

## **On the Performance and Ritual Aspects of the *Xiangshan Baojuan*: A Case Study of Religious Assemblies in the Changshu Area<sup>\*\*</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article deals with performances of the *Xiangshan baojuan* (香山寶卷 *Baojuan* of Incense Mountain) in the tradition of ritualized storytelling called “telling scriptures” in the Changshu 常熟 area of Jiangsu 江蘇. The shortened recension of the *Xiangshan baojuan* that was compiled by a Buddhist monk around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of an older text dating back to the period before 1500, has become well integrated into this performance tradition and still enjoys immense popularity among the people of the Changshu area. The recitation of the text of the *Xiangshan baojuan*, following the tradition of scripture-telling as practiced in Changshu, is accompanied by an elaborate ritual setting and action, and its performance elicits a strong emotional response from the female portion of its audience.

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Manuscript received: July 25, 2013; revision completed: May 25, 2015; manuscript approved: July 16, 2015.

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<sup>\*\*</sup> The author would like to express his gratitude to Yu Yongliang, Yu Dingjun, Xia Genyuan, Di Jianxin, Di Qiuyan, Prof. Victor H. Mair, Dr. Matt Anderson, Paula Roberts, who helped the author during work on this article; and two anonymous reviewers. 作者特地鳴謝虞永良、余鼎君、夏根元、狄建新、狄秋燕先生協助作者調查並提供資料，也鳴謝梅維恆教授與兩位匿名審查專家指正。

Based on field observations, I reconstruct the general content of these performances, discuss the ritual elements that augment the recitation, and analyze the social and psychological meanings of the performance.

**Keywords:** precious scrolls, scripture-telling, Guanyin beliefs, folk literature, folk religion

## 1. Introduction

The *Xiangshan baojuan* (香山寶卷 *Baojuan* of Incense Mountain) is a well-known text in the history of Chinese literature and religion. It tells the story of the female incarnation of the merciful Bodhisattva Guanshiyin 觀世音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara) as Princess Miaoshan 妙善 (Marvelous Goodness), who overcomes many obstacles on her path of spiritual cultivation—one of the most difficult of which is the disapproval of her father, King Miaozhuang 妙莊 (Marvelous Splendor)—and ultimately achieves Buddhahood. It also preaches such Buddhist ideas (as popularly interpreted) as vegetarianism, non-violence, and meditation.<sup>1</sup>

The *Xiangshan baojuan* belongs to the genre of “precious scrolls” (*baojuan* 寶卷), which are essentially religious texts written in the style of alternating sections of prose and verse. They are recited to a lay audience for the purpose of religious instruction. One early edition of this text, entitled the *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji* (觀世音菩薩本行經簡集 Shortened Recension of the Scripture of the Original Life of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin), was printed in 1773 by the Zhaoqing Dazi Jingfang (昭慶大字經房 Zhaoqing Monastery Big-Characters Sūtra Publishers) in Hangzhou 杭州.<sup>2</sup> It is ascribed to the Chan master Puming

1 For the content of this story, see the various works discussing this text mentioned below.

2 For the reprinted version, see Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, “Kenryū han ‘Kōzan hōkan’ (fukusei) fu kaisetsu” 乾隆版《香山寶卷》(覆製) 付解説, in Yoshioka Yoshitoyo and Michel Soyminié, eds., *Dōkyō kenkyū* 道教研究 (Tokyo: Henkyōsha, 1971), vol. 4, pp.

普明 of the Upper Tianzhu monastery 上天竺寺 in Hangzhou, who, according to the preface, compiled it in 1103. However, most scholars doubt this early date and argue that the text in its present form dates back to approximately the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The earliest extant *baojuan* version of this story, entitled the *Da bei Guanshiyin pusa Xiangshan baojuan* (大悲觀世音菩薩香山寶卷 Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin of Great Compassion), however, remained unknown to scholars till recently. It is preserved in the Vietnamese reprint edition dated to 1772 that reproduces the Nanjing 南京 edition of unknown date (ca. late 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). Comparative analysis has shown that this early version significantly differed from the *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji* and its later derivatives.<sup>4</sup> Several studies of the later recensions of the *Xiangshan baojuan* exist in various languages, and there are even complete translations into two Western languages.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, most of these studies are based on pure textual research, paying little attention to modern performances of the piece. Yet the performance and ritual aspects of this text are especially important, as the *Xiangshan baojuan* is still quite popular in several areas of Jiangsu 江蘇 and Zhejiang 浙江 provinces. For example, Chün-fang Yu 于君方, in her study of the development of

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115-194.

- 3 Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 52; Wilt L. Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Baojuan Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), p. 31; Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu* 中國寶卷研究 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), p. 113.
- 4 See Rostislav Berezkin and Boris L. Riftin, "The Earliest Known Edition of the Precious Scroll of the Incense Mountain and the Connections between Precious Scrolls and Buddhist Preaching," *T'oung Pao* 99.4-5 (2013): 445-499.
- 5 The most important works are: Yoshioka, "Kenryū han 'Kōzan hōkan'"; Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan*, pp. 47-56; Chün-fang Yu 于君方, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 293-352; Wilt L. Idema, *Prinses Miaoshan en andere Chinese legenden van Guanyin, de bodhisattva van barmhartigheid* (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2000); Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*.

the Guanyin cult in China, notes that the *Xiangshan baojuan* was recited at pilgrimage sites and in private settings in Jiangsu villages.<sup>6</sup> However, she does not provide details of such use of this text. Fieldwork reports that deal with *baojuan* performances in various areas of Jiangsu also note the recitation of the *Xiangshan baojuan*,<sup>7</sup> but they merely mention it in passing without giving a consistent description of the rituals related to these performances or any analysis of their meaning. At the same time, the ritual function of *baojuan* has long been recognized by scholars in various countries.<sup>8</sup> An example of such a text is the *Mulian baojuan* (目蓮寶卷 *Baojuan* of Mulian), differing versions of which are also performed in Jiangsu, often in conjunction with the ritual of “Destroying the Blood Pond” (*po xuehu* 破血湖).<sup>9</sup> The *Xiangshan baojuan* also has ritual meaning, and its performance is accompanied by various rituals, including those

6 Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation*, p. 536, n. 12.

7 Yu Yongliang 虞永良, “Heyang *baojuan* diaocha baogao” 河陽寶卷調查報告, *Minsu quyī* 民俗曲藝 110 (1997): 67-76; Qiu Huiying 丘慧瑩, “Jiangsu Changshu Baimao diqu xuanjuan huodong diaocha baogao” 江蘇常熟白茆地區宣卷活動調查報告, *Minsu quyī* 民俗曲藝 169 (2010): 183-247; Yu Dingjun 余鼎君, “Jiangsu Changshu de jiangjing xuanjuan” 江蘇常熟的講經宣卷, *Mazu yu minjian xinyang: yanjiu tongxun* 媽祖與民間信仰研究通訊 (Taipei: Boyang, 2012), vol. 2., pp. 49-114; Rostislav Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (*Jiangjing*) in the Zhangjiagang Area and the History of Chinese Storytelling,” *Asia Major*, third series, 24.1(2011.12): 1-42; Rostislav Berezkin, “An Analysis of ‘Telling Scriptures’ (*Jiangjing*) during Temple Festivals in Gangkou (Zhangjiagang), with Special Attention to the Status of the Performers,” *CHINOPERL Papers* 30(2011): 25-76.

8 For an English language work that analyzes *baojuan* performances in Jingjiang 靖江 in Jiangsu (an area close to Changshu) using a performance-folkloristic approach, see Mark Bender, “A Description of *Jiangjing* (Telling Scriptures) Services in Jingjiang, China,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 60.1 (2001): 101-133.

9 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, p. 220; Beata Grant and Wilt L. Idema, trans., *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), p. 232, n. 19; Rostislav Berezkin, *Dragocennyye sviatki (Baotsiuan’) v duhovnoi kul’ture Kitaia: na primere Baotsiuan’ o Treh Voplosheniayah Muliania* (Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg Center for Oriental Studies, 2012), pp. 121-122.

devoted to the worship of deities, pleas for salvation, and requests for medical healing.

This article deals with the performance and ritual contexts of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the areas that formerly belonged to Changshu 常熟 county of Jiangsu province, based on the results of my fieldwork in the modern Changshu and Gangkou 港口 township of Zhangjiagang 張家港 city areas in 2008-2013.<sup>10</sup> Various performance styles are used in these areas. I mainly examine performances by two masters of telling scriptures (*jiangjing xiansheng* 講經先生) who inherited their styles from within their families: Yu Dingjun 余鼎君 (b. 1942), a male master of telling scriptures from Liantang 練塘 town (Shanghu 尚湖) in Changshu, and Di Qiuyan 狄秋燕 (b. 1963), a female performer from Qingshui village 清水村 of Gangkou township (this place lies on the border of present-day Changshu city). Both learned scripture-telling from their fathers, who began performing before 1949. I reconstruct the general context of their performances, discuss the textual and ritual elements that have been added to the recitations, and analyze the social and psychological meanings of these performances.

## 2. The *Xiangshan baojuan* in telling scriptures performances in the Changshu area

*Baojuan* performances in the rural areas around Changshu are known as “telling scriptures,” although the alternative term “scroll recitation” (*xuanjuan* 宣卷) that is more common in the whole Lower Yangtze region is also in use there. Telling scriptures takes place during religious assemblies called *hui* 會. These are differentiated into “private” (“benevolent assemblies,” *shanhui* 善會) and “communal” assemblies (*shehui* 社會); the latter usually take the form of temple

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10 Before 1962, when it became part of the independent Shazhou 沙洲 county (later – city of Zhangjiagang), the Gangkou area belonged to Changshu county.

festivals (*miaohui* 廟會). The performers of *baojuan* are called “masters of telling scriptures” and usually have the status of professionals. They especially study this art, and believers pay for their performances.

Recently several schools of telling scriptures in the Changshu area have attracted the attention of Chinese and foreign scholars: many *baojuan* texts collected in the Changshu and Zhangjiagang areas have been published, and a number of studies in Chinese and English have appeared.<sup>11</sup> However, these studies have paid little attention to the place of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in this tradition. Yet, in fact, this text occupies a central place in the living tradition of telling scriptures. In the cases that I witnessed in the Changshu area it was performed during three private assemblies and at four temple festivals.

Due to space limitations, in this paper I mainly restrict discussion to two private assemblies: the first one, devoted to the consecration of a new house, called an “expression of gratitude to great [Heaven and Earth]” (*xiehong* 謝鴻), was held in a village near Shanghu town in the Changshu area on October 9, 2012; and the second, devoted to “extending the longevity” of an old lady—*yanshou* 延壽—took place in Tianzhuang 恬莊 town (Gangkou) in the Zhangjiagang area on November 11, 2012. In each case, three masters of scripture-telling took part in the recitation, each in turn. At the first event these

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11 For the texts, see *Zhongguo Heyang baojuan ji* 中國河陽寶卷集 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2007) (abbreviated as ZHBJ below); Yu Dingjun, ed., *Qiansheng xiaowang baojuan: Yuqingtang cangben xuan* 千聖小王寶卷：餘慶堂藏本選 (Huh-hoto: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 2010); *Zhongguo Shashang baojuan ji* 中國沙上寶卷集 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2011) (abbreviated as ZSBJ below); for the studies, see Yu Yongliang, “Heyang *baojuan* diaocha baogao”; Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 384-400, 401-415; Li Shuru 李淑如, “Jiangsu diqu Tongli, Zhangjiagang *baojuan* liuchuan xiankuang diaocha yu shili” 江蘇地區同里、張家港寶卷流傳現況調查與實例, *Yunhan xuekan* 雲漢學刊 21 (2010): 133-146; Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (*Jiangjing*) in the Zhangjiagang Area”; Berezkin, “On the Survival of the Traditional Ritualized Performance Art in Modern China: A Case of Telling Scriptures by Yu Dingjun in Shanghu Town Area of Changshu City in Jiangsu Province,” *Minsu quyī* 民俗曲藝 181 (2013): 167-222.

were Yu Dingjun and his two female disciples surnamed Zhang 張 and Wang 王, also Shanghu residents; at the second, Di Qiuyan and her assistants, two male masters, Xia Genyuan 夏根元 (b. 1945, from Shuangtang village 雙塘村, Gangkou) and Li Meixing 李梅興 (from Yushan 虞山 town in Changshu).

These two private assemblies had a similar structure and carried the same general meaning of “returning the vow of Incense Mountain” (*Xiangshan wanyuan* 香山完願), which implies that the main text recited during these assemblies was the *Xiangshan baojuan*. This type of assembly is a form of prayer for the welfare of the whole family; the sponsors (*zhazhu* 齋主) usually take a vow that they will thank the deities with the recitation of *baojuan* in return for their help. More specifically, these assemblies have the aims of exorcism, warding off calamities, curing disease, protecting children, and requesting longevity for elderly persons. These petitions may be combined in one assembly. For example, the aim of the assembly in Shanghu was exorcism and the curing of a disease. The assembly in Tianzhuang was organized mainly for wishing longevity for the parents of the house owner as well as for protecting a child. The purpose of each assembly, as well as the number and titles of *baojuan* recited during them, were listed in the memorial (*shubiao* 疏表) that the masters of scripture-telling wrote in each case. The memorials were recited and then burned, the way in which they were submitted to the deities, at the end of the assembly.

In order to demonstrate the rituals surrounding the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the tradition of scripture-telling, I list the programs of two assemblies in the Appendix. The programs demonstrate that these assemblies had much in common in terms of content, though there were some differences between them. In spite of the fact that the *Xiangshan baojuan* occupied the central place in each of these assemblies, their programs were not limited to this text. *Baojuan* texts devoted to other deities were recited: these included texts dealing with deities that are worshiped all across China, such as the *Yuhuang baojuan* (玉皇寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Jade Emperor) or the *Zushi baojuan* (祖師寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Ancestor), which deals with the hagiography of Zhenwu 真武, the *Sanguan baojuan* (三官

寶卷 *Baojuan* of Three Officials), the *Caishen baojuan* (財神寶卷 *Baojuan* of the God of Wealth), and the *Zaohuang baojuan* (灶皇寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Stove Emperor), as well as those of local deities worshipped mainly in the Changshu area, such as the *Mengjiang baojuan* (猛將寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Fierce General), the *Gao shen juan* (高神卷 *Baojuan* of Deity Gao), the *Qiansheng xiaowang baojuan* (千聖小王寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Small King of Thousand Sages), and the *Lushen baojuan* (路神寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Road Deity).<sup>12</sup> The choice of the texts in each case was determined by the general tradition of scripture-telling, the aim of the assembly, and the geographic location. For example, several *baojuan* devoted to the local deities were different in these two cases, as different deities are worshipped in Shanghu and Tianzhuang.

Telling scriptures performances take place in a complex ritual setting. The special altar (*fotai* 佛臺) is established in the guest room of the sponsor's house. It is composed of several tables put together and is adorned with a hanging scroll showing the images of deities (*shengxiang* 聖像): in the case of the assembly in Shanghu, these were three stellar deities of Happiness, Fortune, and Longevity (see fig. 1). Images of deities summoned



Fig. 1 Altar set up for telling scriptures on the occasion of the consecration of a new house, Shanghu, October 9, 2012.

12 These deities are presented as deified historical or pseudo-historical persons in these texts. Fierce General Liu is usually said to be the deified Song-dynasty general Liu Qi 劉錡 (1098-1162); the Marquis of Martial Glory, the Fierce General of Celestial Department 揚威侯天曹猛將; Deity Gao is the Song-dynasty general Gao Huaide 高懷德 (926-982); the Small King of Thousand Sages is Zhang Tan 張佖, a pseudo-historical son of the Tang dynasty statesman Zhang Xun 張巡 (709-757); the Road Deity is Fang Xiang 方相, the legendary general of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1046 B.C.E.): ZHBJ 1: 194-208, 119-122, 147-149, 178-181; see also Yu Dingjun, ed., *Qiansheng xiao wang baojuan*, pp. 3-22.



at the beginning of the assembly, called *foma* 佛馬 (literally “Buddhist horses,” also commonly known as *zhima* 紙馬), as well as the offerings for them, are placed on the altar. (The *foma* are burned at the end of the assembly.) There is also a place for the performer and his or her assistants, and a chorus composed of old women,



Fig. 2 Recitation of the *Xiangshan baojuan*, Shanghai, October 9, 2012.

who chant the refrain, consisting of the Buddha’s name, after each rhymed line of a verse sung by the performer (see fig. 2). At the beginning of the assembly the masters of scripture-telling light incense (*dianxiang* 點香), invite the deities (*qingfo* 請佛), and lead the sponsors in making offerings to them. At the end they perform several rituals aimed at pleasing the deities and securing blessings for the sponsors, such as “presenting lotus flowers” (*xian hehua* 獻荷花), “untying knots” (*jiejie* 解結), “scattering flowers” (*sanhua* 散花), and “collecting incense” (*shouxiang* 收香). Finally, they send the deities off (*songfo* 送佛) and burn ritual money prepared by the chorus members during the performance and other paper paraphernalia. In this article I do not describe the general performance mode of scripture-telling in the Changshu area and the meaning of separate rituals, as I concentrate here on the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan*.<sup>13</sup>

Both assemblies described here started between 6:30 and 8:30 in the morning and ended between 18:00 and 18:30 in the evening. The performances were divided into morning, afternoon, and evening sessions: breaks for lunch and

13 For details of the ritual context of performances and separate rituals, see Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (*Jiangjing*) in the Zhangjiagang Area”; Rostislav Berezkin, “Modern Performances of ‘Precious Scrolls’ as a Part of Folk Religious and Social Life in the Shanghai Area of Changshu City in Jiangsu Province, China,” in E. A. Serebryakov and Fijita Rina, eds., *Issues of Far Eastern Literatures: Papers of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference* (Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg State University, 2012), vol. 2, pp. 128-145.

snacks took place between sessions. The assembly in Shanghu took longer, as more texts were recited there: twenty-one scrolls versus twelve in Tianzhuang. However, the performance in Shanghu was divided between two altars, one vegetarian and one meat, corresponding to the difference in offerings presented to the two types of deities: the nationally worshiped (or sovereign) and the local. While one master of scripture-telling recited the “vegetarian scrolls” (*sujuan* 素卷) at the main altar, also called “the altar of Incense Mountain,” another master recited the “meat scrolls” (*hunjuan* 葷卷) at the “meat altar” established in another room of the same house. The *Tailao baojuan* (太姥寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Great Grandma), which deals with the mother of Wutong 五通, a deity of wealth very popular throughout the entire Suzhou area, is the central text recited at the meat altar in the Shanghu tradition.<sup>14</sup> Several “vegetarian scrolls” that are usually performed at the vegetarian altar, such as the *Caishen baojuan* and the *Zaohuang baojuan*, were moved to the “meat altar” for economy of time. This division seems to be usual in the Changshu area and is preserved in several local traditions.<sup>15</sup> However, in the Tianzhuang area this tradition is not currently observed, and the national and local deities are venerated at the same altar, as was the case at the assembly on November 11, 2012.

Several rituals of the life-cycle type also took place during these two assemblies. For example, during the assembly in Shanghu the masters of scripture-telling performed the *Lu Ban baojuan* (魯班寶卷 *Baojuan* of Lu Ban), the *Xingsu baojuan* (星宿寶卷 *Baojuan* of Constellations), and the *Yaowang baojuan* (藥王寶卷 *Baojuan* of the King of Medicine), which carry the meaning of, respectively, “pacifying the dwelling” (*zhenzhai* 鎮宅), improving one’s destiny, and providing a spiritual cure. During the assembly in Tianzhuang the *Hejia yanshou* (合家延壽 [*Baojuan* of] Extending Longevity for the Whole Family) was performed, which carried the meaning of wishing longevity for the

14 The edited version from the Gangkou area was published in ZHBJ 1: 68-75.

15 Qiu Huiying, “Jiangsu Changshu Baimao diqu xuanjuan,” pp. 202-203.

mother of the family. The masters of scripture-telling also performed the ritual of “crossing the passes” accompanied by the recitation of the *Duguan baojuan* (度關寶卷 *Baojuan* of Crossing the Passes) there. This is a ritual asking for the protection of small children.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, during both assemblies the ritual of “averting the malicious stars” (*tuixing* 退星) was performed, which has the effect of exorcism and originated in Daoist ritual.

In this article, I focus on the private assemblies and do not analyze in detail the programs of scripture-telling that are performed during temple festivals and their differences from the private assemblies.<sup>17</sup> It is sufficient to note here that the programs of both types of assemblies were quite similar: during the temple festivals, witnessed by the author in the Changshu area in the period of 2011-2013, masters of scripture-telling also performed the *Xiangshan baojuan*, followed by texts dealing with national and local deities. The main difference between the two types of assemblies is their purpose: while the private assemblies are centered on the personal welfare of the family, the temple festivals are aimed at the prosperity of the whole community. Both types of assemblies use the same texts and related rituals.

It is evident from the above description that the context of the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the Changshu scripture-telling tradition is quite complex and varied. Several beliefs and practices related to Buddhism, Daoism and local cults are interwoven in these performances. The *Xiangshan baojuan* comprises only one element in the complex program of assemblies that are related to various events in the life of a family or a community. The social context of the performances is also reflected in the rich contents of the texts and rituals performed. The *Xiangshan baojuan*, originally a popular Buddhist text, has come to be associated with the various exorcist, medicinal, and salvational rituals of the

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16 On the performance of a similar ritual in the Jingjiang area, see Bender, “A Description of Jiangjing,” pp. 114-118.

17 For scripture-telling performances during temple festivals in the Gangkou area, see Berezkin, “An Analysis of ‘Telling Scriptures’ (*Jiangjing*) during Temple Festivals.”

local religion.

### 3. Additional elements of the ritual function of the text

Masters of telling scriptures in the Changshu area use the recension of the *Xiangshan baojuan* called the *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*. This version was adapted from the full recension of this scripture and is ascribed to Jinghong 淨宏 of the Clear Plum Court (Qingmeiyuan 清梅院), which demonstrates the participation of Buddhist clergy in the editing and transmission of this text.<sup>18</sup> The earliest extant edition was printed in 1868 by the Zhaoqing Huikong Jingfang (昭慶慧空經房 Huikong Sūtra Publishers of Zhaoqing Monastery) in Hangzhou.<sup>19</sup> The masters of scripture-telling in the Gangkou area use the edition of this text printed by Wansong Jingfang (萬松經房 Myriad Pines Scripture Publishers) in Wuxi 無錫 in 1886, which closely follows the 1868 edition (see fig. 3 and 4).<sup>20</sup> Several of the masters also possess manuscripts copied from the printed edition (see fig. 5).<sup>21</sup> Yu Dingjun and his disciples use the manuscript that was copied from the reprinted edition of Zhaoqing Huikong Jingfang in Hangzhou, dated 1931.<sup>22</sup>

One can see that the printed text was well integrated into the telling scriptures performances described in this article. However, the performers not only recite this *baojuan*, but also add several textual elements that are related to its ritual function. Such additional elements appear at the beginning and at the end of the main text.

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18 The list of sponsors provided in the colophon of the 1868 edition also contains the names of monks and nuns who donated funds for the printing, see Yoshioka, “Kenryū han ‘Kōzan hōkan,’” pp. 359-360.

19 For the reprinted text, see Yoshioka, “Kenryū han ‘Kōzan hōkan,’” pp. 318-360.

20 The edited version was published in ZHBJ 1: 32-60. I use a copy of the 1886 edition for citations.

21 For the modified manuscript versions from Zhangjiagang, see ZSBJ 2: 959-977, 978-993.

22 Yu Dingjun, “Changshu Shanghu Yuqingtang Yu Dingjun cang *baojuan* mulu” (unpublished manuscript), p. 1.

Based on the results of my fieldwork observations, I can explain the addition of these elements by citing the dissatisfaction of performers with the introductory and concluding parts of the printed edition, which are too short and inexpressive for them.



Fig. 3 The *Xiangshan baojuan*.  
Preface of woodblock edition, dated 1886. In the collection of master of scripture- telling Di Jianxin 狄建新 from Gangkou.

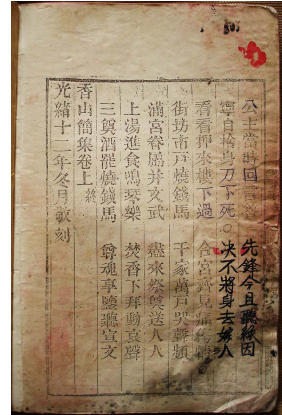


Fig. 4 The *Xiangshan baojuan*.  
Last page of woodblock edition, dated 1886. Di Jianxin's collection.

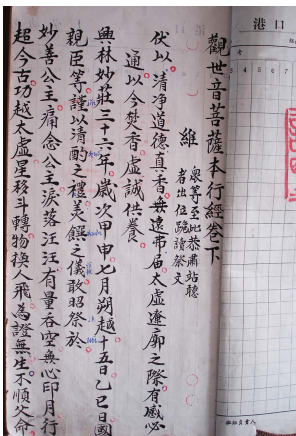


Fig. 5 The *Xiangshan baojuan*.  
Manuscript copied by Di Jianxin in 1987. First page of the second volume.

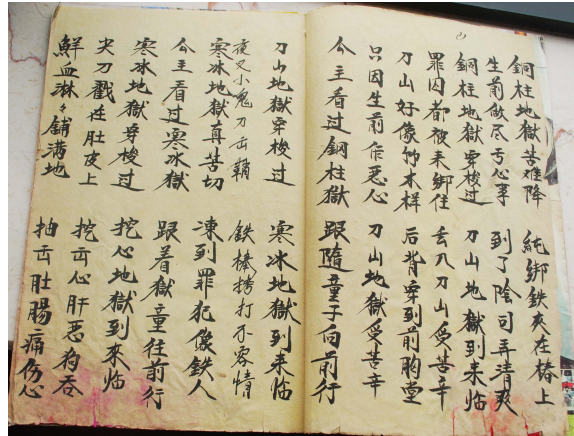


Fig. 6 "You difu" 游地府  
Manuscript in Di Qiuyan's 狄秋燕 possession.

The majority of *baojuan* dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries start with the special introductory ritual, called the “opening of the Sūtra” (*kaijing* 開經). This includes a *gāthā* on the sūtra opening (*kaijingji* 開經偈), a hymn of burning incense (*juxiangzan* 舉香贊), a chant for the Three Treasures of Buddhism (*sanbaosong* 三寶頌), invocations of buddhas and guardian deities, a prose outline (*tigang* 提綱), and other elements.<sup>23</sup> Quite strangely the complete recension of the *Xiangshan baojuan* (1773 edition) does not have these usual introductory verses. This text has three prefaces and several verses with changing seven- and five-character meter at the beginning; then the narration in prose begins.<sup>24</sup> There are two probable explanations for this situation: either this edition was not used for ordinary oral recitation during religious assemblies, or the elements of the ritual frame were transmitted orally and inserted during the real-life performance (as is now done in scripture-telling in Changshu).

Several routine introductory elements appear in the 1868 recension and its later editions: they start with “the opening discourse on ascending the platform” (*dengtai kaibai* 登臺開白), which gives instructions for the performer and audience, a quotation from the sutra, and the introductory verse called a *gāthā*. Then the official title of the text appears, the *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*, and the main text starts with the narration in prose. The opening discourse is a prose passage that contains a description of the occasion of recitation, which is the birth of Bodhisattva Guanshiyin on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the second month. This text obviously reflects the reality of performances, as the text is often recited on this date now; however, as we have seen, the recitation is not limited to this occasion. The prose introduction also asks the audience to listen carefully to the recitation of the text and behave in the proper way: not to talk, joke, or make any kind of noise. The “quotation” from sutra is a re-telling of the basic meaning of the “Gates of Universal Salvation” (*Pumen pin* 普門品), a chapter from the *Miaofa*

23 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 149-150.

24 Yoshioka, “Kenryū han ‘Kōzan hōkan,’” pp. 242-244.

*lianhuajing* (妙法蓮華經 Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law), which forms a scriptural basis for the belief in Bodhisattva Guanshiyin and has been especially popular with lay believers.<sup>25</sup> The introductory verse consists of four lines of seven characters and assures one of the limitless compassion of Guanyin, who answers every believer, even if he (or she) is “a Turk or a Tartar.”<sup>26</sup>

However, the oral introduction to the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the Changshu area performances is usually much more complex than that given in the printed version. The masters of scripture-telling insert additional elements in between the elements of the printed text. The most complex introduction appears in the tradition of scripture-telling followed by Yu Dingjun. There the introduction consists of the following elements:

- (1) the *gāthā* on the scroll opening (*kaijuanji* 開卷偈):

We start with the opening of the *Xiangshan baojuan*,  
 Bodhisattva Guanyin sits on the lotus platform.  
 Good-in-Talent and Dragon Girl stand to the left and right,  
 The willow branch in the pure bottle relieves disasters and hardships.  
 香山寶卷初展開，觀音菩薩坐蓮臺。  
 善才龍女分左右，淨瓶楊柳消災難。

- (2) the hymn of obeisance to the Three [Treasures of Buddhism] (*san guiyi* 三皈依):<sup>27</sup>

With a bow we pay obeisance to all buddhas,  
 The Buddha's mercy is universal and rescues all living beings.  
 With a bow we pay obeisance to all dharmas,  
 The Wheel of Law revolves constantly and rescues all living beings.  
 With a bow we pay obeisance to all monks,  
 The sangha explains the Buddha's teaching and rescues all living beings.

25 See Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation*, pp. 37-39, 45-46.

26 Yoshioka, “Kenryū han ‘Kōzan hōkan,’” pp. 318-319; *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*, pp. 4-5.

27 The Three Treasures of Buddhism are the Buddha, Dharma (his teaching), and Sangha (the monastic community).

稽首皈依一切佛，佛慈廣大度眾生。

稽首皈依一切法，法輪常轉度眾生。

稽首皈依一切僧，僧伽說法度眾生。

(3) recitation of the preface in the printed version (*du xu* 讀序);

(4) the Buddhist *gāthā* in honor of Guanyin:

Bodhisattva Guanyin arrives in this mundane world.

She blesses the assembly's sponsor and eliminates his sins.

She transforms herself into a myriad of forms

And awakens people who are dreaming of Nanke.<sup>28</sup>

觀音菩薩臨凡間，保佑齋主滅罪愆。

百億分身來變化，喚醒南柯夢裡人。

(5) the hymn in honor of Guanyin (*Guanyin zan* 觀音贊):

The clouds of mercy cover [the world],

And there is a response at the Buddha's gate.

Guanyin with eight thousand arms and eyes reveals her golden body.

The teaching of her vow [to rescue living beings] is great and profound.

As she appears in this world, she provides mercy for all beings.

Hail to the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva<sup>29</sup> of the Incense Clouds' Palanquin!

(repeated three times)

慈雲遍復，感應佛門，八千手眼證金身。

誓願法宏深，證（正）果成真，出世盡沾恩。

南無香雲蓋菩薩摩訶薩（三次）。

(6) “opening the main text” (*kai zhengwen* 開正文), which starts with the recitation of “the opening discourse on ascending the platform.”

The introductory verses of the *Xiangshan baojuan* show a clear connection with the contents of the main text and work to set up the religious framework for its performance. They invoke such common Buddhist terms as the Three Treasures, Wheel of Law, kalpa, mahasattva, living beings, clouds of mercy,

28 This expression comes from the story of Li Gongzuo 李公佐 “A governor of Nanke” (*Nanke taishou zhuan* 南柯太守傳, 8th century), a character who, in a dream, became governor of the Kingdom of Ants. It became an expression for illusory joy.

29 The greatest among bodhisattvas.



ocean assembly and so on. They also refer to the popular iconography of Guanyin, as they mention her golden body, thousand arms and eyes, the bottle with the willow branch, the association with the moon imagery, and her multiple manifestations. Guanyin's acolytes in her popular images—Good-in-Talent (Shancai 善才, Skt. Sudhana) and Dragon Girl (Longnü 龍女, Skt. Nāgākanyā)—also appear in one of these verses.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the verses refer to the miraculous response to the recitation of *baojuan* that is so valued by the local audience. Obviously, the masters of telling scriptures composed this type of introduction in order to intensify the religious meaning of their performance.

The concluding verses of *baojuan* are also expanded by the masters of telling scriptures. The recitation of the *Xiangshan baojuan* ends with the recitation of “the hymn of transfer of merit” (*huixiangzan* 回向贊). It reads:

The merit of scroll recitation is indeed superior,  
 May the limitless superior blessings all be transferred.  
 My universal wish is that all living beings who have submerged and drowned,  
 May quickly transfer to the realm of the Buddha of Limitless Light.  
 I have recited completely the *Xiangshan baojuan*.  
 Good-in-Talent, the youth, has bowed thirteen times.  
 Then rapidly ascended to the clouds.  
 And in the precious cart returned to the nine luminaries.  
 The deities grant happiness and guard peace.  
 Hail to Bodhisattva Guanyin!  
 Hail to Bodhisattva Granting Auspiciousness!  
 Hail to Bodhisattva of Precious Treasury!  
 宣卷功德殊勝行，無邊勝福皆回向。  
 普愿沉溺諸眾生，速往無量光福（佛）剎。  
 香山寶卷全部宣完，善才童子十三參。  
 平步上雲端，九曜回鑾，賜福保平安。  
 南無觀世音菩薩摩訶薩。南無降吉祥菩薩摩訶薩。南無收寶藏菩薩摩訶薩。

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30 For detailed study of these, see Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety*, pp. 30-41.

This verse expands the four lines that appear in the printed editions of the *Xiangshan baojuan*.<sup>31</sup> Verses of this type have been standard in *baojuan* texts since the early period; they also continue the tradition of recitation of Buddhist sutras.<sup>32</sup> They deal with the transfer of merit obtained through the recitation of sacred texts to living beings.

During the assembly in Tianzhuang, the *Xiangshan baojuan* was followed by the *Jieyuan juan* (結緣卷 Scroll of Establishing [Benign] Karmic Links), which also serves the purpose of concluding the long recitation of the *Xiangshan baojuan* and summarizes the miraculous effect of this recitation. This text, written completely in verse, has auspicious content, as it wishes all kinds of happiness for the sponsors of the assembly. This *baojuan* is also known for its flexibility: the text is not fixed, but can be modified according to the occasion. Masters of scripture-telling usually add many details concerning the modern life of the locality.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the printed text of the *Xiangshan baojuan* is placed into an elaborate ritual framework in Changshu scripture-telling in a manner similar to the performance of other local texts.

#### 4. Additional texts used in the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan*

Not only are the introductory and concluding parts of the *baojuan* text expanded in scripture-telling performances, additional texts also are inserted into the main body of *baojuan*. They appear at crucial places in the main storyline and are categorized as small scrolls (*xiaojuan* 小卷), which are usually used to enrich the content of scripture-telling performances. These texts can appear in the form of manuscripts that are attached to the printed version of *baojuan* (see fig.

31 *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*, p. 209.

32 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 150-151.

33 For two variants of this text from different performers in Zhangjiagang see ZHBJ 2: 1333-1334; ZSBJ 2: 1227-1229.

6).<sup>34</sup> However, the masters of scripture-telling often know them by heart, and they are transmitted in the oral mode as well. Usually there are notes in the printed text used by the masters of scripture-telling that indicate where a certain additional text is to be inserted.

There are five main additional texts: “*Jin Baique*” (進白雀 Entering the White Sparrow Convent), “*Zhan san gongzhu*” (斬三公主 Executing the Third Princess), “*You difu*” (游地府 Travelling through the Underworld) (see fig. 6, p. 319), “*Song huan yang*” (送還陽 Sending Back to the World), and “*Qing lingdan*” (請靈丹 Asking for the Elixir).<sup>35</sup> The first, second, fourth, and fifth texts are completely in verse, and the third text uses a combination of prose and verse.

The first text deals with the entrance of Miaoshan into the White Sparrow Convent after she becomes determined to enter the life of celibacy; she has refused the order of her father, King Miao Zhuang, who wants her to marry and give birth to an heir to the throne. Miaoshan pursues the way of Buddhist spiritual cultivation and goes to the convent with the aim of becoming a nun. However, her father hinders her from her religious pursuit—he orders his generals to burn the nunnery with all its inhabitants. The text of “*Jin baique*” describes how Miaoshan arrives at the nunnery and worships the Three Treasures in its main temple.<sup>36</sup>

The second text elaborates on the moment at which the princess Miaoshan is executed by her father, after continuously refusing to listen to her father’s and other family members’ admonitions, choosing to die rather than to betray her principles. This text describes the determination of Miaoshan to follow a path of spiritual cultivation and the cruelty of her father Miao Zhuang.

The third text is the longest among all “small scrolls” that are associated with the *Xiangshan baojuan* in Changshu scripture telling. It deals with Miaoshan’s tour of the underworld, where she is escorted by a servant of the kings of hell,

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34 Several such manuscripts were collected in the Gangkou area and published in edited form. See ZHBJ 1: 153-157, ZHBJ 2: 1395-1396, 1407.

35 I translate “*lingdan*” as “elixir” in the sense of a medicine that can cure all ills.

36 ZHBJ 2: 1395-1396.

called a “youth” (*tongzi* 童子). As Miaoshan is a pious and virtuous person, the kings of hell are not able to cause her any harm after her premature death. They simply invite her to tour the underworld, where she can observe the tortures that await sinners after death.

“Travelling through the Underworld” (*You difu*) describes in detail all departments of the underworld. According to the text published in the *Zhongguo heyang baojuan ji* (中國河陽寶卷集 Collection of *Baojuan* from Heyang), which is based on the undated manuscript belonging to Hu Zhangxing 胡正興 (b. 1934), a master of telling scriptures from Zhuangjing 莊涇 village in Gangkou, there are ten departments of hell, called *shidian* 十殿, each governed by a king (with Yanluowang 閻羅王 as the most important among them), and eighteen tiers of hell, called the *shiba ceng diyu* 十八層地獄.<sup>37</sup> Each king of the underworld usually governs two tiers of hell. The last, nineteenth, tier of hell is called Avici (Ch. Abi 阿鼻); it was created especially for Liu Qingti 劉青提, the sinful mother of Mulian 目蓮, where she is imprisoned and awaits the moment when her son will liberate her during his second rebirth. Thus, it refers to the famous story of Mulian rescuing his mother from hell that also appears in *baojuan* of the Changshu area.<sup>38</sup>

“Travelling through the Underworld” provides information about the names and dates of birth of each king of hell, as well as the type of torments that the sinners endure in each tier, and even the way to avoid punishment in any particular department of hell. For example, if one wishes to be pardoned by the First King of Hell, Qin Guangdawang 秦廣大王, one needs to take a vow not to perform evil deeds on the king’s birthday—the first day of the second lunar month—every year, and then recite a thousand times the name of Dingguangwen

37 ZHBJ 1: 153-157.

38 On this story, see Victor H. Mair, “Notes on the Maudgalyāyana Legend in East Asia,” *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 37 (1986-87): 83-93; Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Berezkin, *Dragocennye svitki*, etc.

Buddha 定光文佛.<sup>39</sup> “Travelling through the Underworld” describes the implements and devices of the underworld: the Tower of the Mirror of Sins (*Niejingtai* 孽鏡臺) or the Karmascope, the Blood Pond (*Xuehu* 血湖), the Mountain of Wasted Money (*Poqianshan* 破錢山), the Mountain of Blades (*Daoshan* 刀山), cauldrons of boiling oil, burning hot bronze pillars, fierce man-eating dogs, and so on. These structures and images of the underworld have been common in Chinese religious literature since the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties and often appear in the morality books (*shanshu* 善書) and *baojuan* of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.<sup>40</sup>

“Travelling through the Underworld” elaborates on the section of the printed text of the *Xiangshan baojuan* that describes the underworld. This text does not describe the hells in detail, but just mentions the most important places there. In addition, the *Xiangshan baojuan* tells how the enlightened Miaoshan rescues the sinners that she saw in hell: “As soon as the princess pronounced her vow [to rescue the sinners], she suddenly saw that five-colored lotus flowers bloomed everywhere below the bridge [over the *Naihe* 奈何 or Alas River]. When the sinners saw this, they pressed their palms together and Rejoiced. At that time they reached the opposite shore, thanked Miaoshan with a bow and departed.”<sup>41</sup>

Such passages relate to an important subsidiary function of the recitation of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the Changshu area, the salvation of the souls of deceased ancestors. In commissioning assemblies centering on the *Xiangshan baojuan*, the sponsors aspire to provide a better rebirth for their ancestors and also to secure pardon for the sins of the living. Thus, these performances are an analog

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39 ZHBJ 1:153.

40 See, for example, Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 24-55; Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, *Jigoku hen: Chūgoku no meikaisetsu* 地獄變: 中國の冥界説 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Grant and Idema, *Escape from Blood Pond Hell*, pp. 23-26, etc.

41 *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*, p. 103.

of the funerary services in the same area, which also include scripture telling. The funerals are different from the assemblies for the living, however, in terms of schedule and content.<sup>42</sup> The themes of sin and salvation as well as the elaborate imagery of the underworld in “Travelling through the Underworld” are obviously borrowed from *baojuan* performed during these funerary services, such as the *Shi wang juan* (十王卷 Scroll of the Ten Kings), the *Jiuyou diyu juan* (九幽地獄卷 Scroll of the Nine Dark [Regions] of Hell), and the *Mulian juan* (目蓮卷 Scroll of Mulian).<sup>43</sup>

“Travelling through the Underworld” ends with a sentence stating that, after the Princess has traveled through the eighteen tiers of hell, Yanwang 閻王 sends her back to the world of the living.<sup>44</sup> After this passage a master of telling scriptures can recite a short text called “Sending Back to the World” that marks the passage of Miaoshan to Incense Mountain, where she settles with the help of various deities, and finally attains enlightenment. The last text, “Asking for the Elixir,” is related to the ritual of medicinal function discussed in the next section.

According to the masters of telling scriptures, these “small scrolls” can easily be omitted during modern telling scriptures performances. In a certain sense this reflects the changes in the organization and length of assemblies that occurred around the 1980s. Before then, assemblies usually took a whole day and night; they ended only at the dawn of the next day.<sup>45</sup> At that time masters of telling scriptures inserted additional texts to please the audience. Now the assemblies usually take 12 to 14 hours (see Appendix), so the performers try to economize time and thus omit the additional texts. In addition, the audience does not have much interest in listening to these elaborations of the main story. Therefore, the expanded version of the *Xiangshan baojuan* created by the masters of telling

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42 See Che Xilun, “*Zhangguo baojuan yanjiu*,” pp. 389-400.

43 There are several variants of these in this area, see ZHBJ 1: 135-140, 218-232, 277-280, 281-289; ZSBj 2: 1046-1054, 1110-1122.

44 ZHBJ 1: 157.

45 Berezkin, “Modern Performances of ‘Precious Scrolls,’” p. 136.

scriptures in the Changshu area is quite flexible: the performers can easily shorten or enlarge it with the use of additional elements in accord with the circumstances of performance.

## 5. Rituals accompanying the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan*

The dramatic turning points in the storyline of the *Xiangshan baojuan* are accompanied by special rituals that underline their significance. These passages are focused on: (1) Miaoshan entering the Convent of White Sparrows, (2) reading the sacrificial text (*jiwen* 祭文) at the beginning of the second volume, (3) “sending back to life,” (4) Miaoshan obtaining enlightenment (*chengdao* 成道), and (5) “asking for

the Elixir.” In the first four instances the audience stands up and pays reverence to the Bodhisattva. The master of telling scriptures stands up, lights the incense, and leads the audience in worshipping Guanyin. In the first instance the performer and the audience follow Guanyin in her worship of the Buddha upon her arrival at the nunnery (see fig. 7). The performer sings: “I invite people on the two sides [of the altar] to offer incense, sing a hymn, and worship the Three Treasures of Buddhism.”<sup>46</sup>

The second passage has to do with preparations for the execution of Miaoshan by Miao Zhuang, who has ordered the erection of the pavilion for honoring her soul (while she is still alive) and who has written a sacrificial text for her. There are performance instructions in the printed text of *baojuan*: “The



Fig. 7 Performance of “*Jin baique*” 進白雀 at the assembly in Tianzhuang, November 11, 2012.

46 ZHBJ 2: 1396.

members of the congregation, arriving at this point, respectfully stand and remain standing as they listen. The leader leaves his seat and, kneeling, reads out the sacrificial prayer.”<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the performer asks the audience to stand and bow in the real-life performance; then he recites the sacrificial prayer. Similarly, burning incense and bowing take place when Miaoshan is sent back to life and again when she attains enlightenment. The performers in the Gangkou area also chant the *Dharani of Great Compassion* (*Dabeizhou* 大悲咒) at these four crucial points in the text, and most of the women in the audience chant them together with the performers, as they know this text by heart.

The most spectacular part of the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan* is “asking for the Elixir,” during which the participants of the assembly take a “medicine” that imitates the potion prepared for Miaozhuang. According to this *baojuan*, Miaozhuang becomes ill because deities have punished him for his misdeeds. The only medicine that can cure his illness has to be prepared from the arms and eyes of a person without anger. Miaozhuang learns that such an immortal, who would sacrifice his arms and eyes, lives at the Convent of Purple Bamboo Grove (Zizhulin’an 紫竹林庵) on Incense Mountain; therefore, he sends his minister Liu Qin 劉欽 to the mountain to ask for the substance needed to prepare the medicine, which is called “the Elixir.”<sup>48</sup>

While the masters of scripture-telling recite the *Xiangshan baojuan* at this juncture, they prepare an analog of the elixir. It is just tea or water dyed with brown sugar (this gives it a red color), which is placed in two tea cups. The cups are covered with red paper, which has an auspicious meaning: many offerings at the assembly are wrapped with it. One master of scripture-telling, who recites the text of *baojuan*, asks the audience to stand and listen to the story of the elixir. Then he recites the *Dharani of Great Compassion*, the edict that Miaozhuang addresses to his minister, and the special text of “asking for the Elixir.” Another

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47 *Guanshiyin pusa benxing jing jianji*, p. 137.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 188.



master of telling scriptures stands at his side and holds the tray with the cups. The sponsors of the assembly piously kneel behind the masters of telling scriptures holding burning incense sticks in their hands. The text of the small scroll devoted to the elixir takes different forms in different schools of telling scriptures. The performers from the Gangkou



Fig. 8 Performance of “*Qing lingdan*”  
請靈丹 at the assembly in  
Shanghai, October 9, 2012.

area recite a quite long poetic text, while Yu Dingjun usually just inserts four short verses of four lines each into the main text of *baojuan*. After the text has been recited, the master of scripture-telling asks the sponsors to drink the “medicine” (see fig. 8). The sponsors are supposed to give tips of approximately a dozen *yuan*, known as *lishi* 利市 to each master of scripture-telling. Then the recitation of the main text of *baojuan* is continued.

“Asking for the Elixir” is the culmination of the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan*. This ritual illustrates the virtues of Miaoshan: her self-sacrifice and great filiality. At the same time it epitomizes the awaited effect of the text recitation. The text of “Asking for the Elixir” reads:

Great Guanyin, merciful, and saving from disasters,  
Bestows [believers with] a wonderful pill.  
Carrying the medicine-chest on her shoulder, she secretly saves people.  
She saves people of this world from troubles.  
大慈悲，救苦難，觀音大士妙仙丹，  
肩背藥箱暗裡救，要救凡人不為難。

This “medicine” is believed to have miraculous effects: it cures and prevents all kinds of illnesses. According to the performers, in the past this ritual was performed every time the *Xiangshan baojuan* was recited. It also became an integral part of the program of “extending longevity” for elderly people.

Nowadays, it is usually performed in cases in which the aim of the scripture-telling is the curing of a sick person. The text of “Asking for the Elixir” promises to cure the sponsors of the assembly:

Merciful Bodhisattva Guanshiyin, takes pity on all living beings.  
 She saves people from all kinds of troubles,  
 She bestows a wonderful pill,  
 As a person takes it, his/her disease is completely cured.  
 大慈大悲愍眾生，救苦救難觀世音；  
 觀音賜下靈丹藥，凡人吃了病除根。

However, the use of the elixir is not limited to the private assemblies in the Changshu area. It is also used during the temple festivals; in this case it carries the meaning of securing good health and longevity for all participants of the assembly. For example, during the temple festival at the temple of the God of Wealth in Tianzhuang, the masters of scripture-telling prepared “the elixir” in a big washbasin. Then every participant of the assembly—those who donated for the organization of this event, including the author of this article—received a cup of medicine (see fig. 9). This was obviously a projection of the ritual used in a family setting onto the community level.

One can find a parallel of the ritual “Asking for the Elixir” in the “Destroying the Blood Pond” ritual in several areas of China. This ritual is performed for the purification of a woman so that she will escape suffering in the Blood Pond in the underworld after her death (it is related to the belief in pollution caused by the loss of blood in menstruation and childbirth). In many local traditions, descendants of a woman drink water dyed with brown sugar or red grape wine from the cup that represents the emptying of this Blood Pond. For example, in the Jingjiang area, which lies across the Yangtze River from



Fig. 9 Performance of “*Qing lingdan*” at the God of Wealth temple festival in Tianzhuang, August 21, 2011.

Zhangjiagang and follows a similar tradition of telling scriptures at religious assemblies (*zuohui jiangjing* 做會講經), every time an assembly with the purpose of “extending longevity” is held, the descendants of an elderly woman drink the red water from a cup that represents the Blood Pond. This ritual is performed in association with a recitation of the *Xuehu baojuan* (血湖寶卷 *Baojuan* of the Blood Pond) that deals with the story of Mulian rescuing his mother.<sup>49</sup>

According to my informants, a similar ritual existed in the Changshu area in the past. However, it is no longer performed there in this form. Masters of telling scriptures simply recite the *Xuehu jing* (血湖經 Scripture of the Blood Pond), a sacred text of Daoist origin, at the women’s funerals.<sup>50</sup> However, there is still a custom of drinking the dyed water after the living family members return home from the funeral, which apparently is a remnant of the “drinking from the Blood Pond” ritual in this area.

## 6. On the use of rituals in the performance of *Xiangshan baojuan*

We have seen that the masters of scripture-telling have enriched the performative and ritual aspects of the traditional *baojuan* text transmitted in the printed form. The rituals and additional texts related to them emphasize the sacred and even curative function of the *Xiangshan baojuan*; they contribute to the religious framework of *baojuan* performance. There is little wonder these rituals were included in the performance of this text: they directly address the audience and its desires. The *Xiangshan baojuan* is a storytelling text written in the colloquial language of the Ming dynasty, so its archaic language is not sufficiently comprehensible to the audience of scripture-telling performances, which are composed mainly of elderly peasant women. Most of them are illiterate, and for

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49 Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 348-363.

50 The local Daoists also perform the ritual of destroying a symbolic Blood Pond.

them the *Xiangshan baojuan* appears to be a religious scripture written in sacred words. Ritual actions particularly appeal to an illiterate person.

David Johnson has given attention to this function of ritual actions in the folk dramas dealing with the Mulian story. He notes that the rituals and spectacular scenic actions became especially important in these dramatic performances, although the written dramatic texts with their emphasis on didacticism also existed and circulated broadly.<sup>51</sup> Johnson has juxtaposed the dramatic performances with *baojuan* recitations dealing with Mulian. The latter in his view mostly operated with verbal didacticism and then represented not the genuine folk ideas and values, but those imposed by educated classes.<sup>52</sup> However, this conclusion was reached without firsthand observation of real-life *baojuan* performances: Johnson relies on data drawn from early short Chinese descriptions of such performances. The performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in Changshu constitutes an example of the close association of folk ritual and *baojuan* texts in the local religious storytelling traditions. From this perspective, Johnson's conclusion seems to be misleading in application to modern *baojuan* performances. As we have seen, certain parts of these performances are highly dramatized, and in this sense they resemble Mulian dramas and other types of ritual drama in China.

The participation of the sponsors of the assembly and the audience in these rituals constitutes an important element of scripture-telling performances. As we have seen, the members of the audience bow, kneel, and recite the sacred formulas, such as the *Dharani of Great Compassion*, following the performer. In fact, in many cases they imitate the actions of the characters in the story: they burn incense after Miaoshan worships the Buddha, recite the sacrificial prayer for

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51 David Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: "Mu-lien Rescues His Mother" in Chinese Popular Culture: Papers from the International Workshop on the Mu-lien Operas* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), pp. 1-45.

52 David Johnson, "Mu-lien in *Pao-chüan*: The Performative Context and Religious Meaning of the *Yu-ming pao-chuan*," in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1995), pp. 101-103.

Miaoshan, and take the miraculous medicine. Thus, they take the roles of the princess, the court officials, and King Miaozhuang.

There is no doubt that women in the audience identify themselves with Miaoshan. Most of them consider themselves Buddhists and interpret telling scriptures as a Buddhist religious service, although it is imbued with local beliefs.<sup>53</sup> In this regard they associate themselves with Miaoshan, who fulfilled her desire for self-perfection. Miaoshan eventually attained enlightenment and became an almighty bodhisattva; in addition, she performed her duty toward the family, as she cured her father, the king, and eventually assisted the whole family on the way to salvation. Thus, Miaoshan is a deity standing especially close to the women in the audience. She can serve as a role model for them, as they also pursue a type of spiritual cultivation in the usually quite difficult circumstances of rural life. These performances can in a certain sense resolve social and family tensions. While following the story of Miaoshan's struggle, execution, and travel in the underworld, women in the audience sympathize with her and share her experience again and again with every performance.<sup>54</sup> It is no wonder that local women like the *Xiangshan baojuan* so much that it is performed at almost every assembly for the living that involves telling scriptures.

This situation is not a recent phenomenon, as historical sources also mention such emotional response to the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan*. The earliest description of the performance of *Xiangshan baojuan* can be found in the eleventh chapter of the novel the *Pingyaozhuan* (平妖傳 Pacification of the Demons' Revolt, recension by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ca. 1620) "Egg-monk attains the Path and Visits the Teacher; Sage Nun obtains the Celestial Book and

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53 Note the common local name for telling scriptures sessions: *foshi* 佛事, a Buddhist service.

54 The effect of the shared experience is intensified by the practice of chanting the Buddha's name in chorus, which Mark Bender characterized as "the performance trance" in application to the similar performances in Jingjiang; see Bender, "A Description of Jiangjing," pp. 110-112.

Meets Her Brother” (得道法蛋僧訪師, 遇天書聖姑認弟). This is a quite detailed description, although it has remained unnoticed by the majority of scholars studying *baojuan*. This passage tells of the performance by a Buddhist nun, significantly also called “telling scriptures” (the same as in the Changshu case), that takes place during the several-day-long ritual assembly sponsored by the family of a military official in the county, and attended by quite a diverse audience. Though the name of the text is not given, from the details of the content and the form of the narrative it is clear that it is based on the text of the *Xiangshan baojuan*:

Can you tell me how did Bodhisattva Guanyin appear? The gāthā says:  
Ancient Buddha Guanyin originally was a man, Buddha Amitabha!  
However, to convert the women of Underheaven, he turned into a woman,  
Namo Buddha Amitabha!  
He was born as the Third princess of Emperor Miao Zhuang, Buddha Amitabha!  
She did not agree to enjoy prosperity, but endured sufferings, Namo Buddha  
Amitabha!<sup>55</sup>

This passage in the *Pingyaozhuan* reveals that the audience deeply sympathized with Miaoshan:

Then this old woman narrated the story of how Bodhisattva Guanyin endured nine sufferings and eight hardships, how she left home and perfected herself. Every time after she spoke for a while, she chanted a poem, and all these unsophisticated men and women [in the audience] were so touched that their eyes turned red, and they became choked up, they all could not help crying.<sup>56</sup>

Though both men and women are mentioned in this passage, it is clear from the context that the performance primarily appealed to the women (see the previous citation). This is testimony to the popularity of the *Xiangshan baojuan* among women by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; it also sets an early precedent for the modern performances in Changshu. From another novel, *Xing shi yan* (型世言

55 Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, ed., *Ping yao zhuan* 平妖傳 (Hong Kong: Qingnian chubanshe, 1980), p. 72.

56 Ibid., p. 72.

Words to Mould the World) by Lu Renlong 陸人龍 (ca. 1627-1644), we learn that, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *baojuan* performances were already taking place on the boats that female believers took to travel to Upper Tianzhu Monastery in Hangzhou, a center of the Guanyin cult.<sup>57</sup> The *Xiangshan baojuan* was certainly among the texts performed there.

Another piece of evidence for the association of the *Xiangshan baojuan* with women comes from the Suzhou area in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is a song called “Listen to the scroll recitation” (*Ting xuanjuan* 聽宣卷) in the collection of “New Folk Songs from the Wu Gates” (*Wumen xin yuefu* 吳門新樂府) by Cheng Yinxi 程寅錫 (active ca. 1796-1850), which says: “Listen to the scroll recitation, listen to the scroll recitation! Mothers and daughters are going to the Buddhist monastery. A mother will be like King Miaozhuang, a daughter will be like the Third Princess.” (聽宣卷，聽宣卷。婆兒女兒上僧院。婆兒要似妙莊王，女兒要似三公主)<sup>58</sup> The poem certainly talks about the performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan* that took place in a Buddhist temple in the Suzhou area and demonstrates that local women identified themselves with the characters of the Miaoshan story. The performance thus served as a way to relax the conflict between women of different generations, especially daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law (“mothers and daughters” mentioned in this verse certainly include those as well), that was commonplace in traditional Chinese families. The traditionally patrilocal marriage practice in this area, with daughters-in-law living together with their in-laws, remains quite a fertile ground for the development of such conflicts. This connection between literature and real life appears an especially insightful one in light of the evidence of the ritualized performances of this *baojuan* in modern times.

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57 Lu Renlong 陸人龍, *Xing shi yan* 型世言 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), p. 179. One should recall that the recording of the early recension of the *Xiangshan baojuan* was associated with this monastery in the 1773 edition.

58 Zhang Yingchang 張應昌, ed., *Qing shi duo* 清詩鐸 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 903.

Another piece of evidence, dating back to the 1860s, given by the scholar Mao Xianglin 毛祥麟 (ca. 1814-1875), a native of Shanghai, also testifies to the connection between the *Xiangshan baojuan* and curative rituals. He noted that in Wu 吳 (modern Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces) people always summoned spirit mediums when someone was ill, and these mediums organized recitations of *baojuan* as a cure. The texts performed included the *Guanyin baojuan*, which is another name for the *Xiangshan baojuan*, and the female mediums participated in chanting the refrain.<sup>59</sup> This situation is similar to that of scripture-telling in Changshu; thus, the ritualized storytelling centered on the story of the *Xiangshan baojuan*, already existed in neighboring areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup>

Different recensions of the *Xiangshan baojuan* are performed not only in the areas that formerly belonged to Changshu county, but in the other areas of China as well, including several places in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the Hexi 河西 corridor in Gansu 甘肅 province, and Taiwan.<sup>61</sup> There may be considerable differences between these performances. For example, the context of *baojuan* recitation in the Sandbank (Shashang 沙上) area of Zhangjiagang, Wuxi 無錫, and Jingjiang seems to be close to that of Changshu performances: ritual specialists recite different recensions of the *Xiangshan baojuan* during the private assemblies and communal celebrations there regardless of the date.<sup>62</sup> However, in places near the city of Suzhou, such as the towns of Shengpu 勝浦, Luzhi 甬直, Xietang 斜塘,

59 Mao Xianglin 毛祥麟, *Mo yu lu* 墨餘錄(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), *juan* 9, p. 140.

60 On the participation of mediums in the organization of scripture-telling performances, see Qiu Huiying, “Jiangsu Changshu Baimao diqu xuanjuan,” pp. 188-192; Yu Dingjun, “Jiangsu Changshu de jiangjing xuanjuan,” pp. 49-50.

61 See, for example, Guo Yi 郭儀 et al., eds., *Jiuquan baojuan* 酒泉寶卷 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 12-56; Zeng Ziliang 曾子良, “Baojuan zhi yanjiu,” 寶卷之研究(M.A. dissertation, National Chengchi University, 1973), pp. 35-36.

62 Lu Yongfeng 陸永峰 and Che Xilun, *Jingjiang baojuan yanjiu* 靖江寶卷研究(Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2008), pp. 68-72, 124; Li Ping 李萍, “Wuxi xuanjuan yishi yinyue yanjiu: Xuanjuan zhi yishixing chongfang,” 無錫宣卷儀式音樂研究：宣卷之儀式性重訪(Ph.D. dissertation: Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2012), pp. 75-102.



and Wujiang 吳江, the *Xiangshan baojuan* seems to be performed mainly during the celebrations devoted to Guanyin on the nineteenth day of the second, sixth, and ninth months.<sup>63</sup> The difference in the function of these performances is beyond the scope of this article.

## 7. Conclusion

The shortened recension of the *Xiangshan baojuan*, compiled by a Buddhist monk around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of an older text composed sometime before 1500, was well integrated into the ritualized performance tradition of the Changshu area and still enjoys immense popularity among the village populations there. Though the original text propagated popularly interpreted Buddhist ideas, in its modern performance context in Changshu it is closely related to local beliefs and practices aimed at securing personal and community welfare. This performance of the *Xiangshan baojuan* is an example of the interplay of oral and written, religious and secular, elite and folk traditions in Chinese culture.

My study also demonstrates that purely textual research on the works of popular literature in China such as *baojuan* is not enough to fully reveal their cultural value and their appeal for their audiences. Only fieldwork can provide insight into the performance and ritual aspects of *baojuan* functioning. The text of the *Xiangshan baojuan* in the Changshu scripture-telling tradition is supplemented with an elaborate ritual setting and actions, and its performance receives a strong emotional response from its female audience. These performances have exorcist, curative, and salvational functions. They also play an important role in the socialization of the local women.

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63 These dates are usually interpreted as the birthdays of Miaoshan and her sisters. Personal communications with Mr. Xu, a *baojuan* performer from Xietang; see also Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史 et al., eds., *Chūgoku nōson no geinō: Taiko ryūiki shakaishi kōjutsu kirokushū 2* 中国農村の藝能：太湖流域社会史口述記録集 2 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2011), p. 130.

## Appendix: Schedule of two scripture-telling assemblies centered on “the vow of Incense Mountain”

<b>Shanghu (Changshu), October 9, 2012, 6:30-18:00</b>		<b>Tianzhuang (Zhangjiagang), November 11, 2012, 8:00-18:30</b>
<b>Morning session, 6:30-11:00 a.m.</b>		<b>8:00-11:30 a.m.</b>
“Burning incense” 點香		“Burning incense” 點香
“Inviting deities” 請佛		“Inviting deities” 請佛
<i>Baojuan of the Jade Emperor</i> 玉皇寶卷		<i>Baojuan of the Jade Emperor</i> 玉皇寶卷
<i>Baojuan of the Sun</i> 太陽寶卷		
<i>Baojuan of the Ancestor</i> 祖師寶卷		
<i>Baojuan of Incense Mountain</i> 香山寶卷, all up to the middle of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> vol.		<i>Baojuan of Incense Mountain</i> 香山寶卷, 1 <sup>st</sup> vol.
<b>Afternoon session, 12:00-17:00</b>		<b>12:30-15:30</b>
Vegetarian altar	Meat altar	<i>Baojuan of Incense Mountain</i> 香山寶卷, 2 <sup>nd</sup> vol.
<i>Baojuan of Incense Mountain</i> , the final part	<i>Baojuan of Tailao</i> 太姥寶卷	<i>Scroll of Establishing the [Benign] Karmic Links</i> 結緣卷
<i>Building the Lotus Boat</i> 打蓮船	<i>Baojuan of the Virtuous and Good [Person] of the West Lake</i> 西湖賢良寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Stove Emperor</i> 灶皇寶卷
<i>Baojuan of the Three Officials</i> 三官寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Small King of Thousand Sages</i> 千聖小王寶卷	<i>Extending Longevity for the Whole Family</i> 合家延壽
<i>Baojuan of Lu Ban</i> 魯班寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Two Loyal Ones</i> 雙忠寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Road Deity</i> 路神寶卷
<i>Baojuan of Constellations</i> 星宿寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the City God</i> 城隍寶卷	<i>Baojuan of Caishen of the Five Roads</i> 五路財神寶卷
<i>Baojuan of the Releasing Deity and the Lords of Stars</i> 解神星君寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Road Deity</i> 路神寶卷	<i>Baojuan of Crossing the Passes</i> 度關寶卷
<i>Baojuan of the King of Medicine</i> 藥王寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Family Hall Deity</i> 家堂寶卷	<i>Eight Immortals Wishing Longevity</i> 八仙上壽
<i>Eight Immortals Wishing Longevity</i> 八仙上壽	<i>Baojuan of the God of Wealth</i> 財神寶卷	
<i>Baojuan of the Door Deities</i> 門神寶卷	<i>Baojuan of the Stove Emperor</i> 灶皇寶卷	“averting of the malicious stars” 退星
<b>Evening session, 17:00-18:30</b>		<b>16:00-18:00</b>
“averting of the malicious stars” 退星		<i>Baojuan of the Fierce General</i> 猛將寶卷
		<i>Baojuan of the Small King of Thousand Sages</i> 千聖小王寶卷
		<i>Baojuan of Deity Gao</i> 高神寶卷
		“presenting the lotus flowers” 獻荷花
“untying knots” 解結		“untying knots” 解結
“scattering flowers” 散花		“scattering flowers” 散花
“presenting [clothes] on the plate” 送盤		“presenting [clothes] on the plate” 送盤
“collecting incense” 收香		“collecting incense” 收香
“submitting the memorial” 通疏		“submitting the memorial” 通疏
“presenting the lotus flowers” 獻荷花		“sending-off deities” 送佛
“sending-off deities” 送佛		“burning the ritual money” 燒紙
“burning the ritual money” 燒紙		

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## 《香山寶卷》的表演與儀式側面 ——以常熟地區「講經宣卷」活動為例

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### 摘 要

本文討論《香山寶卷》（也稱《觀世音菩薩本行經》）在江蘇省常熟市周圍地區當代表演的儀式。《香山寶卷》是中國講唱文學著名的作品之一，它敘述觀世音菩薩的前生——妙善公主——修行成道的故事，作為中國觀音信仰的一種表現。《香山寶卷》的編撰年代不詳，但是此寶卷在明代中期已相當流行；後來出現了幾部不同的版本。其中一種版本——《觀世音菩薩本行經簡集》（現存最早的刻本 1868 年刊刻）——至今由常熟「講經先生」（事業性或半事業性的表演者）講唱。在該地區寶卷講唱被稱為「講經」或「宣卷」，是在民間宗教集會上出現的（分為私人的「善會」和社區的「社會」、「廟會」），伴隨百姓的「生命禮儀」。《香山寶卷》在常熟講經中扮演非常重要的角色，幾乎所有為了活人需求舉辦的宗教集會，都要講唱這部寶卷。《香山寶卷》特別受當地女性信徒的歡迎，因此它是女性文化的一部分。之前中國國內外學者研究《香山寶卷》的內容特點與其宗教思想背景時，主要立足於文獻角度。本文採用作者在田野中調查得到的資料，以常熟地區的講經活動為例，分析《香山寶卷》在民間寶卷表演中的地位、其與儀式的關係，以及在當地社會生活中的角色，試圖解釋這部寶卷在當地特別流行的現象。

**關鍵詞：**寶卷、講經、觀音信仰、民間文學、民間信仰

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2013 年 7 月 25 日收稿，2015 年 5 月 25 日修訂完成，2015 年 7 月 16 日通過刊登。

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