3 The Xiyang ji and Other Novels

3.1 The Xiyang ji Compared to Other Chinese Novels: Surveys

Most notably, Xiyang ji is compared to both Xiyou ji 西遊記 and Fengshen yanyi 封神演義 for its supernatural structure, and to Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 for its use of historical sources. However, comparisons of episodes in different novels are also frequently made.


This article compares some basic features of Xiyang ji and Tianfei niangma zhuan 天妃娘媽傳, especially their macro-structure, the role of Tianfei 天妃, the position of different religious strata within the overall construction and the implicit political messages behind each story. Several differences in the structure of both novels as linked to the idea of san jiao gui yi 三教歸一 are also explored.


This is a discussion of the narrative features of the Ming dynasty novels Xiyou ji 西遊記, Dongyou ji 東遊記, Fengshen yanyi 封神演義, Tianfei niangma zhuan 天妃娘媽傳, and Xiyang ji. Chen Meixia argues that there is a “marine complex” (Haiyang qingjie 海洋情結) – a special attention to the sea – evident in these novels.

3.1.3 Chen Simin: “Jinghua yuan yu Xiyang ji yiguo zhi lü yanjiu”. See 1.2.1.

In this thesis, Chen Simin compares Xiyang ji and Jinghua yuan to diverse records of oversea travels.
3.1.4 Chen Xiao. “Shide tang ben *Xiyou ji* yu *Xiyang ji* ‘yu-tu’ huwen yanjiu”. See 8.2.2.
This is a comparison between the Shide tang editions of *Xiyou ji* and *Xiyang ji*.

3.1.5 Fu Chengzhou 傅承洲. “Zhongguo gudai lixianji xiaoshuo lunwang: yi *Xiyou ji* wei zhongxin” 中國古代歷險記小說論網—以《西遊記》為中心. *Hubei daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 湖北大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 33.3 (2006), 305-308.
This article is about the genre of “adventure novels” in China, which, as Fu thinks, started with *Da Tang Sanzang qujing shihua* 大唐三藏取經詩話, and evolved through *Xiyou ji* and *Xiyang ji* to *Jinghua yuan*. Novels belonging to this genre describe foreign lands, and blend fictitious and factual elements.

This article identifies *Xiyang ji* as representative of “present-dynasty novels” (*benchao xiaoshuo* 本朝小說), novels set in the same dynasty during which it was written. Gregory argues that the novel’s use of the lost imperial seal of state as the journey’s impetus reflects general anxieties about the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. He further demonstrates how the novel makes self-conscious reference to other well-known works of fiction, especially *Sanguo yanyi* and *Xiyou ji*, in an endeavor to highlight its own status as a piece of fiction.

3.1.7 Guida, Donatella: *Nei Mari del Sud*. See 5.2.4.
This book includes a discussion of literary representations of “Nanyang” countries in novels including *Xiyang ji*.

This article looks at *Xiyang ji* as a cross between “historical novels” like *Sanguo yanyi* and “fantasy novels” like *Xiyou ji* and *Fengshen yanyi*. Confirmation for this hypothesis is sought in comparing the novel to its historical predecessor, *Mingshi* 明史, and its geographical sources, *Yingya shenglan* and *Xingcha shenglan*.


Mao’s thesis investigates Zheng He’s travels in popular literature, namely in the Ming drama *Feng tianming Sanbao xia Xiyang*, Luo’s novel *Xiyang ji* and Peng Heling’s 彭鶴齡 late Qing novel *Sanbao taijian xia Xiyang* 三保太監下西洋. The main body of this thesis is devoted to a comparison between the “xia Xiyang” 下西洋 theme and Zheng He in these literary works.


Similar to Ptak’s monograph, this essay seeks to uncover essential patterns, the macro-structure and character constellation of *Xiyang ji*. This relies partly on an extensive comparison to *Xiyou ji*. The structures of the quest in *Xiyang ji* are revealed by a minute segmentation of the voyage according to the places visited and the challenges that needed to be overcome.

3.1.11 Ptak, Roderich: *Cheng Hos Abenteuer im Drama und Roman der Ming-Zeit*. See 1.1.2.

Ptak’s work introduces the Ming *zaju* *Feng tianming Sanbao xia Xiyang* and the novel *Xiyang ji* against the backdrop of the historic voyages. Similarities to the *Xiyou ji* are repeatedly pointed out.

3.1.12 Shen Wenfan and Wang Yunxin. “*Jinghua yuan ‘haiwai yiguo’ kaolun*”. See 5.2.8.

Section four of this article juxtaposes *Xiyang ji* and *Jinghua yuan*. 

This article explores the “ocean lore” featured in Xiyang ji and Jinghua yuan. The author links both novels to the political landscape of the time, in particular to the so-called hajin 海禁 (sea ban) through which China became partially isolated from the maritime ocean in certain periods.

3.1.14 Xiang Da. “Guanyu Sanbao taijian xia Xiyang de ji zhong ziliao”. See 1.3.4.

This article compares Xiyang ji to its historical and ethno-geographical sources, as well as Xiyou ji.

3.1.15 Xiang da. “Lun Luo Maodeng zhu Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi”. See 1.3.5.

Part of the article above. (See 1.3.4)


The author compares the content of Xiyang ji to other “historical novels”, especially to Sanguo yanyi. The structure of Xiyang ji is seen against the background of “fantasy novels” such as Xiyou ji and Fengshen yanyi. With the use of various quotes, Ying Na points out how these sources were imitated in Xiyang ji.


This article introduces the category haiyang wenxue 海洋文學 (“ocean literature”) inspired by Zheng He’s travels. Next to Xiyou ji and Xiyang ji this genre includes such novels as Tianfei jishi chushen zhuan 天妃濟世出身傳, Ba xian chuchu dongyou ji 八仙出處東遊記, Nanbai Guanyin pusa chushen xiuixing zhuan 南海觀音菩薩出身修行傳 and the dramas Feng tianming Sanbao xia
3.1.18 Zhao Jingshen: “Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji”. See 1.3.10.

Parts of this article deal with the supernatural material borrowed from *Xiyou ji* and *Fengshen yanyi*, *Sanguo yanyi* references and episodes taken from *Bao Gong an* and other literary sources.


This article looks at the Ming dynasty “Ocean literature” that was inspired by Zheng He’s travels. Firstly, the voyages expanded the literary horizon of the time. Secondly, they were featured across a variety of genres: novels, songs, drama and inscriptions. Lastly, they introduced a range of maritime topics to Chinese literature. As a work directly linked to Zheng He’s travels, Zhao Junxiao’s discussion refers repeatedly to *Xiyang ji*. 

*Xiyang* 奉天命三保下西洋, *Zheng yuban Ba xian guohai* 爭玉板八仙過海 and *He wansui wu long chaosheng* 賀萬歲五龍朝聖.
3.2 The Xiyang ji Compared to Other Chinese Novels: Individual Episodes, Characters and Special Themes

*Xiyang ji* is notorious for borrowing heavily from other literary works. The studies below all explore different episodes which are featured in *Xiyang ji*, even though the relevant articles frequently focus on other works.


Feng’s article explores texts and anecdotes, both contemporary and prior to the Ming, that might have influenced some episodes of *Xiyang ji*. Special attention is given to the origin of the protagonist Jin Bifeng and “Tianfei’s Red Lanterns” (St Elmo’s fire). Furthermore, the “dramatic” nature of *Xiyang ji* is explored in a comparison with its contemporary play *Mudan ting*牧丹亭.


This article was written for the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of Zheng He’s first voyage and returns to those aspects of Feng’s earlier article (see above) related to the “dramatic” nature of the *Xiyang ji*. This includes the dialogue employing aria lyrics, the use of rhyming proverbs, the description of characters in terms of “masks” (*lianpu*臉譜), and finally a comparison of the “Infernal Judgement” in *Mudan ting* to Ma Huan’s dream journey in chapter 93.


Goode’s dissertation focuses on seven episodes which Luo Maodeng borrowed from Buddhist, Daoist and popular literature. Through detailed comparisons with their original form, Goode shows how these episodes were adapted to suit the author’s purpose. This includes the following themes: chapters 82-84 (black ox), chapter 95 (makara摩伽 as giant fish), chapter 92 (Honglian红莲 seduces Yutong玉通), chapter 93 (prophetic dream), chapter 91 (Xue Tao薛濤), and chapters 56-58 (Zhang Sanfeng张三峰). The Introduction to the thesis fea-
tures some information on Luo Maodeng and a discussion of the main characters and refers to Luo’s major sources. Comparisons to similar episodes in the Xiyang ji and other contemporary novels are also made.


Lévy looks into the story called “The Five Rats Play a Mean Trick in the Eastern Capital” (Wu shu nao dongjing 五鼠鬧東京) as a variation of the “Amphitryon motif” (involving supernatural doppelgangers) in Chinese literature. He compares the versions of the story featured in Laoshu nao dongjing 老鼠鬧東京, Bao Gong an 包公案 and chapter 95 of Xiyang ji. The article includes an appendix with a comparison of the three versions (pp. 133-138) and a French translation of the relevant passage in Xiyang ji (pp. 139-146).

3.2.5 Liu Honglin. “Xiyang ji zhujiao tan”. See 4.2.5.

This article includes frequent comparisons of Xiyang ji protagonists and those of Xiyou ji.

3.2.6 Maeno Naoaki. “Meikai yūkō”. See 6.2.3.

This article looks at descriptions of the underworld in Chinese literature from the Six Dynasties to Xiyang ji.


This article explores the theme of qubao 取寶 (treasure quest) in oversea areas as a literary topic.

3.2.8 Messing, Kathrin. “Das Spiel mit dem Feuer: Ludische Anlehnungen an die Chibi-Schlacht der Drei Reiche im Roman Xiyang ji”. In: Studien zum Roman “Sanbao taijian Xiyang ji tongsu yanyi”《三寶太監西洋記
The article begins with a few general remarks on the role of the famous Chibi battle in the dynastic annals of the Sanguo period. It then turns to the *Sanguo yanyi* and other accounts in which the Chibi theme is of central importance. Special attention is paid to chapters 33 and 66 of *Xiyang ji* and the complex narrative structure in which this motif is embedded.


This article explores different versions of the “The Five Rats Play a Mean Trick in the Eastern Capital” (*Wu shu nao dongjing* 五鼠鬧東京) story. The fourth section highlights the development of the “Five Rats” theme from the Ming period onwards and includes a discussion of the story in *Xiyang ji* (chapter 95).

3.2.10 Shao Yingtao. “Ming Qing xunyou mingjie ticai xiaoshuo”. See 6.2.6.

This article compares Tang Taizong’s tour of the Underworld in *Xiyou ji* and *Xiyang ji*.

3.2.11 Su Zhongxiang. “Sha dao Yanluo dian de Mingdai xiaoshuo *Xiyang ji*”. See 6.2.7.

This article compares the role of Yama in *Xiyou ji* and *Xiyang ji*.

Weigold explores the role of Guan Yu (one of the heroes of *Sanguo yanyi*) in chapters 75 and 76 of *Xiyang ji* (the Mogadishu segment). The article shows how Luo Maodeng manipulates a set of familiar elements – Guan Yu’s sense of loyalty and righteousness, but also his arrogance – to achieve a humorous effect.

For a Chinese language abstract, see: “Guan Yu yu *Xiyang ji*” 關羽與《西洋記》. *Zheng He yanjiu dongtai* 鄭和研究動態 26 (2012), 19.


The paper outlines the historical roots of the “Heavenly King Li” (Li Tianwang) before turning to his role in the novels *Xiyang ji* and *Fengshen yanyi*, with reference made to *Xiyou ji*. It explores how the character of Li and his son Nezha are “adjusted” to the specific conditions of the narrative by examining individual scenes and the functional dimensions of the major characters (Jin Bifeng and Jiang Ziya respectively) in these works.

3.2.14 Xu Wenying 徐文瀾. “Guanyu *Sanbao taijian xia Xiyang ji*” 關於《三寶太監下西洋記》. *Wanxiang* 萬象 2.5 (1942), 176-182.

This article seeks to give an overview of *Xiyang ji*, introducing in turn: the historical voyages of the Sanbao eunuch, the supernatural sections headed by Jin Bifeng and Zhang Tianshi, historical and literary sources of the novel, and the stock of folk stories incorporated in the narrative. The author particularly dwells on the last point, citing various examples from within the novel.


This article looks at stories associated with the demon queller Zhong Kui 鍾馗, one of which, *Wu gui naopan* 五鬼鬪判, also appears in chapter 19 of *Xiyang ji*. 

This article looks at the themes of “Underworld tours” and happy endings in Chinese literature.


This article looks at how Zheng He is described in Luo Maodeng’s book. Its focus is on the following issues: (1) the contemporary background of Xiyang ji and the author’s intentions; (2) on Zheng He’s life and his promotion to chief admiral; (3) on his military leadership, (4) diplomatic skills (5) and religious views.


Zhou Ruyan’s second article explores differences between the image of Wang Jinghong in Xiyang ji and the “real” man, namely native place, responsibilities and the number of voyages he joined. She further looks into Luo Maodeng’s characterization of Wang Jinghong as an educated, loyal, benevolent, righteous, patient, wise and courageous character, who also boasts military talents and navigational expertise.

3.3 Comparisons of *Xiyang ji* to non-Chinese Literature

The subject-matter of comparison in these articles are mostly *Xiyang ji* and European works of literature with the Portuguese *Os Lusiads* and the Italian *Divinia Commedia* featured in more than one article. But among these works is also a Malay epic (in Lombard’s article) and North American novels. (The articles including the *Divinia Commedia* are only included as cross-references and are discussed in detail in the subsection on the Underworld Journey in Chapter 6.2)


In this article Chen Xiao’e discusses the differences between Chinese and Western travel novels in terms of setting, the social status and motivation of the protagonists and the narrative point of view. Chinese examples range from *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (4th cent.) to *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 (1903) and include *Xiyang ji*. The Western novels begin chronologically with *Satyricon* (1st cent.) by Petronius and *The Golden Ass* (2nd cent.) by Apuleius and then span from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to Voltaire’s *L’Ingénue* (1767).

3.3.2 Duyvendak, J. J. L. “A Chinese *Divinia Commedia*”. See 6.2.2.

This article compares the underworld journey in *Xiyang ji* to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the *Miʿrāj*.


Finlay compares the famous Portuguese epic *Os Lusiadas (The Lusiads)* by Luís Vaz de Camões, which glorifies the Portuguese presence in Asia, to *Xiyang ji*, suggesting that both novels narrate historical events packaged into quest themes. According to Finlay, the authors of both works share similar views and inspirations, the central characters are flat and the narrative is driven by divinities. He also shows how both works mirror their respective heroes’ relations to maritime imperialism.

In this article Hou Jian attempts a new reading of Xiyang ji. He disagrees with the criticism brought forth by Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Lu Xun and others and sees it based on a definition of the novel genre that is too narrow and would exclude such Western classics as Tristram Shandy (1759–1767) and Finnegans Wake (1939). Instead, the author seeks to reveal the sophistication of the underlying structures of Xiyang ji and to show the universality of its themes. In this he heavily relies on works by Western theorists, namely James George Frazer, Joseph Campbell, René Wellek, Carl Jung, Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye and Herbert Weisinger. He also makes extensive comparisons of certain episodes to corresponding narratives in Western and Chinese literature, principally with the Old Testament of the Bible and the Arthurian legends, for example in Alfred Tennyson’s Idylls of the King (1859–1885).


Lombard compares three works of the 16th c: the Portuguese epic Os Lusíadas (The Lusiads) by Luís Vaz de Camões, glorifying the Portuguese presence in Asia, to both Xiyang ji and the Malay epic Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain (about the campaign of Alexander the Great [Iskandar Zulkarnain] in Eurasia). Attention is paid to how much knowledge about the regions they describe the various authors’ actually had and to the religious overtones in all works, that is the dimensions of Buddhism, Daoism (Xiyang ji), Islam (Hikayat), Christianity and the Greco-Roman pantheon (Luisads).


This article explores the role of the guide during the underworld journeys in Xiyang ji, the Aeneid and the Divine Comedy.
3.3.7 Ru, Yi-ling. “The Parallel Structure in Underworld Journeys”. See 6.2.5.
This article compares the underworld journeys in *Xiyang ji* and the *Aeneid*

3.3.8 Wu, Qingyun: *Transformations of Female Rule*. See 6.1.6.
This thesis compares *Xiyang ji* to Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1596).

3.3.9 Wu, Qingyun: *Female Rule in Chinese and English Literary Utopias*. See 6.1.7.
This book is based on Wu’s PhD thesis described above. (See 6.1.6)

Fig 6 *Xiyang ji*, Chapter 47 (10.21b-22a, 1259f):
“Most Talented Tang [Ying] Marries Huang Feixian.”