. In Episode II.199 of SSYL, Baocheng cites an imperial decree casting all Daoist scriptures as apocryphal and ordering their burning, along with all the woodblocks used for their printing. Baocheng's condemnation should not only be read as a rebuke of this anti-Buddhist claim (in keeping with the rest of the collection), but also as a reflection of the sense of competition in fifteenth century devotional book culture.

Considering the immense popularity of SSYL in the decades following the first edition and the production of further editions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is little wonder that the impact of SSYL was felt beyond the realm of Buddhist hagiographic writing. The sixteenth-century hagiographic album *Zhenwu lingying tuce* 《真武靈應圖冊》, depicting the life and manifestations of the god Zhenwu, shares numerous structural, thematic, and visual characteristics with SSYL, and shows remarkable resemblance to the illustration style of the 1486 edition of SSYL.[35] The development of the theme of Confucius's *Shengji tu* 聖跡圖 during the Ming and Qing dynasties might have also responded, directly or indirectly, to the broad impact of SSYL. *Shengji tu* works similarly present the life of Confucius in a sequence of units of text and image. In late imperial China, these works increasingly incorporated popular hagiographic tropes, chief among them the supernatural characteristics of Chinese divinities. Julia Murray highlights a shift in the hagiographic depiction of Confucius in different *Shengji tu* during the Ming, noting that "from the end of the fifteenth century onward, this humanistic conception was largely superseded by pictorial hagiographies that drew upon the supernatural lore and adopted the well-established conventions for portraying the life of a transcendent being."[36]

Beyond the realm of book culture, the possible connections between SSYL and other visual hagiographical representations underscores the work's significance to Chinese Buddhism and the Ming hagiographic imagination in temple art. Lesbre argues that SSYL influenced the murals of the Jueyuansi in Sichuan (completed sometime between 1457 and 1489, that is, less than half a century after the first edition of SSYL), albeit with some minor

[34] Goossaert, "Daoist Primers and Identity," 80.
[35] For a reproduction and analysis of this album, see Xiao Haiming 肖海明, *Zhenwu tuxiang yanjiu* 《真武圖像研究》 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2007).
[36] See Murray, "The Evolution of Pictorial Hagiography in Chinese Art," 92. Reverberations of SSYL are also visible in the development of the tradition of pictorial hagiographies of the goddess Mazu 媽祖 (also called Tianhou 天后 and Tianfei 天妃) during the Qing dynasty; see Xiao Haiming 肖海明, *Mazu tuxiang yanjiu* 《媽祖圖像研究》 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017).

differences.[37] Moreover, Murray raises the possibility of a broader impact of SSYL on visual culture at the time, stating that “close counterparts to the pictures in *Shishi yuanliu* can readily be found in surviving Ming temple murals, suggesting that the compendium served as a source or reference in the preparation of large-scale colored paintings.”[38] These murals alert us, first, to the possible connections between printed hagiographies and visual depictions of the deities in temples, and second, to the fact that readers of hagiographic writings in late Ming were exposed to stories about the lives of deities and saints in various circumstances and through different media. The following sections take a closer look at two SSYL episodes and their links to mid- and late-Ming illustrated hagiographies of the immortal-bard Lü Dongbin and the god Zhenwu.

<Level 1>5. The Monk Huiji (Huanglong) Defeats Lü Dongbin

Episode II.174 in the second volume of SSYL recounts an encounter between the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin and a Chan monk, a recurring trope that has been circulating in various iterations since the thirteenth century.[39] Baocheng indicates the collection *Fozu tongji* 《佛祖統紀》 as the source he consulted for this episode.[40] *Fozu tongji* in turn traces the source of the story to a possibly lost collection titled *Xianyuan yishi* 《仙苑遺事》. Capitanio traces the earliest version of this encounter in a Buddhist hagiographical collection to the *Jiatai pudeng lu* 嘉泰普燈錄.[41]

Although episode II.174 in SSYL follows the *Fozu tongji* version of this story in general strokes, it diverges from its stated source in several important respects.[42] First, it is noticeably

[37] Lesbre, “Une Vie illustrée du Buddha,” 69–101. The Jueyuansi murals include 205 episodes, surpassing the murals of Dunhuang and Yongle gong in their extensive hagiographic depiction of the Buddha.

[38] Murray, “The Evolution of Pictorial Hagiography in Chinese Art,” 88–89.

[39] See discussions of this episode in Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, “Lü Tung-pin in Northern Sung Literature,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 2 (1986): 148–149; Joshua Capitanio, “Buddhist Tales of Lü Dongbin,” *T’oung Pao* 102, no. 4/5 (2016): 448–502; Stephen Eskildsen, “Do Immortals Kill? The Controversy Surrounding Lü Dongbin,” *Journal of Daoist Studies* 1 (2008): 28–66; Wu Guangzheng, 吳光正, “Fo Dao zhengheng yu *Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong* gushi de bianqian 佛道爭衡呂洞賓飛劍斬黃龍故事的變遷,” *Wenxue yichan* 《文學遺產》, 2005, no. 4: 100–111. On Lü Dongbin lore and worship see also Isabelle Ang, “Le Culte de Lü Dongbin sous les Song du Sud,” *Journal Asiatique* 285, no. 2 (1997): 473–507, and Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).

[40] *Fozu tongji* (T2035, *juan* 49) was completed by Zhipan 志磐 in 1269; see Yün-hua Jan, “The Fo-Tsu-T’ung-Chi, a Biographical and Bibliographical Study,” *Oriens Extremus* 10, no. 1 (1963): 64.

[41] Capitanio, “Buddhist Tales of Lü Dongbin,” 453–455; Wu, “Fo Dao zhengheng yu Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong gushi de bianqian,” 100–101. *Jiatai pudeng lu* (X1559) was compiled in 1204 by the monk Lei’an Zhengshou 雷庵正受 (1146–1208).

[42] See *Fozu tongji* in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, vol. 42, pp. 1159-1160, last accessed through the Diaolong 雕龍 Database on 15 July 2025.

longer (279 characters in the SSYL episode, comparing with the 188 characters of the *Fozu tongji* version). Secondly, it reorganizes the narrative and adds new information, clearly in an attempt to historicize the encounter between the monk and Lü Dongbin. The episode can roughly be divided into two parts: the first introduces the Buddhist cleric Huiji 晦機, whereas the second describes his encounter with Lü Dongbin. In the second part, Baocheng follows closely the anecdote as it appears in the *Fozu tongji*. The first part, however, is almost entirely new. The Buddhist monk—of whose identity the *Fozu tongji* tells us nothing—is identified here as Huiji, né Zhang 張, hailing from Qinghe 清河.[43] A brief biographical sketch of Huiji precedes the arrival of Huiji at Huanglong Mountain 黃龍山 in Ezhou 鄂州 in the first year of the Tianyou 天祐 reign of the Tang dynasty (904), where he preaches a sermon to the local clergy concerning the prohibition against killing. Huiji's dialogue with the monks who attend his sermon seems to be a new addition by Baocheng, which serves as a prelude for Huiji's later exchange with Lü Dongbin and the latter's use of violence against Huiji. In the second half of the anecdote, the text then turns to Lü Dongbin; by way of introduction, it tells that previously Lü traveled in Huashan 華山 where he received from Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 the knowledge of inner alchemy ("golden cinnabar," *jindan* 金丹) and methods of flying. Arriving at Huanglong Mountain, Lü Dongbin is cast as the instigator of the exchange with Huiji. The over-eager young Daoist novice challenges Huiji to a battle of wits, which he loses, and consequently Lü attempts to kill Huiji with his pair of flying swords at night. Huiji, however, foresees Lü's attack and successfully diverts the flying swords to the ground with a flick of his finger. The next day, when Lü Dongbin learns of this, he admits his error and accepts the instruction of the Buddhist cleric.

This dramatic encounter, with its verbal exchange of ideas between Huiji and Lü Dongbin and the physical demonstration of Huiji's superior abilities, receives here a historical, factual framing that ties it to (supposedly) historic personas at a specific time and place. In content and style, the second part of the SSYL episode is modeled after the Chan literary form of "encounter dialogue" (as are the earlier versions in the *Jiatai pudeng lu* and *Fozu tongji*, studied by Joshua Capitanio).[44] Following Lü Dongbin's double defeat—theological and physical—he accepts Huiji as his master and thus de facto joins Huiji's lineage. In the context

[43] The *Jiatai pudeng lu* and *Jingde chuan denglu* name the monk Huanglong Huiji (spelled slightly differently, 黃龍誨機).
[44] Capitanio, "Buddhist Tales of Lü Dongbin," 457.

of SSYL, this confrontation joins a long list of Buddhist conquests in China, in line with the polemical stance underlying the entire collection.

The matching illustration of this episode in the upper register shows Lü Dongbin standing alone on the right-hand side of the illustration bowing before Huiji, who is seated on a stone under a tree on the left-hand side of the image (fig. 2). Two novices, engaged in conversation, stand next to Huiji on the lower-left corner of the illustration. The scene shows the aftermath of Lü Dongbin's attempted attack; one of his swords is planted vertically into the ground in front of Huiji, at the center of the image, whereas the second sword is stuck horizontally in the tree trunk behind Huiji, just above his head. SSYL follows visual conventions in portraying Huiji as the largest figure in this image and the only seated person, fitting his elevated status. The background and natural elements included in the illustration make it clear that the scene takes place in the wilderness; a mountain stream occupies the space between Lü Dongbin and the left edge of the image while the top-left corner is taken up by the tree under which Huiji is seated.

洞賓參問

一百七十四

佛祖統記云唐禪晦機姓張氏清河人也
得法於懷州玄泉彥禪師天祐元年遊化
至鄂州黄龍山本郡節使施俸創建法宇
奏賜紫衣号超慧大師大張法席師一日
上堂僧問曰如何是和尚家風師曰琉璃鉢
盂無底問如何是君王劍師曰不傷万類
曰佩者如何師曰血濺梵天曰大好不傷
万類師便打忽值呂洞賓遊華山遇鍾離
權授金丹及劍法曰過鄂州黄龍山值禪
師說法毅然問曰一粒粟中藏世界半升
鐺內煮山川此意如何師曰守尸鬼洞賓
曰爭柰囊中有不死丹師曰饒君八万劫
終是落空亡洞賓不服夜飛劍以脇之師
已前知以法衣幪頭端坐方丈劍遶數匝
師手指之即墮地洞賓明日詣師前謝過
師詰曰半升鐺內即不問如何是一粒粟
中藏世界洞賓忽有省乃述偈謝曰自從
一見黄龍後始覺從前錯用心

Figure 2: Episode II.174 in the 1556 edition of SSYL; reprint in Shi Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2009).

In the 1486 edition of SSYL, wherein the text and image comprising each episode are divided into two separate pages, the text is identical to the 1556 edition discussed here and the illustration closely mirrors it, with only very minor differences in the background vegetation and the pattern of the robes worn by Huiji and his disciples (fig. 3).

洞賓叅問

佛祖統記云廣釋晦機姓張氏清河人也得法於懷州玄泉彥
禪師天祐元年遊化至鄂州黃龍山本郡節使施俸創建法宇
奏賜紫衣號超慧大師大張法席師一日上堂僧問曰如是和
尚家風師曰琉璃鉢盂無底問如何是君王劍師曰不傷萬類
曰佩者如何師曰血濺梵天曰大好不傷萬類師便打忽值呂
洞賓遊華山遇鍾離權授金丹及劍法因過鄂州黃龍山值禪
師說法毅然問曰一粒粟中藏世界半升鐺內煮山川此意如
何師曰守尸鬼洞賓曰爭柰囊中有不死丹師曰饒君八萬劫
終是落空亡洞賓不服夜飛劍以脅之師已前知以法衣幪頭
端坐方丈劍遶數匝師手指之即墮地洞賓明日詣師前謝過
師詰曰半升鐺內即不問如何是一粒粟中藏世界洞賓忽有
省乃述偈謝曰自從一見黃龍後始覺從前錯用心

Figure 3: Episode II.174 in the 1486 edition of SSYL; reprint in Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu*, ZGGD, no. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 770.

Although Baocheng mentions only *Fozu tongji* as his source for this episode, several clues in the text suggest that Baocheng consulted other sources when adapting this story. *Fozu tongji* refers to the Buddhist cleric not as Huiji but as the Chan master Zhiji 值機禪師 and later as Huanglong.[45] The Song-dynasty "transmission of the lamp" chronicle *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (T2076, vol. 51) could have been Baocheng's source for the biographical information on Huiji; the description of Huiji's biographical background and his conversation with the monks concerning the prohibition of killing in SSYL repeat the *Jingde chuandeng lu* account almost verbatim. *Jingde chuandeng lu* also lists a monk by the name Huiji (spelled 誨機) under the lineage of the same Chan master (that is, Xuan Quanyan 玄泉彥 of Huizhou 懷州) who is named elsewhere in the chronicle and in SSYL as the master of Huanglong Huiji.

[45] Later sources follow this geographical association by referring to the Buddhist cleric as Huanglong. Interestingly, despite its attempts at historicity and the added biographical information on Huiji, at the end of the anecdote Baocheng follows previous versions of this story, likewise referring to the monk as Huanglong.

More crucially, in his adaptation of this episode Baocheng fundamentally changed the focus of the encounter between the Buddhist monk and the Daoist immortal. In the earlier versions recorded in *Fozu tongji* and *Jiatai pudeng lu* the story is centered on Lü Dongbin and the encounter with Huanglong is narrated from the perspective of the Daoist immortal, not from that of the monk. Both the *Fozu tongji* and *Jiatai pudeng lu* versions of the story open with background information on Lü Dongbin; in the former it is a mere sixteen-characters biographical sketch, whereas *Jiatai pudeng lu* provides a more detailed hagiography in line with the lore of Lü Dongbin during the Song. As Capitanio notes, the story as it appears in *Jiatai pudeng lu* is closer to the realm of miracle tales aimed at glorifying the supernatural effects of Buddhism.[46] By contrast, SSYL tells the story from the perspective of the Buddhist cleric Huiji, embracing a decidedly historiographical tone and only introduces Lü Dongbin briefly in the second part of the anecdote when he arrives to challenge Huiji in Huanglong Mountain. This change in perspective and tone is significant, as it situates the encounter within the realm of Buddhist annals—not folklore—and further amplifies the episode’s polemical Buddhist stance.

In the following centuries, this story was repeatedly used by both Buddhist and Daoist writers to argue for the superiority of their creed, as Wu Guangzheng and Joshua Capitanio convincingly show.[47] However, these polemical adaptations emerged alongside more syncretic versions of the encounter, wherein Lü Dongbin’s failure to defeat the Buddhist monk becomes a productive teaching moment for him, eventually enabling him to reach spiritual attainment and ascend to the divine realm as a Daoist deity, taking his place as one of the Eight Immortals. Furthermore, the story became a recurring trope in late-imperial storytelling and drama. One notable example of a literary adaptation of the episode appears in *Flying Sword* (*Feijian ji* 《飛劍記》), an illustrated narrative text by the commercial writer Deng Zhimo 鄧志謨 (fl. ca. 1596) that weaves pre-existing tales about Lü Dongbin into a single, unified narrative of the immortal’s life story.[48] I include this work in a subgenre of illustrated hagiographical prose works I term “origin narratives” that were produced by commercial publishers in Southeast China during late Ming.[49] *Flying Sword* adopts the abovementioned Buddhist polemical

[46] Capitanio, “Buddhist Tales of Lü Dongbin,” 462–463.
[47] Wu, “Fo Dao zhengheng yu Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong gushi de bianqian,” 102–103; Capitanio, “Buddhist Tales of Lü Dongbin,” 471–482.
[48] See Deng Zhimo 鄧志謨, *Tangdai Lü Chunyang dedao feijian ji* 《唐代呂純陽得道飛劍記》 (circa 1603), reprinted in *Guben xiaoshuo congkan*, 10:5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 316–324.
[49] Noga Ganany, “Origin Narratives: Reading and Reverence in Ming China” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2018), and Noga Ganany, “Writing and Worship in Deng Zhimo’s *Saints Trilogy*,” *Religions* 13, no. 128 (2022): 1–22.

portrayal of the encounter as one in which the monk prevails and Lü Dongbin, much humbled, is forced to acknowledge the superiority of his spiritual advancement and supernatural powers. However, contrary to the SSYL’s polemical use of this episode as yet another proof of Buddhism’s superiority over Daoism, in *Flying Sword* this encounter gains a new hagiographic significance within the Lü Dongbin lore, reframed as a turning point in Lü’s self-cultivation.

In *Flying Sword*, the encounter between Lü Dongbin and the monk Huanglong is merged with another popular story cycle concerning the sexual affair of Lü Dongbin with a young woman by the name Bai Mudan 白牡丹.[50] *Flying Sword* tells that while Lü Dongbin travels in Nanjing disguised as a young scholar, he seduces the maiden Bai Mudan (not without the help of her maidservant) while her mother is away visiting relatives. Upon her return, her mother is appalled to find her daughter looking thin and haggard, and takes her to a nearby temple, Chang’gan si 長干寺, to burn incense and listen to the chanting of Buddhist scriptures. After the sermon, a monk (*fashi* 法師) notices an evil aura (*xieqi* 邪氣) hovering about Bai Mudan. Interestingly, Lü Dongbin’s presence is described as that of an evil spirit (*yaoxie* 妖邪). After the monk—now called Huanglong chanshi 黃龍禪師—learns about Bai Mudan’s affair with Lü Dongbin, he teaches Bai Mudan a technique to force Lü Dongbin to ejaculate and thus release the *yang* force which he has been harvesting from her through his methods of sexual cultivation (called here “the method of collecting *yin* to match it with *yang,*” *caiyin buyang shu* 採陰補陽術).[51]

The furious Lü Dongbin sends his male sword (*xiongjian* 雄劍) flying to behead the monk. Yet Huanglong is no ordinary monk; he foresees Lü Dongbin’s attack and diverts his sword to the ground. When his flying sword fails to return, Lü Dongbin sends his female sword (*cijian* 雌劍) to behead the monk; again, Huanglong diverts it with a flick of his finger. When Lü Dongbin flies to confront the monk in person, he realizes his mistake and asks for forgiveness.[52] Lü’s failure here is particularly significant considering the symbolic value of the

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[50] About two decades after the publication of *Flying Sword*, the famous writer-editor Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) adapted this episode into a short story titled “Lü Dongbin’s Flying Sword Beheads Huanglong” (Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong 呂洞賓飛劍斬黃龍), which he included in the 1627 anthology *Stories to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言). Feng’s version identifies the Buddhist monk as Huinan 慧南 (1002–1069).
[51] The issue of sexual dual cultivation is further expanded in later adaptations of the story in prose and drama; see Wu, “Fo Dao zhengheng yu Lü Dongbin feijian zhan Huanglong gushi de bianqian,” 109–111.
[52] Huanglong describes himself in this scene as “an orthodox? descendent of the Buddha” (*Shishi zhengmai* 釋氏正脈), evoking the notion that the Buddhist clergy belongs to the Śākya clan, that is, they form a genealogical line that traces back to the Buddha Śākyamuni.

swords as representing his exorcistic prowess and his earlier advances in Daoist inner alchemical self-cultivation.

The monk Huanglong reproaches Lü Dongbin for his cruelty towards Bai Mudan and excessive indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh (*yinse* 淫色). Moreover, he criticizes Lü for neglecting to follow the instructions he received earlier from the Daoist master Huolong 火龍真人. When Huolong bestows upon Lü Dongbin his pair of flying swords in the preceding chapter, he forbids Lü from using them to harm people. These swords, he is told, should be used physically only against malevolent demons and metaphysically to eliminate lust, greed, and anger. In his conduct with the lady Bai Mudan and the monk Huanglong, Lü Dongbin demonstrates he is unworthy to be the bearer of these precious swords. Huanglong therefore confiscates the male sword (symbolically significant as representing the *yang* force), which will be used to protect the Buddhist community in the mountain and returns the female sword (representing *yin*) to Lü Dongbin on the condition that he only uses it against demonic forces (also associated with *yin*). Huanglong moreover instructs Lü to carry the sword on his back; from then on, if Lü reaches for his sword to combat demons he will succeed, but if he unsheathes the sword to harm humans, he will injure himself. Much humbled, Lü also requests Huanglong's guidance regarding his loss of *yang* force due to the affair with Bai Mudan. Huanglong instructs Lü to travel to Yangzhou, where he should nurture his *yang* (*yangyang* 養陽) for nine years. The rest of this chapter describes Lü Dongbin's Daoist self-cultivation efforts and quotes one of the most famous inner-alchemical poems associated with him ("Yufuci 漁父詞").

Despite Lü's humiliating defeat by the Buddhist monk, *Flying Sword* casts this encounter not as a setback for Lü nor as a blow for Daoism, but rather as an important teaching moment that allows Lü to complete his training. Structurally, this episode is the last in a series of instructional encounters of Lü Dongbin with various masters, starting with his mentor the Daoist immortal Zhongli Quan and ending with this encounter with the Buddhist monk Huanglong. It marks the end of Lü's instructional period in the first half of the narrative (chapters 1–5), enabling his miraculous feats in the second half (chapters 6–12). In other words, both structurally and thematically Lü's encounter with Huanglong is a key moment in the *Flying Sword*'s hagiographic project. In this scene, as elsewhere in the narrative of *Flying Sword*, Lü Dongbin's life and persona are more indebted to the immortal's popular lore than to any single sectarian view of the immortal and his spiritual cultivation is viewed through the lens of the Three Teachings.

The illustration of this scene in *Flying Sword* bears a striking resemblance to the illustrations of this episode in the 1486 and 1556 editions of SSYL (fig. 4). The basic composition of the scene is largely identical: Lü Dongbin stands on the right side, bowing towards Huanglong, who is seated on a slightly elevated rock. The surrounding natural scene hints they are in the mountains. There are, however, two notable visual differences in *Flying Sword*, namely that Lü Dongbin's swords are both planted in the ground, one on each side of Huanglong, and he appears alone without any accompanying attendants. Nevertheless, the resemblance between the illustrations raises the possibility that the carvers (and others in the publishing production team) were familiar with SSYL, or with other works modeled on it.

Figure 4: The Lü Dongbin and Huanglong episode in *Flying Sword* by Deng Zhimo, circa 1603; reprint in Deng Zhimo, *Tangdai Lü Chunyang dedao Feijian ji*, GBXSCK, 10:5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 318–319.

<Level 1>6. A Revelation of the God Zhenwu

Episode II.194 of SSYL, "Zhenwu Bestows a Towel" (Zhenwu shijin 真武施巾), describes a miraculous encounter between a Buddhist novice by the name Yunfang 蘊方 and the Daoist

god Zhenwu. According to Baocheng’s own account in SSYL, this episode is taken from *Qisheng shilu* 《啟聖實錄》, a Yuan-dynasty collection of hagiographic tales of Zhenwu included in the Zhengtong Daoist canon under the longer title *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lu* 《玄天上帝啟聖錄》 (DZ 958).[53] The SSYL version of the story tells that one summer day, as Yunfang was on his way to bathe in a stream by the foothill of Mount Qufu 曲阜山, he notices a servant clad in black walking ahead. Yufang follows him to a grove, where he sees the god Zhenwu (Zhenwu zhenjun 真武真君) seated on a rock, examining the rosters of good and evil deeds. Awestruck, Yunfang considers withdrawing, but his presence is noted, and he is summoned to pay his respects to Zhenwu. Zhenwu asks to see the towel Yunfang was holding and then instructs his attendant to give Yunfang another towel, which, as he discovers later, has magical properties: when exposed to cold it heats up, and when encounters heat, it cools itself down. Moreover, this magnificent cloth shines with a golden radiance and emits a wondrous scent. After receiving this extraordinary gift, Yunfang consults a scholar-official who presents a memorial to the throne on his behalf which paves the way for Yunfang’s ordination.

The illustration of this episode shows the novice standing by a stream on the left side of the image, bowing in the direction of Zhenwu and stretching his arms forward to receive the magical cloth (fig. 5–6). Zhenwu is seated under a tree on the right, surrounded by two attendants on either side, and a fifth attendant standing at the center of the image presenting the novice with the cloth. Of Zhenwu’s attendants, the two on the right appear in official garb whereas the two on his left are martial figures, one carrying a sword and the other a large black flag. As befitting his status, the figure of Zhenwu is the largest in the image and stands out from the other figures in its dark colors. Zhenwu’s black robe is the most heavily inked space on the page, mirroring the black flag waving above him. A halo around Zhenwu’s head marks his divine status. Significantly, only sixteen illustrations in SSYL include halos, invariably portraying Buddhist divinities such as the Śākyamuni Buddha and Guanyin. At Zhenwu’s feet are his iconic animal emblems, a snake coiled around a turtle. This visual depiction matches Zhenwu’s standard iconography during the Ming dynasty, as it appears in the Daoist canon, art works, and prints.[54]

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[53] On the depiction of Zhenwu in *Qishenglu*, see Noelle Giuffrida, “Representing the Daoist God Zhenwu, the Perfected Warrior, in Late-Imperial China” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2008), 164–170.
[54] See Xiao, *Zhenwu tuxiang yanjiu*, 36–62.

九十七

真武施巾 一百九十四

啓聖實錄云僧蘊方投礼西京善濟院住
持用勤為師差蘊方化緣衆僧夏浴手巾
到曲阜山下於澗邊見青衣童子前行蘊
方隨後至一林花葉茂盛見真武真君坐
於石上撿校善悪蘊方不敢近前方欲回
轉被適見童子相召云真君喚蘊方既面
拜真君蒙問抄注手巾收上號目恐尓難
尋吾之住所令童子將隨身手巾一條与
蘊方略充結緣言祇不得與諸色人称是
見吾於此所得蘊方拜謝將手巾歸院納
上祇称於曲阜山不識姓名人家求化得
來用勤接看其巾長八尺非凡俗布入手
如純纈遇冷處竟熱於暖處却凉無篾眼
又覆有金光異香用勤帶去謁貽文館大
學士李中孚商量進奏進奉承詔書宣僧
用勤并行童蘊方赴闕根問蘊方即依前
實奏奉聖旨披剃蘊方為僧留淨巾赴內
道場供養令蘊方就在京住院

Figure 5: Episode II.194 in the 1556 edition of SSYL; reprint in Shi Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2009).

真武施巾
啓聖實錄云僧蘊方投禮西京善濟院住持用勤為師差蘊方
化緣衆僧夏浴手巾到曲阜山下於澗邊見青衣童子前行蘊
方隨後至一林花葉茂盛見真武真君坐於石上檢校善惡蘊
方不敢近前方欲回轉被適見童子相召云真君喚蘊方既面
拜真君蒙問抄注手巾收上跡目恐爾難尋吾之住所令童子
將隨身手巾一條與蘊方畧充結緣言秪不得與諸色人稱是
見吾於此所得蘊方拜謝將手巾歸院納上秪稱於曲阜山不
識姓名人家求化得來用勤接看其巾長八尺非凡俗布入手
如純纓遇冷處覺熱於暖處却凉無毳眼反覆有金光異香用
勤帶去謁昭文館大學士李中孚商量進奏進奉承詔書宣僧
用勤并行童蘊方赴闕根問蘊方即依前實奏奉聖旨披剃蘊
方為僧留凈巾赴内道場供養令蘊方就在京住院

Figure 6: Episode II.194 in the 1486 edition of SSYL; reprint in Baocheng, *Shishi yuanliu*, ZGGD, no. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 810.

This episode is an interesting case of a Buddhist appropriation of a Daoist god and an example of the popular view of Zhenwu as a morality god, that is, a divine bureaucrat who examines the deeds of mankind. The inclusion of Zhenwu in SSYL and other Buddhist works during the first half of the fifteenth century should be considered in light of the unprecedented popularity of Zhenwu worship and the imperial patronage of his cult. Arguably the most important deity during the Ming, Zhenwu was included in the pantheon of Buddhist divinities in contemporaneous illustrated editions of the *Diamond Sūtra*, where he is presented as the bodhisattva Zhenwu (Zhenwu pusa 真武菩薩).[55] Zhenwu’s visual depiction in the illustrated *Diamond Sūtra* follows his standard iconography, as seen in multiple Ming sources including SSYL. Susan Shih-shan Huang notes that Zhenwu was included in numerous Water Land

[55] Huang, “Illustrating the Efficacy of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Vernacular Buddhism,” 74–76. Notice figures 39a-b on pp. 119–120 in Huang’s article showing a hybrid pantheon featuring Zhenwu bodhisattva circa 1420–1430s.

paintings (*shuilu hua* 水陸畫) that were used in Buddhist salvation rituals during this time.[56] Importantly, this Buddhist appropriation correlates with extensive imperial investment in Zhenwu's cult center on Mount Wudang. SSYL was produced merely two years after the completion of a major reconstruction of Zhenwu's cult center on Mount Wudang with imperial support.[57]

Episode II.194 of SSYL is close enough in content and language to its stated source, *Qisheng shilu*, for us to confidently establish that Baocheng indeed relied on it (or another source quoting it). Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to several differences between the two versions since they are indicative of Baocheng's editorial strategy and shed light on his authorial intents. First, the account in *Qisheng shilu* is almost twice the length of the episode in SSYL. Since the page layout of SSYL set a rigid limit on the number of characters in each episode, many of Baocheng's omissions are editorial rather than substantive, doing away with some narration and superfluous information about the monk Yunfang and his monastery. Nonetheless, Baocheng also omits more essential details that tie this episode to Zhenwu's Daoist lore. For instance, unlike the SSYL episode, the *Qisheng shilu* describes Zhenwu seated on a rock in the wood surrounded by countless demons (*mo* 魔). When discussing Zhenwu's engagement in examining the good and evil deeds of mankind, the *Qisheng shilu* adds that Zhenwu sends the souls of the dead to the Eastern Peak (Mount Tai 泰山) to be reborn. Moreover, the divine provenance of the towel is discussed in detail when the enchanted cloth is offered up to the imperial court; an official working in the imperial storehouse who examined the cloth concludes that it is a celestial treasure made by heavenly maidens. Baocheng's omissions reveal an intentional attempt to detach this miraculous event from its Daoist associations. Baocheng's modifications seem to fulfill two goals: abbreviating this anecdote to conform to the fixed layout of SSYL and bringing its content in line with the Buddhist agenda of the compilation.

Although most Zhenwu hagiographies (illustrated and otherwise) do not include the abovementioned episode of the enchanted towel, the episode taps the prevalent topic of Zhenwu's divine revelation (manifestation, *xian* 顯) to worthy humans. In numerous tales of Zhenwu's manifestations, the encounter with the god is cast as the result of devotional

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[56] Huang, "Illustrating the Efficacy of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Vernacular Buddhism," 75.
[57] Pierre-Henry De Bruyn, *Le Wudang shan: Histoire de récits fondateurs* (Paris: Indes Savantes, 2010), 258–277; Giuffrida, "Ming Imperial Patronage of the Wudang Mountains and the Daoist God Zhenwu," in *Royal Taste: The Art of Princely Courts in Fifteenth-Century China,* ed. Mariah Keller (New York: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2015), 49–54.

reverence and generated by good karma. These miraculous manifestations of Zhenwu occupy most of the abovementioned illustrated hagiography *Zhenwu lingying tuce*. Produced during the Jiajing reign (though carrying colophons dating 1413), *Zhenwu lingying tuce* is made up of eighty-two standalone episodes, each composed of a full-page color illustration and a matching folio of handwritten text. The album seems to draw much of its content and model its illustrations on earlier works, among them the Yuan-dynasty *Xuantian shangdi qisheng lu* 《玄天上帝啟聖錄》 (DZ 958) and *Daming xuantian shangdi ruiying tulu* 《大明玄天上帝瑞應圖錄》 (DZ 959).[58] Similarly to the formation of SSYL, the first quarter of *Zhenwu lingying tuce* depicts the life of Zhenwu, his spiritual path to enlightenment, and canonization. The rest of the album focuses on his post-history: his cultic reverence, divine manifestations, and his miraculous assistance (*lingying* 靈應) to worshipers.

This album also echoes the abovementioned depiction of Zhenwu as a morality god; it describes Zhenwu as "the god of the north who descends to the human world every month to examine the good and evil deeds of mankind."[59] This role has been increasingly associated with Zhenwu since the fourteenth century (at the latest). In the moral tract *Wudangshan Xuantian shangdi chuixun wen* 《武當山玄天上帝垂訓文》, produced through spirit writing at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Zhenwu describes himself as a morality-cum-fortune god ("world-reigning longevity-granting fortune deity," *Changsheng zhishi fushen* 長生治世福神) who was assigned by the Jade Emperor to inspect the deeds of humanity and allocate rewards and punishments according to the Heavenly Code (*tianlü* 天律).[60] This widely circulated tract was included in various Ming anthologies, sometimes listed among the four morality "classics." In late Ming, this tract was even incorporated into the entertainment miscellany *Guose tianxiang* 《國色天香》 alongside a plethora of practical information and religious manuals that occupied its upper register, while a collection of erotic short stories occupied its lower register.[61] The next section looks at two other types of Ming compilations vis-à-vis SSYL: daily-life encyclopedias and origin narratives.

[58] Xiao, *Zhenwu tuxiang yanjiu*, 2–5.
[59] Xiao, *Zhenwu tuxiang yanjiu*, 246–247, plate 29. Zhenwu's role as a fortune deity is stressed throughout this album.
[60] Vincent Goossaert, "Divine Codes, Spirit-Writing, and the Ritual Foundations of Early-Modern Chinese Morality Books," *Asia Major*, 3d ser., 33, no. 1 (2020): 27–29.
[61] *Guose tianxiang* was published in Nanjing by the Zhou 周 family firm in 1597. See reprint in *Ming Qing shanben xiaoshuo congkan* 《明清善本小說叢刊》 (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1985), *juan* 4, vol. 2, 52a–55a.

<Level 1>7. Narratives of “Origins” in Ming Book Culture

When the first edition of SSYL was produced, the term *yuanliu* was already used widely in depicting a tradition as rooted in the life of its founder. Short texts that use *yuanliu* in their title recur in the Daoist canon, *Soushen* 搜神 collections, and Ming commercial encyclopedias. Vincent Goossaert alerts us that in the Daoist tradition the title “Daojiao yuanliu” has been used to designate two types of texts, namely short texts focusing on the Laojun myth or entire booklets that often begin with a short account on Laojun, which is followed by various other materials (e.g., doctrinal treatises, genealogical lists, and liturgical texts, among others).[62] Significantly, as Goossaert asserts, these Daoist booklets place great emphasis on the origin story of Laojun (which includes the life of Laozi) as the theological, historical, and cosmological source of Daoism. While Daoist *yuanliu* booklets were written primarily for practitioners and devotees, short accounts titled “Daojiao yuanliu” were also included in a wide variety of compilations, often alongside *yuanliu* accounts of Confucius and the Buddha, that targeted a much wider audience.

Of particular interest here are works included in what Vincent Goossaert refers to as the *Soushen* “family of texts,” that is, “texts that have a common inspiration and structure but may have various titles and substantially different contents.”[63] *Soushen* compilations often open with short *yuanliu* entries on Confucius, the Buddha, and Laojun (respectively titled “Rushi yuanliu 儒氏源流,” “Shishi yuanliu,” and “Daojiao yuanliu 道教源流”), each sporting an illustration of the founder. As hagiographic collections follow a descending order of hierarchical importance, the primacy of the entries on the founders of the Three Teaching as opening *Soushen* collections underscores the importance of *yuanliu* as an organizing principle. Although the accounts on the Buddha vary between *Soushen* collections, they all reiterate prevalent tropes while paying particular attention to the historical and geographical circumstances of Śākyamuni’s life from a markedly Chinese perspective. For example, in the Wanli-era *Soushenji daquan* 《搜神記大全》, the entry titled “Shishi yuanliu” appears second in the collection (after Confucius and before Laojun), occupying five pages of text and one full page of iconic illustration of the Buddha.[64] This account places special emphasis on the issue of time: the date of the Buddha’s birthday is noted under the heading, whereas the entry itself

[62] Goossaert, “Daoist Primers,” 79. I thank Vincent Goossaert for sharing with me scans of several Qing-era and modern Daoist *yuanliu* booklets.

[63] Goossaert, “Daoist Primers,” 78.

[64] See Luo Maodeng 羅懋登, ed., *Ke chuxiang zengbu Soushenji daquan* 《刻出像增補搜神記大全》 (Nanjing: Wanli period (1573–1620), seq. 11–14, accessed via the Harvard-Yenching Chinese Rare Book Collection, https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/chinese-rare-books/catalog/49-990081049590203941.

highlights other significant dates in the life of the Buddha—his renunciation, awakening, and passing—in Chinese dating. Since the entry is arranged chronologically, the auspicious dream of Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han, the subsequent dispatching of envoys to India, and the arrival of Buddhism in China appear at the end of the entry. Despite a shared aura of historicity in *yuanliu* accounts included in *Soushen* collections, they claim universal significance; the origins of the Buddha are conceived here, first, as the roots of the Buddhist tradition, and second, as one of the three pillars of the divine pantheon more generally.[65] Significantly, printed *Soushen* collections circulated widely in late Ming and were accessible to commercial producers (authors, editors, and publishers) who incorporated *yuanliu* into a variety of anthologies, encyclopedias, and narratives.

In Ming commercial publishing, categorical uses of *yuanliu* build on this profoundly hagiographic view of the Three Teachings. Here too the doctrines and ritual traditions associated with each of the Three Teachings are presented as originating—both historically and theologically—from the lives of Laojun, Confucius, and the Buddha. For instance, the daily-life encyclopedia *Santai wanyong zhengzong* 《三台萬用正宗》 dedicates a chapter to "Seng dao men 僧道門" (Buddhist and Daoist matters), which opens with sections on the origins of Buddhism and Daoism in two parallel registers, with the Buddhist section occupying the upper register and the Daoist occupying the lower (fig. 7).[66] The Buddhist subsection, titled "Sengjia beiyong 僧家備用" (Manual for the sangha), begins with a brief account of the emergence of the Buddha Śākyamuni, titled "Shizu yuanliu 釋祖源流," that embraces a strikingly similar approach to that of SSYL and *Soushen* collections. The Buddha Śākyamuni and the Buddhist teachings (*jiao* 教) are introduced here through the lens of Chinese historiography; the Buddha is portrayed as a sage from the Western regions (*xifang shengren* 西方聖人) who was born during the reign of King Zhao of the Zhou. The text then turns to a succinct account of the dream of Emperor Ming of the Han that spurred a discussion in court and the sending of envoys westward to bring the Buddhist teaching to China.[67] It goes on to discuss the conversion of Emperor Wu of Liang, the arrival of the Buddha bone during the

[65] Goossaert "Daoist Primers," 93. Goossaert describes the late-Yuan collection *Soushen guangji* as "a work of Daoist theology issuing from *daofa* thinkers" and highlights that "many Yuan and Ming *daofa* manuals urge practitioners to 'know their *yuanliu*'" as a line that connects them to the origins of their teachings, i.e., Laojun.
[66] The full title of this forty-three-volume encyclopedia reads *Xinke tianxia simin bianlan santai wanyong zhengzong* 《新刻天下四民便覽三台萬用正宗》. It was printed in 1599 by the commercial publisher Yu Xiangdou 余象斗. See Wei Shang, "The Making of Everyday World: *Jin Ping Mei cihua* and Encyclopedias for Daily Use," in *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation from the Late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond,* ed. Wei Shang and David Der Wei Wang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 63–92.
[67] These events are narrated in the first episode of the second volume of SSYL.

Tang dynasty, and the acceptance of the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness and the embracing of monastic regulations. This *yuanliu* section is followed by a series of other entries related to Buddhism, mostly quoting Buddhist canonical texts, many of which concern the practicalities of Buddhist life, such as directions for sitting in meditation and templates for letters.[68]

The parallel section in the lower register, titled “origin of the Daoist sect” (*Daopai yuanliu* 道派源流), opens with a chronological list of Daoist patriarchs and divinities since antiquity that ends with a biography of Laozi (quoting Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shiji liezhuan* 史記列傳, *juan* 63). This genealogy is followed by a series of miscellaneous Daoist texts and manuals, such as templates for writing congratulatory letters (*qinghe shujian* 慶賀書簡) and summons (*qingzhao shujian* 請召書簡). These Daoist templates in the lower register mirror the Buddhist templates occupying the upper register.

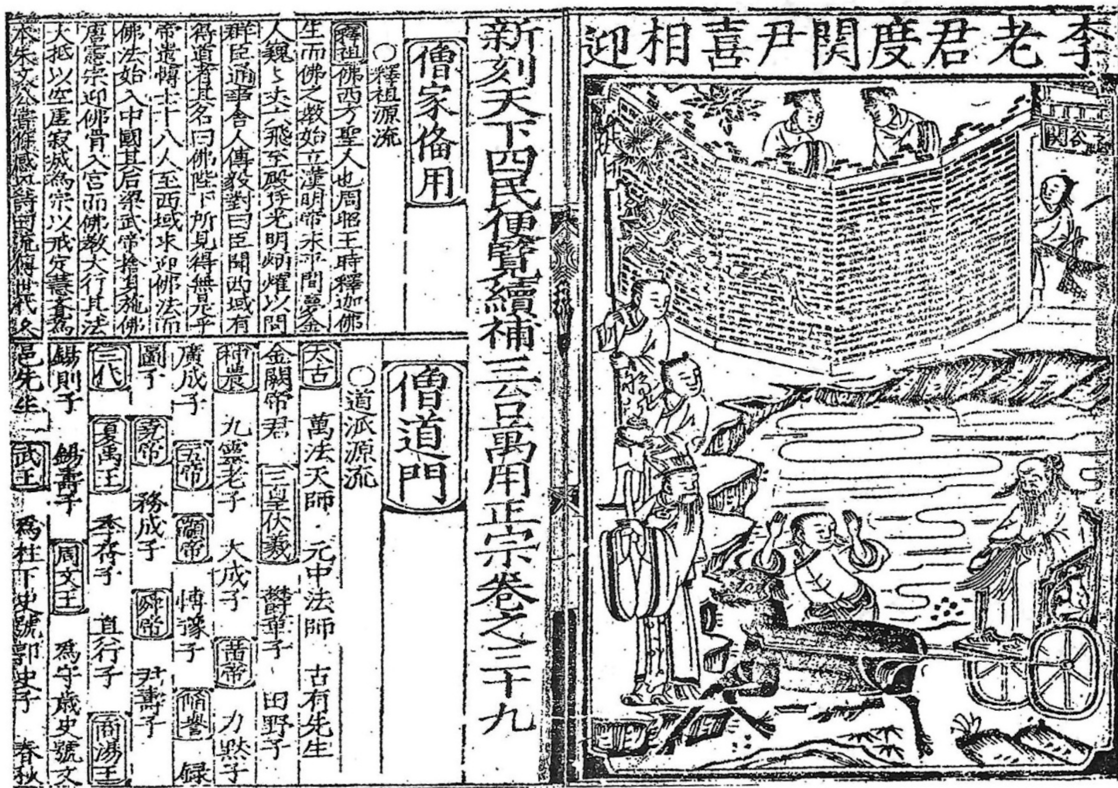


Figure 7: The Buddhist and Daoist *yuanliu* (“origins”) parallel sections, in the daily-life encyclopedia *Santai wanyong zhengzong*, 1599, *juan* 39: 1.a. Reprint in MDTS, vol. 6, 589.

[68] Among the sources quoted in this section are selections from *Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規 (X1245) and *Cheng shi lun* 成實論 (T1646), among other texts.

In another encyclopedia of the time, *Wanbao quanshu* 《萬寶全書》(1614), the Buddhist and Daoist *yuanliu* sections appear in a chapter titled "Matters of Cultivating the Real" (Xiuzhen me*n* 修真門).[69] Here too the Buddhist section (Shijiao lei 釋教類) and the Daoist (Daojiao lei 道教類) appear in two parallel registers and open similarly with the Buddha's *yuanliu* on top and a Daoist genealogical list which concludes with Laozi's biography on the bottom register, identical to that of the *Santai wanyong zhengzong*.[70] However, after the initial Buddhist and Daoist *yuanliu* sections, the content of the rest of the chapter diverges markedly. In the *Wanbao quanshu* the account on the Buddha is followed by a genealogical series of hagiographies of Buddhist masters in a section titled "The origins and attainment of the thirty-three patriarchs" *sanshisan zu chuchu chengfo yuanliu* 三十三祖出處成佛源流. Similarly, following the *Shiji* biography of Laozi, the Daoist section of *Wanbao quanshu* includes a genealogical series of hagiographies of forty-two Heavenly Masters. The following chapter in the lower register, "Miscellanea for Cultivating the Real" (Xiuzhen lei 修真類), focuses on Daoist self-cultivation. This divergence probably stems from a fundamental difference in focus and purpose of the two encyclopedias; while *Santai wanyong zhengzong* seeks to provide practical guidance for various aspects of life, *Wanbao quanshu* is more akin to a reference work offering general knowledge of the world. Despite their differences, however, both encyclopedias position the *yuanliu* accounts of Laojun and the Buddha as the cornerstones of Daoism and Buddhism respectively.

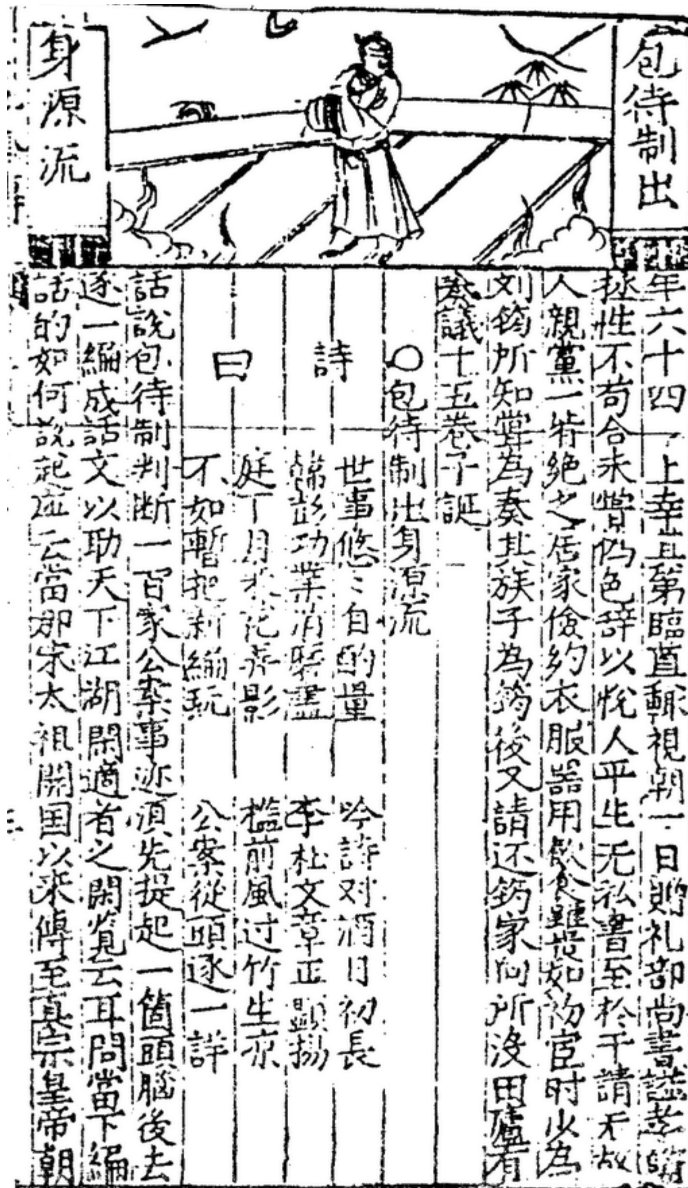
In late Ming print culture, the notion of *yuanliu* went hand in hand with a growing interest in the origin stories of famous individuals, that is, their *chushen* 出身, or *chuchu* 出處. In Ming ballad-stories (*shuochang cihua* 說唱詞話, works alternating between verse and prose) and narrative texts (*xiaoshuo* 小說), the life stories of cultural icons are presented as fundamental to their lore and worship. One notable example is a ballad story from the Chenghua period (1465–1487) about the early life of the famous Judge Bao (Bao Zheng 包拯, popularly referred to as Baogong 包公), titled "Origin Story of Rescriptor Bao" (*Baodaizhi*

[69] The full title of this work reads *Xinke souluo wuche hebing wanbao quanshu* 《新刻搜羅五車合併萬寶全書》 (the table of contents sports a slightly modified title: *Xinke yejia xincai wanbao quanshu* 《新刻鄴架新裁萬寶全書》). The scanned copy from 1614 I had access to through the Erudition database names Xu Qilong 徐企龍 of Yunzhang 豫章 as the editor of this compilation and the Shude tang 樹德堂 in Fujian as publisher. Its thirty-four volumes cover a variety of topics, from astronomy and medicine to calligraphy and tending horses.
[70] Considering the editorial practices of the time, it is likely that these collections borrowed freely from each other (and from other sources).

chushen yuanliu 包待制出身源流).[71] An intelligent but unusually ugly child, Bao Zheng is deserted by his parents and adopted by his aunt, who raises and educates him. An entertaining tale of many twists and turns, the story of young Bao’s rise to office is strewn with miraculous events and divine revelations hinting at his later success. A narrative text adaptation of this origin story of Baogong opens the anthology *Baijia gong’an* 《百家公案》 (1594), a collection of a hundred courtroom stories featuring Baogong in the “picture-above-text” format (fig. 8).[72] Interestingly, in Baogong reverence in contemporary East Asia this origin story is incorporated into temples’ textual and pictorial representations of Baogong, probably taking their cue from late imperial literary and performed adaptations of the story (fig. 9).

[71] See Wilt L. Idema, *Judge Bao and the Rule of Law: Eight Ballad-Stories from the Period 1250–1450* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010), 1–29.

[72] See An Yushi 安遇時, ed., *Quanbu Bao Longtu pan baijia gong’an* 《全補包龍圖判百家公案》, 1594 edition, reprint in GBXSCK, vol. 9, 1505–1523. Although this version adapts the story in “vernacular” prose within the framework of a *gong’an* anthology, the contents of Baogong’s origin story remain largely unchanged. *Baijia gong’an* opens with two prefaces: the first is based on Bao Zheng’s official biography and the second carries the same title as the abovementioned *cihua*. See Ganany, “Origin Narratives,” 82–84; Patrick Hanan, “*Judge Bao’s Hundred Cases* Reconstructed,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40, no. 2 (1980): 307; Y.W. Ma, “The Textual Tradition of Ming *Kung-an* Fiction: A Study of the *Lung-t’u Kung-an*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 35 (1975): 207.



包待制出身源流

年六十四上幸其第臨喪輟視朝一日贈礼部尚書謚孝肅
拯性不苟合未嘗偽色辭以悅人平生无私書至於干請不故
人親黨一皆絕之居家儉約衣服器用飲食雖貴如初宦时以為
刘筠所知嘗為奏其族子為筠後又請还筠家向所沒田廬有
奏議十五卷子綖

〇包待制出身源流

詩　世事悠悠自酌量　吟詩对酒日初長
綸扉功業消磨盡　李杜文章正顯揚
庭下月來花弄影　檻前風过竹生凉
曰　不如暫把新編玩　公案從頭逐一詳

話說包待制判斷一百家公案事迹須先提起一箇頭腦後去
逐一編成話文以助天下江湖閑適者之閑覽云耳問當下編
話的如何說起應云當初宋太祖開国以來傳至真宗皇帝朝

Figure 8: First page of Baogong’s “origins” (*chushen yuanliu*) in *Baijia gong’an* (1594); reprint in GBXSCK, vol. 9, 1505.

Figure 9: A scene from Baogong’s origin story in a mural at Kaifeng gong 開封宮, Daliao 大寮, Taiwan (photograph by the author).

Prose versions of other *yuanliu* accounts were also woven into longer narrative texts in late Ming commercial publishing. The late Ming *Tale of the Eight Immortals*, for instance, introduces Daoism through a *yuanliu* account of Taishang Laojun 太上老君.[73] Ruminating about transcendence, the would-be immortal Li Tieguai 李鐵拐 reflects on Laojun as the immortal-patriarch of his religious clan in the first chapter ("老君者吾宗姓之仙祖"). The use of the term *zongxing* 宗姓 here might refer to their shared surname, Li 李, though it could also be interpreted as an attempt to match the use of *shi* 氏 in the Buddhist tradition, invoking the notion of genealogy and the view of the tradition as a multi-generational "clan." The *Tale of the Eight Immortals* goes on to dedicate chapter two in its entirety to Laojun's origin story ("Laojun Daojiao yuanliu 老君道教源流"), which acts as a cosmological introduction to the narrative as a whole. This account presents the "historical" Laozi (Li Er 李耳) as one of Laojun's numerous emanations, or "transformations" (*huashen* 化身) (fig. 10). In this *yuanliu* as elsewhere in the landscape of Daoist hagiography, the Laojun myth encompasses and precedes the Laozi myth, as, to quote Vincent Goossaert, it "implies claims of Daoist primacy in cosmic history and in the present."[74] The Laojun-centered vision of the Daoist tradition that frames *Tale of the Eight Immortals* assumes a similar theological position to that of the Yuan and Ming Daoist *yuanliu* catechisms studied by Goossaert.

[73] Wu Yuantai 吳元泰, *Baxian chuchu dongyou ji* 《八仙出處東遊記》 (Jianyang: Shuangfeng tang 雙峰堂, circa 1600), reprint in *Guben xiaoshuo congkan*, vol. 39: 1–2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1991), 12–26.
[74] See Vincent Goossaert, "Daoist Primers and Identity," 80–81.

玉女生老子

於李樹下

化身而未有誕生之迹迨商陽甲時分神化
氣始寄胎玄妙玉女八十一歲暨武丁庚辰
二月十五日卯時降誕於楚之苦縣瀨鄉曲
仁里從母左腋而生於李樹下指樹曰此吾
姓也生時白首面黄白色額有參午達理日
月角懸長耳矩目鼻純骨雙柱耳有三漏門
美鬚廣顙疎齒方口足蹈五文手把十文姓
李名耳字伯陽號曰老子又號曰老聃周文
王為西伯召為守藏史武王時遷為柱下史
成王時仍為柱下史乃遊西極大秦竺乾等

Figure 10: From Laojun’s *yuanliu* (“origins”) in *Tale of the Eight Immortals*; reprint in GBXSCK, vol. 39 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 13.

While this *yuanliu* of Laojun repeats longstanding hagiographical tropes (such as his miraculous birth story, modeled after that of the Buddha), it is particularly notable for our purposes for its historicist rhetoric and its lengthy narrative description of Laozi’s iconographical characteristics (including his famous white hair, high forehead, and elongated earlobes). The rest of the chapter charts the history of Daoism, from Laozi’s famous journey westward, through the establishment of Daoist sects and appearance of major Daoist scriptures, to the political significance of Daoism—its acceptance by historic rulers and the genealogical connection between Laozi and the imperial family of the Tang dynasty. Despite the obvious differences in genre and style between this narrative and SSYL, the basic approach this text takes to the story of Daoism—and the centrality of Laojun within this history—echoes SSYL’s

coupling of the life of Śākyamuni (within a series of Buddhas) in its first volume with the survey of Chinese Buddhism it offers in its second volume.

This resemblance is in line with the hagiographical vision underlying the subgenre I refer to as origin narratives, to which this narrative belongs.[75] Narratives of this kind invariably open with a cosmological introduction that situates the origin story of the main protagonist(s) within a larger universal vision. Yet origin narratives have more in common with SSYL beyond their basic framing and the notion of *yuanliu*. These illustrated books, particularly in vogue during the Wanli period in late Ming (1572–1620), recount the lives and saintly careers of widely revered figures, from Guanyin and Zhenwu to Confucius and Zhong Kui 鍾馗. As I argued elsewhere, origin narratives offered renewed visions of beloved cultural icons that sought to act as comprehensive guides for their lore and reverence. Entertainment and cultic worship are closely intertwined in these narratives and their accompanying paratextual materials (e.g., appendices containing ritual manuals for the worship of the protagonists). Notwithstanding their reliance on pre-existing materials and centuries of popular lore, origin narratives represent a watershed in hagiographic representation in Ming China. In their thematic scope and textual dimensions, origin narratives expand the hagiographies of the protagonists into full-length narratives that flesh out the figures’ ties to the ritual traditions and sacred sites that came to be associated with their lore.[76]

Several characteristics of SSYL are central to the makeup of late Ming origin narratives. In format, they pair text with image predominantly by embracing the abovementioned “picture-above-text” format, albeit with slightly different dimensions; in origin narratives the illustration above the text takes up a smaller portion of the entire page, as was customary in commercially publishing at the time. Specific visual links in the content of the illustrations, such as the abovementioned resemblance between the illustrations of the Lü Dongbin episode in SSYL and the *Flying Sword*, are also noteworthy. Furthermore, the basic narrative structure of origin narratives largely mirrors the SSYL template, namely consisting of a cosmological introduction (a pre-history), followed by the main life story of the protagonist, and finally ending with their posthumous (or post-ascension) legacy.[77] Thematically, beyond their shared trove of

[75] Ganany, “Origin Narratives.”
[76] Ganany, “Origin Narratives,” 1–2, 320–330.
[77] Interestingly, an earlier Korean hagiography of the Buddha, *Sŏkka yŏrae haengjŏk song* 《釋迦如來行蹟頌》 (Ode to the acts of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni), composed around 1328 by the Koryŏ monk Mugi 無寄, assumes a narrative structure that echoes both SSYL and the Chinese origin narratives of late Ming: the first third of the work is devoted to cosmology, the creation of the universe, and the genealogy of the Buddha; the second third describes the life of the Buddha, his enlightenment, and teaching period; and the last third focuses on his heritage—commemoration, relics, King Asoka—and the propagation of Buddhism in later generations.

hagiographical tropes, the hagio-theological vision underlying origin narratives positions the revered protagonist as the founder of a sect or the source of a cultic tradition. Like the Buddha Śākyamuni of SSYL (and to a lesser extent its large cast of Buddhist figures), protagonists of origin narratives embark on journeys of self-cultivation marked by the performance of various services for mankind, from spiritual instruction and healing to bringing rain and vanquishing demons. In both origin narratives and SSYL, spiritual cultivation and benevolent action for mankind are seen as complementary and interdependent; spiritual attainment is a precondition for the icons’ role as cultic patriarchs and deified saints. Equally important is the resemblance in the compilation strategies undertaken by Baocheng and the producers of origin narratives. In both cases, a wide range of pre-existing texts, predominantly borrowed from canonical collections, were adapted and reworked in the service of each project’s overarching missionary agenda. The producers of both SSYL and origin narratives voice similar aspirations that their compilations act as vehicles for doctrinal teaching and cultic reverence.[78]

<Level 1>8. Conclusions

In his postscript for the first volume, the compiler Baocheng makes the case for SSYL by voicing his concerns regarding the decline of the dharma, a concern shared by many Buddhist historiographers, and the inaccessibility of Buddhist texts due to their overabundance and complexity.[79] He writes:

> I prepared this compilation from numerous scriptures [in order to] make the profound writings clear and substantiated. I endeavored to bring together the essentials and the schools; my phrasing is plain [in order to] make the meaning explicit. In [preparing] the captions and pictures I followed established models. Its title is “Origins of the Śākya Clan.” I solicited donations for the carving [of woodblocks], for its extensive use and wide circulation,[80] [so that] those who see it and hear it could easily obtain it [i.e., comprehend it].
> 備抄眾典，顯證深文。控會神宗，辭略意曉。標題圖畫，取則成規。目曰《釋氏源流》。募緣鋟梓，用廣流通。使見聞者，可不勞而博矣。

On *Sŏkka yŏrae haengjŏk song*, see Sem Vermeersch, “An Early Korean Version of the Biography of the Buddha,” *Journal of the Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies* 1 (2011): 197–211.

[78] Ganany, “Writing and Worship in Deng Zhimo’s *Saints Trilogy*,” 15–16.

[79] Tsai, *Life of the Buddha*, 32.

[80] The term *liutong* 流通 is a euphemism for buying and selling books in Buddhist parlance, often used to refer to the circulation of published texts.

SSYL represents Baocheng's attempt to offer a guidebook to Buddhist teachings and history, an engaging and easily comprehensible vision of Buddhism for a Chinese audience. Baocheng's desire to make his work accessible is echoed by the compilers of other hagiographic compilations (Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

SSYL propagates a grand vision of Buddhism that draws on the realms of genealogy, hagiography, and historiography, yet transcends all three categories. John Kieschnick divides Chinese Buddhist historiography into three main groups: genealogies, prosopographies, and universal histories.[81] SSYL, I would like to suggest, represents a convergence of these three modes of writing. As a pseudo-historical genealogy of the Buddhist community, SSYL is intentionally representational, not comprehensive. This is particularly striking in the second volume of SSYL, which presents a selection of episodes about Buddhist clerics (belonging to different schools) and events related to Buddhism in China in chronological order without providing a full "family tree" or any systematic lineage of transmission. Instead, it creates an *image* of Buddhism as a creed and a monastic community from the Han to the Yuan dynasty. In this endeavor, Baocheng follows an existing historiographical tendency among Buddhist historians in China whose focus was, to quote Kieschnick, "on exemplars who fit into a larger scheme. […] For Buddhist historians, the challenge was to document how the individual monks contributed to the dissemination of the Dharma from the land of the Buddha to China, and how they nourished and protected Buddhism once it sank its roots into Chinese soil."[82] In SSYL, this challenge was met through Baocheng's focus on successful cases—episodes in which Buddhist monks proved triumphant in a variety of situations. The Buddhist figures populating the second volume do not receive a full biography (or hagiography), but rather an emblematic sketch. The illustrations accompanying the texts likewise depict emblematic scenes.

As the abovementioned episodes featuring Zhenwu and Lü Dongbin demonstrate, SSYL is not only highly selective in its choice of topics and figures, but it also takes great liberties with the information it incorporates and its mode of presentation. Despite Baocheng's stated reliance on earlier sources, the changes he introduced do far more than merely repackage existing materials within the constraints of the "picture-above-text" layout. Most notably, Baocheng provides a detailed historical, geographical, and biographical framing for the episodes he includes, whether they be events in the imperial court, miracle stories, or divine

[81] Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China*, 17–19.
[82] Kieschnick, *Buddhist Historiography in China*, 80.

encounters. This historicizing tendency goes hand in hand with the compilation’s overarching missionary agenda. Yet despite Baocheng’s overtly polemical stance throughout SSYL, the compilation also incorporates major Daoist deities into its vision of Chinese Buddhism. In his choice of topics, editing practices, and visual strategy, Baocheng crafts a vision of the Buddha and the Buddhist tradition that is specifically designed to meet the changing tastes, expectations, and ritual needs of Ming Chinese readers, lay and clerical alike.

As an emblematic collage that is both polemic and syncretic, SSYL responded to the vibrant hagiographic landscape of fifteenth-century China. Notwithstanding their different religious affiliations and contrasting polemical claims, a shared hagiographic imagination underlies SSYL and other Ming illustrated hagiographies, including the abovementioned *Zhenwu lingying tuce* and *Laojun bashiyi hua tushuo* which SSYL openly critiques. Importantly, SSYL left a profound mark on Chinese writing beyond the religious sphere. The compilation’s approach to the Buddhist tradition, its editorial strategy, and modes of textual and visual presentation reverberated in commercially published works, such as narrative texts and encyclopedias that targeted a wide readership. Chief among the many traces of SSYL in Ming book culture is the understanding of cultic traditions as rooted in the life stories of revered patriarchs, a hagiographical vision wherein the *yuanliu* and *chushen* accounts of widely-worshiped figures take on new significances as historical and genealogical narratives of universal proportions.

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