

Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi: An Annotated Bibliography

Barbara WITT*

Introduction

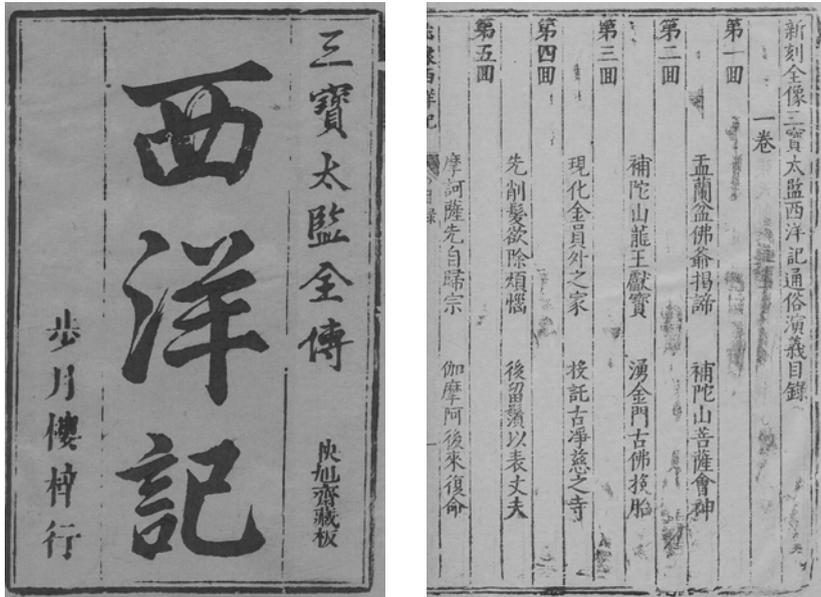


Fig. 1 *Xiyang ji*, title page and first page of the “Table of Contents” of the 1597 edition

The *Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi* 三寶太監西洋記通俗演義 [Romance of the Sanbao Eunuch’s Voyage to the Western Ocean] – also titled *Sanbao taijian quanzhuan: Xiyang ji* 三寶太監全傳—西洋記 [Complete Biography of the Sanbao Eunuch: Voyage to the Western Ocean], usually shortened as *Xiyang ji* 西洋記 – is a Ming dynasty novel based on the seven voyages of Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433 or 1435), the Sanbao Eunuch, to the

* Barbara Witt is a PHD student at LMU Munich and associate lecturer at the University of Würzburg. Her dissertation on Ming Dynasty literature centers on the character of Nezha 哪吒 in the novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (Investiture of the Gods).

ports and countries around the “Western Ocean”, i. e. Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and East Africa. The novel is attributed to Luo Maodeng 羅懋登 (fl. 1596) and the preface of the earliest existing copy dates the print to 1597. *Xiyang ji* never enjoyed as much success as *Xiyou ji* 西遊記, the classic upon which it was modeled. But in the wake of renewed interest in Zheng He during the Republican Era, this novel based on his voyages came to the attention of Chinese scholars.

Scholarship on *Xiyang ji* has been extremely eclectic: Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) denounced its style early on in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (1927) as an unskilled imitation of the contemporary novels *Xiyou ji* and *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義. Almost simultaneously the novel was discovered as a source for historians to study Zheng He’s treasure fleet. Based on the fact that the novel made extensive use of ethno-geographical records of the “Western Ocean” and official historiographical information on Zheng He, it was assumed that its information on shipbuilding, the size of the ships and the crew were accurate descriptions of the real treasure fleet. A great number of studies on *Xiyang ji* include a comparison to other novels, most commonly to *Xiyou ji* or *Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣 (1827), a Qing dynasty novel about a fantastical ocean voyage. Specialized studies have further been made on supernatural beings – deities and bodhisattvas, demons and spirits – that appear throughout the narrative. Attention has also been given to specific episodes of the journey, especially to the Women’s Land and the Underworld. Furthermore, a number of studies have been published that focus on the relationship between *Xiyang ji* and its main ethno-geographical sources. These studies look at how the novel renders descriptions of actual countries and places in the “Western Ocean”.

In recent years, research on the novel has broadened and now includes studies on the author Luo Maodeng and on premodern editions of *Xiyang ji* as well as linguistic analyses of the text itself. Along with this came a shift in appreciation for the novel. The frequent use of dialectic expressions was no longer seen as a stylistic shortcoming, but welcomed as a rich source of information on the Ming vernacular. Similarities to other novels were no longer viewed as mere cases of plagiarism, but appreciated as conscious appropriations of common themes by a skilled author. Scholarly interest has been steadily increasing since the 1980s and this interest is by no means limited to China. One example of this is the recent publication of a Chinese-German

essay collection in two volumes (2011 and 2013) exclusively devoted to the novel and its author. (See: Shi Ping and Roderich Ptak)

In assembling this bibliography, I attempted to localize and analyze every work I included. Sometimes, however, this was not possible. Where the title or the abstract of the article made it clear that it deals with *Xiyang ji*, I have simply included the article, but the details were not always so straightforward. One reason for this is the question which genre *Xiyang ji* belongs to. Because of recurrent supernatural elements in the narrative it has often been classified as part of the *shenmo xiaoshuo* 神魔小說 genre, the “fiction of gods and demons”, a term coined by Lu Xun in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. However, the novel’s affinity to historical novels has also been mentioned repeatedly. Furthermore, *Xiyang ji* shows significant overlaps with other important Ming novels, both in terms of content and structure, as well as in the handling of the *sanjiao heyi* 三教合一 material. In recent times, the novel also entered new fields of classification in genre theory. This includes such categories as *Haiyang wenxue* 海洋文學, sometimes considered a general term for all kinds of written works related to the sea, but sometimes used in a more narrow sense for fictional and other non-historical writings. This complicates the identification of scholarly works actually related to *Xiyang ji*, as for example in this case:

Chen Fengyu 陳風雨. “Zheng He xia Xiyang yu Mingdai Haiyang wenxue” 鄭和下西洋與明代海洋文學. *Zheng He yanjiu* 鄭和研究 4 (2009), 36-38.

Even though this article carries the term *Haiyang wenxue* in its title, it does not seem to deal with fictional accounts of Zheng He’s travels, but rather with writings on the ocean inspired by his voyages. This case is complicated by the fact that I was not able to acquire a copy of *Zheng He yanjiu* 4 and was therefore not able to verify this.

This bibliography is inevitably limited to publications in Western European languages and Chinese. There is undoubtedly a lot of research on the *Xiyang ji* in Japanese, Korean or Russian Sinology; however, it is often hard to come by. One example of this is the research of N. E. Borevskaia, who wrote her PhD thesis on the novel, of which there is apparently no copy outside of Moscow University:

Боревская, Н. Е. [Borevskaia, N. E.]. Ло Мао-Дэн “Плавание Чжэн Хэ по Индийскому океану” (1597 г.) [Lo Maoden “Plavanie Chzhèn Khé po Indiiskomu okeanu” (1597 g.)]. Unpublished PhD thesis. Moscow: Moscow University, 1970.

Additionally, there is a lot of Sino-Malayan literature on Zheng He. Research on this field can, however, not be included in the present bibliography, and the subject is limited to the English and French publications of Claudine Salmon on translations of *Xiyang ji* into Malay.

To this day, a number of works on Zheng He’s voyages have been greatly inspired by Luo Maodeng’s novel. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this work to identify them. It must suffice to say that these include works of fiction, such as Qing dynasty novels about Zheng He or the ocean, as well as non-fiction books that recount the history of Zheng He’s voyages. Many of these works could not resist the narrative of *Xiyang ji* in all aspects. One such instance is Louise Levathes’ book on China’s maritime exploits that combines facts with entertaining narratives:

Levathes, Louise. *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405–1433*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. [252 pp.]

A serious scholar of either Zheng He or the *Xiyang ji* will not find this book very helpful. It does, however, show the ongoing fascination with the exploits of the treasure fleet and the lasting influence the novel has on research into Zheng He. Especially studies on the magnitude of the treasure ships need to make some reference to the absurdly large dimensions recorded in the novel (More on this in Chapter 7).

Some information about the organization of this bibliography: Entries are sorted into nine broad categories, some of which also have subcategories. Within these (sub-)categories entries are sorted alphabetically. Several publications by the same author are also sorted chronologically.

The names of authors for Chinese publications are transcribed in Pinyin. In cases where the authors added a transcription of their own, this is given in square brackets after the characters in the following manner: Chen Simin 陳思敏 [Chen Szu-min]. Additional English titles for Chinese publications are likewise added in square brackets as seen on the publication.

There is no general numbering, but each entry is assigned a number within its respective category. Several books and articles belong to more than one category, in which case they are discussed in the category they bear the greatest affinity to, while a cross-reference is made in the other chapter(s). Some of these articles were published in more than one journal. In those cases I am aware of, I marked the several publications with numbers in parentheses in the following manner: (1). Some serious complications are to be found in the case of Xiang Da 向達, courtesy name (*zi* 字) Jueming 覺明. Finally, there is an author index at the end of the book.

The following books owe a lot to existing bibliographies and bibliographical reviews on Zheng He. These are, in chronological order:

Zhu Jianqiu 朱鑒秋. *Bai nian Zheng He yanjiu ziliao suoyin (1904–2003)* 百年鄭和研究資料所引 (1994–2993). Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2005. [359 pp.]

Zhu Jianqiu 朱鑒秋. “*Xiyang ji yanjiu zongshu*” 《西洋記》研究綜述. *Zheng He yanjiu dongtai* 鄭和研究動態 15 (2010), 2-5.

This is a bibliographic summary of Chinese language cornerstones on the research and appraisal of *Xiyang ji* from the late Qing dynasty (Yu Yue 余懋, 1821–1906) to 2009.

Liu, Ying, Zhongping Chen and Gregory Blue. *Zheng He's Maritime Voyages (1405–1433) and China's Relations with the Indian Ocean World: A Multilingual Bibliography*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. [220 pp.]

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