

THE FORMING OF ETHICAL EVALUATION OF *SHUIHU ZHUAN* IN THE CONTEXT OF *GUANXI* CULTURE

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Abstract

Shuihu Zhuan, a work of fiction with a perverse narrative of atrocities, has been criticized as a novel with serious ethical demerits. Yet, this novel remains widely appreciated within Chinese society, with many holding its morals in high esteem. This presents an apparent paradox when juxtaposed against the ethical criticisms directed at the novel. Understanding the forming of the ethical evaluation is pivotal, especially given the significant role of ethical references in literary commentary—a backdrop further intensified by traditional Chinese literary theory, which is deeply influenced by Confucian moral teachings. Since interpretations of *Shuihu Zhuan* should consider its context, this article analyzes the forming of ethical evaluation about the work from the perspective of *guanxi* culture and its emphasis on *bao* and *qing* principles. In this light, the characters can be viewed as moral exemplars. Although the novel's many protagonists seem cruel, in the *guanxi*-oriented Chinese society, readers' attention is caught by their *bao* and *qing* rather than their crimes. Since *Shuihu Zhuan* is a knight errant fiction in the first cult of the *qing* movement in Chinese literary history, *bao* and *qing* principles are basic criteria for the ethical evaluation of this work. The specific cultural and historical context generates a paradoxical impression of the work: a novel with both a highly ethical evaluation and a perverse narrative about atrocities.

Keywords

bao, cult of *qing*, ethical criticism, *guanxi* narrative, knight errant fiction, *Shuihu Zhuan*, *qing*

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

The ethical value of literature is emphasized by both traditional Chinese and Western literary theories. The Chinese aphorism “wen er ming dao” (文而明道) in Liu Xie’s *Wenxin Diaolong* (*Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*, 文心雕龍) suggests that literature should indoctrinate moral rules (13). In the Western world, Aristotle never separated aesthetics and moral values in literary works (Grube xxii; Smithson 17). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that “[e]very art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good” (37).

Ethical references have constituted the starting point for most literary commentary for roughly 2,500 years, and are still a primary concern for literary criticism (Gregory 273). In his *On Moral Fiction*, John Gardner argues that moral affirmation was the most basic artistic value in literary creation: “true art treats ideals, affirming and clarifying the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Ideals are art’s ends; the rest is mere methodology” (101). Tzvetan Todorov also remarks that “the relation to values is inherent in literature, not only because it is impossible to speak of existence without referring to that relation, but also because the act of writing is an act of communication, which implies the possibility of understanding, in the name of common values” (164). Berys Gaut’s remarks on ethical concerns affirm the importance of ethical literary criticism: “[T]he ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works, such that, if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious” (182). In addition, Zhenzhao Nie states that literature served as the recording of human being’s moral experience and a manifestation of the ethical order, and pointed out that moral enlightenment and education are the primary function of literature (“Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism” 83).

However, in discussions of *Shuihu Zhuan* (in English translated as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *All Men Are Brothers*, or *Water Margin* 水滸傳), China’s earliest full-length knight errant novel in vernacular prose created in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), some researchers argue that the novel should be negatively evaluated due to its ethics. Liu Zaifu denounced the novel as “the gate to hell” for the Chinese people because it poisons their hearts and minds despite its wide readership in Chinese society (5–6, 18). Liu Zaifu’s assessment of the novel stands in contrast to the common understanding about the novel among general readers; the popularity of *Shuihu Zhuan* in China indicates that people hold its morals in positive regard.

This then raises the question: How does its ethical evaluation come into being? As literature is the product of ethical choices in a certain historical period (Nie,

“Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism” 83; “Interdisciplinary Reflection” 428), this article aims to address the ethical evaluation from the perspective of the work’s context. Before proceeding to address the ethical criticism of *Shuihu Zhuan*, the next section examines the novel’s premise and plot.

THE SCENARIO OF SHUIHU ZHUAN AND ITS SOCIAL NETWORK

Against the backdrop of the closing years of the Song dynasty (960–1279), *Shuihu Zhuan* tells the story of the development, climax, decline, and disintegration of the social network of 108 heroes. The opening episode gives a legendary explanation of the heroes: they are 108 spirits released intentionally from a palace. In the secular world, they are common people who do not recognize themselves as spirits except when they are inspired by special conditions, such as dreams.

As most of them are in low social strata, the heroes are often bullied, wronged, despised, and even persecuted in a world full of injustice. Then, one by one, they meet and unify with each other for different reasons, such as being introduced by others, or due to harassment or recruitment (Wu 259). Ultimately, they occupy and gather on Mount Liang, where the 108 heroes hold a grand ceremony to swear brotherhood and resolve to revolt against the government.

After establishing an armed organization on Mount Liang, the heroes are invincible and defeat the government’s suppression many times. Seeing that the organization cannot be conquered, the court grants them amnesty and enlists them. Then they are ordered to suppress other revolts and defeat foreign invaders. Eventually they win but pay their price. Many of them sacrifice their lives in combat. Additionally, many of them are murdered, commit suicide, or withdraw. Only a few members of the network lead peaceful lives after the military activities.

Some researchers have commented that the work has a loose narrative structure. For example, Richard Irwin remarked that it was “merely a collection of tales” (23), and Peter Li claimed that the first 70 chapters comprised 80 story circles, each having its own plot (80). Their opinions are mainly based on Aristotle’s definitions of plot and character. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle stated that plot and character are the two most important narrative elements. According to his theory, there is usually a protagonist or focal character—a character present in the plots of Western fictional narratives. This notion of the Western narrative relates to individualism, which Ian Watt stresses in his *The Rise of the Novel* as the basis of modern European

fiction (60). However, there is no such focus in the Aristotelian sense in premodern Chinese fiction.

The literary mode in premodern Chinese fiction relates to the Chinese cultural context. Chinese society is neither collectivist nor individualist, but rather relation-oriented (Hwang 961). In this context, premodern Chinese fiction writers rarely advocate individualism in fictional narratives (Hightower 168). Accordingly, there is no Aristotelian character in premodern Chinese fiction. Hence, in the perspective of the Western literary theory, there is no coherent narrative structure in premodern Chinese fiction.

Since Chinese society is relation-oriented, the Chinese novel focuses on social network—which can be seen in *Shuihu Zhuan*. The novel's narrative structure parallels Freytag's pyramid which suggests that a plot must have an exposition, a rising action, a climax, a falling action, and a denouement (Freytag 192–95); the plight of the social network in the novel aligns with this logic. Therefore, the social network is critical in understanding *Shuihu Zhuan*.

GUANXI AND ITS INGREDIENTS

Guanxi is the concept used to describe a social network in Chinese culture. *Guanxi* is so ubiquitous and quotidian in China that, without it, nothing can be done (Ju 231). Yanjie Bian defines it as “a dyadic, particular, and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favor exchange between the parties connected by the tie” (“Guanxi” 312). Jack Barbalet describes *guanxi* as “a form of asymmetrical exchange of favors between persons on the basis of enduring sentimental ties in which enhancement of public reputation is the aspirational outcome” (3). Due to its importance in Chinese society, *guanxi* has often been researched in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and management. However, *guanxi* has rarely been addressed in the field of literary criticism, although it is an archetype in Chinese fiction (Han, “Guanxi as Literary Archetype” 265).

Guanxi has three internal ingredients, *ganqing*, *renqing*, and *mianzi* (Hwang 946; Yen et al. 97), and three external ingredients, namely banquet, gift, and favor (M. Yang 6). Banquet, gift, and favor are three operational ways to nurture the affective tie between participants and hence to facilitate their exchange in *guanxi*.

Ganqing, *renqing*, and *mianzi* are the three ingredients that describe the intrinsic characteristic of *guanxi*. *Ganqing*, translated in English as “affection,” “emotion,” or “sentiment,” refers to “the degree of emotional understanding, connections and the sharing of feelings of happiness and fears alike. Additionally, it refers to a sense of loyalty and solidarity, the willingness to take care of each other under all circumstances” (Chen and Chen 314). It is essential and more valuable than monetary value in *guanxi* (Wang 82). *Renqing*, translated as “obligation,” is “the bond of reciprocity and mutual aid between two people, based on emotional attachment or the sense of obligation and indebtedness” (M. Yang 68). It is both expressive and instrumental. Sympathy, favor, and help can be deemed as *renqing* (Shi et al. 497–498; Luo 53). *Mianzi*, translated in English as “face,” is one’s social status, dignity, and prestige (Qi 283). Hence, it is crucial to establish and maintain *guanxi*, especially since “in Chinese culture, gaining and losing face is connected closely with issues of social pride, honor, dignity, insult, shame, disgrace, humility, trust, mistrust, respect, and prestige” (Gao and Ting-Toomey 54).

All three internal ingredients are both sentimental and instrumental (Bian, “Comparative Significance” 265). On the one hand, they are affective in that they involve emotion, affection, feeling, or sentiment; on the other hand, they are instrumental in procuring resources in social exchange on the basis of the established emotions complex (Barbalet 934).

BAO AND QING PRINCIPLES

It can be concluded from the instrumentality and sentimentality of *guanxi* that two elements, reciprocity and sentiment, are the core in the structure of *guanxi*. In the Chinese language, *bao* (報) and *qing* (情) are the concepts for reciprocity and sentiment, respectively. The two concepts are principles of *guanxi*.

Bao in English can be translated as “retribution,” “recompensation,” “reciprocity,” “reward,” “retaliation,” or “revenge” depending on the context. In this sense, *bao* has two aspects of meaning: *bao’èn* (報恩), which is “recompensation,” “reciprocity,” or “reward”; and *baochou* (報仇), which is “retaliation,” or “revenge.” Lien-sheng Yang argued that *bao* is most deep-running and pervasive for Chinese human relations and is the basis of Chinese social relationships (291). Kao stated that *bao* is a code governing ethical, social, familial, and political conduct and interaction (“Bao and Baoying” 120). Its popularity in Chinese society is attributed to three Chinese

traditions, namely the rules of receiving and returning in communication, Chinese Buddhism, and “knight errant” codes (L. Yang 291–99).

In the realm of *guanxi*, *bao* essentially means “recompensation,” “reciprocity,” or “reward.” *Bao*, as a requital of a favor, operates on the emotional foundation of gratitude, which fosters a bond of interaction, distinct from legal constitutions and the enforcement of equivalence (Simmel 387). Gratitude is a moral virtue as well as an emotion (Tudge et al. 281). Emmons highlights gratitude as the “queen of virtues” by contrasting it to ingratitude as the “king of the vices” (149). Cicero’s characterization of gratitude as “not only the greatest [virtue], but also the parent of all the other virtues” has been widely cited (qtd. in McCullough and Tsang 123).

Alongside the emotion of gratitude, *bao* is regarded as moral grammar and therefore determines the narrative frame of all stories on moral themes since premodern Chinese writers regarded the universe as morally active and justice as ethical law (Hanan 26). *Bao* is the external motivation and narrative causality in Chinese fiction (Kao, “Bao and Baoying” 137–138). The theme of *bao* has existed widely and for a long time in the Chinese literary tradition (Xing Meng 邢猛 26); for example, Chinese folklore contains many stories about animals’ requital of favors to human beings with a view to indoctrinating the reader with ethical value (Chen Jiayi 陳佳冀 235; Wang Shengbo 王勝波 and Li Xin 李鑫 39).

Bao narrative has existed in particular in Chinese knight errant stories since the Ming dynasty. Belonging to the tradition of knight errant stories, *Shuihu Zhuan* describes the *bao* among the 108 heroes. In the *guanxi*-oriented world depicted in *Shuihu Zhuan*, *bao* is a basic moral code (Han, “Guanxi as Literary Archetype” 271–272).

Another principle of *guanxi*, *qing*, which has no direct equivalent in English, can be translated as “affection,” “emotion,” “passion,” “feeling,” or “sentiment.” In the Western world, reason and emotion are at odds and even contradict each other, while in the Chinese tradition, they operate in harmony and may be said to share the same ontological source (Santangelo, “Evaluation of Emotions” 417). Early Chinese thinkers, not distinguishing between reason and emotion, believe that emotional and cognitive processes were integrated (Virág).

Qing is also bonded with ethical evaluation in Chinese tradition. Early Chinese thinkers such as Mencius, Xunzi, and Laozi, proponents of dominant ethical thinking in Chinese tradition, share the conviction that a meaningful life is impossible without affective thinking (Virág). In Confucian tradition, *qing* is imbued in the Chinese ethical judging criterion, in contrast to the Western judging criterion, which deems reason as the rule (Huang Yushun 黃玉順 13).

Confucianism's emphasis on the function of *qing* for moral judgement is represented by its understanding of the five cardinal relationships in human society. Confucianism divides human relationships into five cardinal relationships: between emperor and minister, father and son, brothers, husband and wife, and friends. It regards the five types of *qing*, which are loyalty, filial piety, love and respect, tolerance, and benevolence, as the ethical principles for relationships. In other words, the ethical judgement of human relationships in the relation-oriented Chinese society is based more on *qing* and less on reason. The judging model even exceeds the legal judgement in the Western sense, for example, as Confucius said in his *Analects* when he commented on a case in which a father stole a sheep: "The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this" (父為子隱·子為父隱·直在其中矣) (134). To Confucius, according to the *qing* principle, which is filial piety in this case, if the son had reported his father as a thief, the son would not have been an upright man.

Although *qing* is crucial in Chinese culture, there is an inevitable misunderstanding of *qing* in the Western world. For example, due to the different cultural ways of expressing emotion in literary narrative, Western readers cannot easily fully understand the emotions in Chinese fiction (Klineberg 519–520). Another reason for the difficulty in understanding emotions in Chinese culture is that, in Chinese society, emotional expression is carefully regulated out of concern that it may disrupt status hierarchy and group harmony (Bond, *Beyond the Chinese Face* 90; "Emotions" 245). With regard to *qing* in Chinese literature, Bishop argues that Chinese fictional narrative had few hints of emotion (246).

However, an emphasis on *qing* exists in Chinese literary tradition. Both Chinese Confucian aesthetic ethics and ethical aesthetics are *qing*-oriented (Y. Liu 70). Chinese literature, in contrast to the mimetic-representational orientation of Western literature, is affective-expressive oriented (Kao, "Comparative Literature" 5). Therefore, *qing* is central to traditional Chinese literary criticism (Cai 64). The *qing* tradition in Chinese literary history is so important that, in the last millennium, the "cult of *qing*" movement occurred three times: the first was at the end of the Ming until the Qing dynasty; the second was at the beginning of the twentieth century; and the third time was in the 1980s.

Shuihu Zhuan was created against the background of the first "cult of *qing*" movement, a zeitgeist in which *qing* was unprecedentedly emphasized in Chinese literary history. As *qing* is a criterion of moral judgement in Chinese culture, it is a necessary criterion for both the literary creation and ethical criticism of this novel. Thus, to investigate the evolution of the ethical evaluation of *Shuihu Zhuan*, the *qing* tradition should be considered in the Chinese context.

BAO AND QING PRINCIPLES IN SHUIHU ZHUAN

Bao and *qing* principles are embodied in *guanxi* narrative in *Shuihu Zhuan*. Given that *guanxi* narrative exists in every episode of *Shuihu Zhuan*, it is impossible to analyze all the episodes containing *guanxi* in the work. This article has selected a representative episode for analysis. Among the episodes, the first meeting between Song Jiang and Li Kui is representative because they are the most notable characters in the novel. Their encounter in Chapter 38 of 100 has been selected to illuminate *bao* and *qing* principles of *guanxi* narrative in the work.

The first encounter between Song Jiang and Li Kui takes place in a restaurant when the former is drinking with Dai Zong, who introduces Li Kui to Song Jiang. Seeing that Li Kui is short of money, Song Jiang gives ten taels of silver to the latter. To reward Song Jiang, Li Kui gambles but loses all his money. He then grabs both the lost money and another gambler's money, and hence falls into conflict. Song Jiang comes out and settles the dispute. After the altercation, when Song Jiang, Li Kui, and Dai Zong sit down to eat, Li Kui is furious at the restaurant waiter because he thinks he is humiliated when the waiter tells him there is only mutton in the restaurant.¹ Song Jiang calms Li Kui down by sending the waiter to get the mutton that the latter wants. After eating for a while with Song Jiang complaining that the fish soup on the table is not fresh, Li Kui volunteers to get some fresh fish to make soup for Song Jiang. However, Li Kui clashes with fishermen and fights violently with the head fisherman, Zhang Shun. As Li Kui is about to be drowned by Zhang Shun, Song Jiang comes out and saves Li Kui again. After the conflicts have been settled, the four of them: Song Jiang, Dai Zong, Li Kui, and Zhang Shun sit down and enjoy the banquet.

The episode can be divided into four sections: the first section describes how Song Jiang, upon learning that Li Kui needs money, lends him ten taels of silver; the second section describes how Song Jiang defuses the violent gambling conflict between Li Kui, who loses his money, and Xiao Zhangyi, another gambler; the third section is about Song Jiang asking the waiter in the restaurant to serve mutton to Li Kui; and the fourth section is how Song Jiang saves Li Kui when the latter is almost drowned to death because of his conflict with a fisherman named Zhang Shun.

BAO

The narrative of *bao*, or reciprocity, is clear in the relationship between Song Jiang and Li Kui in the episode. Song Jiang is the one who initiates their reciprocity. For example, he gives ten taels of silver to the latter; he helps Li Kui to resolve the gambling conflict and Song Jiang saves Li Kui from being drowned; and Song Jiang asks the waiter to give Li Kui a big bowl to drink from and orders mutton for Li Kui when he is not satisfied.

For Li Kui to make amends with Song Jiang after receiving his money, Li Kui soon gambles with the intention of winning some money with a view to repaying him. Additionally, he volunteers to fetch some fish for Song Jiang when hearing Song Jiang's complaints about the fish soup in the restaurant. More importantly, Li Kui becomes Song Jiang's loyal follower from that point. Even Jin Shengtian (1608–1661) commented that “buying the strong Li Kui for only ten taels of silver is something Song Jiang is proud of for his whole life” (“以十兩銀買一鐵牛·宋江一生得意之筆。”; my trans.; *Jin Shengtian Pingdian Caizi Quanji* 金聖歎評點才子全集 683).

The gift and favor Song Jiang gives Li Kui is a type of *renqing*. In the work, Song Jiang is remarkably generous in giving him money. Li Zhi (1527–1602) (1987) noted Song Jiang's renown as a *haohan* (good fellow, 好漢) in the eyes of other protagonists due to his generosity (Chen Xizhong 陳曦鐘 et al. 699). He remarked that Song Jiang was different from other rich people who are not generous enough to give out money, and hence are not good fellows.² Jin Shengtian commented that the pair of characters in the episode are in an ideal frame of giving and receiving: “Song Jiang regards [lending] silver [to others] as an important matter, while Li Kui borrows money as he first appears in the book” (“宋江處處以銀子為要務，達卻初入書便是借錢。”; my trans.; 金聖歎評點才子全集 [*Jin Shengtian Pingdian Caizi Quanji*] 681). The narrative in the work defines the two in a frame of *bao* initiated by *renqing*. From the perspective of gift exchange theory, the reciprocity created by a gift should be expected in the long run (Mauss 45–46). Additionally, “[r]eciprocity is in any society a rule of life, and in some societies at least it is *the* rule of life” (Noonan 3). This is especially the case in Chinese society, as *renqing* is a critical ingredient of *guanxi*.

Mianzi is another ingredient for the *bao* in this episode. In the meeting between them, Song Jiang also gives Li Kui enough *mianzi*. For example, when Dai Zong complains that Li Kui is making trouble, Song Jiang not only favors but also praises Li Kui. Song Jiang's manner enhances Li Kui's *mianzi*, or the latter's social status, prestige, and face. This no doubt makes Li Kui feel more emotionally indebted in his *guanxi* with Song Jiang.

As the Chinese saying goes, “A drop of water shall be returned with a gushing spring” (滴水之恩，當湧泉相報; my trans.), and Li Kui is willing to repay Song Jiang with more benefits. Although there is no direct psychological description of his intention to repay, his gratitude is revealed by his action: After getting the silver from Song Jiang, Li Kui soon starts to gamble and anticipates winning money to return to Song Jiang, and when he hears Song Jiang mention the fish soup, he soon goes to fetch fresh fish. To a certain extent, his adherence to the *bao* principle is reflected in his conflicts with others due to his eagerness to reciprocate. The episode’s emphasis on the *bao* principle leads most readers to be oblivious to the character’s uncouthness and hooliganism because of the *guanxi* context and the common understanding of gratitude. His other atrocities in the frame of the *bao* principle are thus unconsciously neglected in the work.

QING

The narrative of *qing* in the episode is demonstrated through the frame of *guanxi*. As analyzed above, the three internal ingredients of *guanxi*, namely *ganqing*, *renqing*, and *mianzi*, are imbued with emotion. In other words, *qing* is fundamental in the three ingredients.

From the beginning of the encounter, the *qing* is nurtured through the external ingredients of *guanxi*: banquet, gift, and favor. Song Jiang is active in nurturing the *qing* through the ingredients, while Li Kui is passive. The banquet is all paid for by Song Jiang, and the gift and favor are also presented by Song Jiang to Li Kui. In *guanxi*, *qing* can be cultivated through material means, which are the three external ingredients of *guanxi* (M. Yang 195). Moreover, Song Jiang also enhances the *qing* through his showing of sympathy to Li Kui. As mentioned above, in contrast to Dai Zong’s aversion to Li Kui’s inurbanity, Song Jiang constantly shows sympathy and even praises Li Kui’s behaviors.

Song Jiang’s manner inspires Li Kui’s gratitude. After Li Kui receives Song Jiang’s favor and becomes indebted to Song Jiang, Li Kui becomes loyal to his benefactor Song Jiang throughout the rest of his life because of gratitude. In his inner thoughts he exclaims: “What a marvel! Brother Song Jiang lends me ten taels of silver although he has not communicated with me for a long time. He is surely generous in aiding the needy, and deserves his reputation!” (“難得！宋江哥哥又不曾和我深交，便借我十兩銀子。果然仗義疏財，名不虛傳！”; my trans.; Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中459).

It should be noted that direct psychological description in premodern Chinese fiction is scant; thus, the only psychological monology in the episode highlights Li Kui's degree of gratitude. However, in the episode, the narrative of Li Kui's *qing* is highlighted while Song Jiang's *qing* is mostly concealed. Li Kui tends to show his emotion and affection in an extremely direct way. For example, his table manners show his psychological activities: When they begin to drink together, he says: "I need the big bowl to drink wine. I can't bear the little cup" ("酒把大碗來篩 · 不耐煩小盞價吃。"; my trans.; Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 461). When Li Kui is not satisfied with the fish in his own bowl, he grabs the fish in Song Jiang and Dai Zong's bowls, and when Li Kui hears that the waiter says there is no beef but only mutton in the restaurant, he becomes abruptly furious and splashes the fish soup onto the waiter, believing that he has been offended. His rude and raw table manners demonstrate that he directly expresses his emotions and desires without pretensions. The most surprising demonstration of his *qing* to Song Jiang is his willingness to drink the poisonous wine from Song Jiang, who wants his death to avoid his possible revolt.

The contrast of Song Jiang's concealment of his *qing* and Li Kui's direct exposition of *qing* induces Jin Shengtian and Li Zhi's positive evaluation of Li Kui. Li Zhi commented about Li Kui that he was "[a]n interesting man! An interesting man! He is so transcendent that he is genuinely reincarnated from a living Buddha" ("妙人妙人 · 超然物外 · 真是活佛轉世。"; my trans.; Chen Xizhong 陳曦鐘 et al. 925). Jin Shengtian regarded Li Kui as being "full of naivety and brilliance" ("一片天真爛漫到底"; my trans.; "讀第五才子書法 [Du Diwu Caizi Shufa]" 20). In his commentary in Chapter 25, Jin Shengtian stated that Li Kui was a "genuine man."³

Jin Shengtian commented about Song Jiang's behavior that "Song Jiang demonstrates all his craftiness when meeting Li Kui" ("宋江見李逵 · 便令權詐都盡"; my trans.; Jin Shengtian 金聖歎, 金聖歎評點才子全集 [*Jin Shengtian Pingdian Caizi Quanji*] 690). Li Zhi remarks that Song Jiang is "a fake moralist who was a robber at heart" ("假道學真強盜"; my trans.; qtd. in Shi and Guanzhong 486). Both commenters regarded Song Jiang as a hypocrite.

It should be noted that Li Kui's atrocious behavior is remarkable. For example, in Chapter 40, in saving Song Jiang from execution, Li Kui kills anyone he encounters—including innocents; in Chapter 50, he not only kills those who surrender but also slaughters innocent people in the Manor of Hu and burns their houses.

The positive commentaries about Li Kui originated from the cultural understanding of *qing*. *Qing* has the same ontological source as rationality and became a criterion for judgement in Chinese culture (Santangelo, "Evaluation of Emotions" 417). *Qing* is often identified with morality (Tang et al. 413). The emphasis on *qing* was unprecedented especially during the Ming and Qing dynasty,

the period in which *Shuihu Zhuan* was created and spread and when the cult of *qing* flourished. From the episode narrative, we find that Li Kui's actions and speech are decided by his *qing*. In contrast, Song Jiang's behavior is suspected to have come from pure calculation because there is scant description of his intentions especially in the condition that *guanxi* is both sentimental and instrumental (Bian, "Comparative Significance" 265). The impression of Li Kui's morality and Song Jiang's hypocrisy is aggravated because *Shuihu Zhuan* is a knight errant fiction created during the cult of *qing* movement. The next section will address the influence of the knight errant fiction genre and *qing* zeitgeist on *Shuihu Zhuan*.

A WORK OF KNIGHT ERRANT FICTION IN QING ZEITGEIST

Knight errant stories in China can be traced to the Warring States period (403–221 B.C.) in China, which was recorded in 遊俠列傳 [Biographies of Knights Errant] in 史記 [Records of the Historiographer] by Sima Qian (145–90 B.C.). The initial prosperity of knight errant fiction was during the latter half of the Tang dynasty (618–907), when knight errant fiction narrating knight errantry and swordsmanship appeared in 傳奇 ("tales of the extraordinary"; my trans.).

As a work of knight errant fiction, *Shuihu Zhuan* slowly took shape from the Song dynasty to the Ming dynasty in a form of 話本 ("prompt book"; my trans.) for storytellers (Ma 278–80). During the process, in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the central characters, Song Jiang and Li Kui, received dramatic treatment (J. Liu 39). The earliest edition of *Shuihu Zhuan* is attributed to Shi Nai'an in the fourteenth century and Luo Guanzhong (1330–1400) and was circulated in print around 1500 (Altenburger 5), a period witnessing the prosperities of knight errant literature.

Knight errantry is a kind of behavior but not a profession. It is not like the Japanese samurai, which is a caste, nor the European knights, who were members of a religious order. *Yi* ("righteousness," 義), or to be exact—being upright, sincere, and undaunted—was the moral requirement for a knight errant from the beginning of knight errantry in Chinese history.

After the Ming and Qing dynasties, a consciousness of *bao* appeared and became popular in knight errant fiction. According to the *bao* consciousness, a knight errant will reward any favor, including every meal served in kind; therefore, "knight errant" codes are key to the popularity of *bao* consciousness in Chinese society (Lien-sheng Yang 294).

The roots of the *bao* theme in knight errant fiction can be traced to the Chunqiu period (770-476 BC), when it became a critical ethic for warriors. Chinese knight errant inherited the spirit, which was fortified by many Confucian scholars such as Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒 179-104 BC), Liu Xiang (劉向 79-8 BC), and Xun Yue (荀悅 148-209) (Zhao 84). Advocated by prominent scholars, the *bao* theme was a pervasive subject in folkloric literature. The pervasiveness of the literature laid foundation for the creation of *bao* theme in knight errant fiction.

It should be noted, however, that the *bao* consciousness in knight errant fiction was only popular during the rise of *guanxi* in the Ming fiction narrative, a basic feature of which is that it is a social exchange based on sentimental ties (Han, “Guanxi as Literary Archetype” 270; Han, “Why Was It the Ming Dynasty” 444-47). Since the Ming dynasty, the *bao* theme became a principle in knight errant fiction. The social exchange theme is reinforced in *Shuihu Zhuan* as it narrates the social bonds and interactions of the heroes, who have a strong desire to bond with each other, differing from previous works of knight errant fiction such as those in *Tang chuanqi*, where the heroes tend to be aloof and asocial (Altenburger 4). The *bao* notion is stressed in the social exchange of *guanxi* in *Shuihu Zhuan*. Eventually it becomes an essential moral requirement for the heroes in the context of the *guanxi*-oriented Chinese society.

The *bao* notion not only includes reward and reciprocation but also vengeance and retaliation. A *haohan* (“good fellow,” 好漢)⁴ must reward abundantly for a received favor; similarly, the multiplied degrees of revenge were approved or even praised. Therefore, in *Shuihu Zhuan*, the favor must be reciprocated and the wrong action must be retaliated. Based on the ethical requirement, as regards the *haohan*'s vengeance, the popular attitude toward blood revenge is overwhelmingly positive, no matter what the actual circumstances of the case are (Cheng 30). However, compared to its vengeance aspect, the reward aspect of *bao* permeates the work since *guanxi* is the basic theme and literary archetype of the fiction because of the dominant narrative of banquet, gift, and favor (Han, “Guanxi as Literary Archetype” 265). Thus, the *bao* in *guanxi* is more essential than the *bao* of vengeance.

The *bao* ethics and morals are essential in the moral code of the heroes in *Shuihu Zhuan*. In the work, although there are many over-retributions, the knight errant fiction narrative does not portray the actions in a derogatory manner. In contrast, the affection and sentiment aroused or related in the social exchange of *guanxi*, or the *bao* actions, is stressed and detailed. Accordingly, the morals of *bao* in *guanxi* are emphasized. Li Kui is remarkably noted as an exemplar of morals. In the narrative of the work, he is portrayed as conforming to the *bao* principle even though he is rude and raw. He is willing to repay a benefactor, as seen when he meets Song Jiang for the first time. Thus, his bloodthirst is neglected or forgotten.

Since the *bao* in *guanxi* is based on sentiment and emotion, or *qing* in Chinese culture, the next section discusses the forming of ethical evaluation of *Shuihu Zhuan* in the perspective of the *qing* zeitgeist.

THE QING ZEITGEIST

The cult of the *qing* movement in the Ming and Qing dynasty also contributes to the justification of knight errant behaviors. In the movement, writers promoted *qing* as a paramount human value in their works of fiction and drama. *Zhenqing* (“genuine feelings,” 真情) encapsulates the valorization of *qing* in the movement (Wai-yee Li 32; Huang 164).

The notion of *zhenqing* was especially reflected in the works of Li Zhi. In his “On the Childlike Mind” (*Tongxin Shuo*, 童心說), Li Zhi denounced hypocrisy and falsehood and praised authentic and genuine *qing* (“童心說” 92-93). He commented that *Xixiang Ji* (*Romance of the Western Chamber*, 西廂記) and *Shuihu Zhuan* were two supreme works in the world because they narrated the genuine and authentic *qing*.⁵ In his *San Dashi Xiang Yi* (*San Dashi Xiang Yi*), he wrote: “Buddha is genuine. There are genuine Buddhas because there are genuine people (*zhenren*, 真人)” (“佛是一團真者·故世有真人·然後知有真佛。”; my trans.; Li Zhi, “三大士像議” 137). Li Zhi’s enthusiastic championing of “authenticity” and “genuineness” seemed to have been a criticism of *jia* (假), a fashion of “falsehood” and “hypocrisy” (Huang 164).

The emphasis on authentic *qing* can be traced to the Wei-Jin period (220-420), when many literati were inspired by human nature and released their passions and emotions (“率性任情”); the writers’ intentions and manners were righteous—hence they are above social or political sanctions. The justification of this focus on genuine *qing* is based on Confucianism: the Confucian classics on bamboo slips unearthed in Guodian in 1993 contain the comment: “*dao* begins in *qing*” (“道始於情”). *Dao* can be translated as norms of social conduct or logos in philosophy. The words demonstrate the importance of *qing* in moral cultivation (Chan 226). Under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese society is *qing*-oriented, and this ethos reached a climax for the first time in the cult of *qing* movement of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Qing scholar Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) describes how Li Zhi’s doctrines were so popular that many literati followed and practiced Li Zhi’s style of a childlike mind (*tongxin*, 童心) _(66). The popularity of *Shuihu Zhuan* is

a response to the cult of *qing* movement. Li Zhi's comments on *Shuihu Zhuan* are not only the embodiment of his own doctrine, but are also reflective of the cult of *qing* zeitgeist of the Ming dynasty. Compared to Jin Shengtan's comments on *Shuihu Zhuan*, which primarily consider the novel's rhetoric techniques, Li Zhi's comments represent his contemporary cultural sentiment (Chen Caixun 陳才訓 154).

To Li Zhi, the heroes of *Shuihu Zhuan* were the embodiment of a childlike mind or *zhenqing*, and their emotions were genuine without any hypocrisy. For example, although Li Kui is rude and raw, he is never hypocritical. Li Zhi also eulogized another protagonist Wang Ying, a man with an aggressive sexual appetite, in the conservative Confucianism culture regarding sex in China. To Li Zhi, Wang Ying is by no means a villain but:

a sage with a strong character. He is indeed lustful but he never conceals that, even when his life is threatened. He is only following his instinct. If a Confucian moralist had the same lust, he would try every means to conceal it, with his words inconsistent with his actions. Alas, what benefit will that produce? In contrast, Wang Aihu (Wang Ying) is honest about his lust for women. And Hu Sanniang (Yizhangqing) finally agrees to marry him just because of his sincerity." ("王矮虎還是個性之的聖人，實是好色，卻不遮掩，即在性命相併之地，只是率其性耳。若是道學先生，便有無數藏頭蓋尾的所在，口夷行蹠的光景。嗚呼！畢竟何益哉！不若王矮虎實在，得這一丈青做個妻子也，到底還是至誠之報。"; my trans.; Chen Xizhong 陳曦鐘 et al. 897)

The cult of *qing* in the Ming and Qing dynasties is not only a romantic literary movement in Chinese history, but also an embodiment of the sentiment and thinking mode rooted in Chinese culture and philosophy. It is "a conveyer of basic Chinese social values," in which *qing* was identified with morality (Santangelo, "Reconsidering 'Cult of Qing'" 156). The cultural understanding of *qing* constituted a positive ethical judgement of *Shuihu Zhuan* in the zeitgeist and even in Chinese history.

CONCLUSION

Ethical judgement is a basis for the evaluation of fiction. *Shuihu Zhuan* has received negative interpretations from critics due to the perverse narrative of the characters' atrocities. However, it is paradoxical that *Shuihu Zhuan* gives a positive ethical impression among the common Chinese readers.

As Chinese society is relation-oriented, the interpretation of the novel should be in the perspective of *guanxi*. In *guanxi*, there are two basic criteria for ethical judgement: *bao* and *qing*. According to the *bao* principle, the protagonists are straightforward in enacting retribution or reciprocation. According to the *qing* principle, the heroes are affectionate toward their sworn brothers and genuinely express their emotions without any hypocrisy. Therefore, despite the heroes' over-retribution, wanton killing, and even cannibalism, they are not denounced in the *guanxi*-oriented society. The reader's attention is drawn more to the novel's *bao*, *qing*, and *guanxi*, while the brutality is forgotten.

The positive ethical judgement of *Shuihu Zhuan* is reinforced by its context: it is a work of knight errant fiction created in the cult of *qing* movement. The fundamental ethical requirement of knights errant since the Ming dynasty in stories about them is that they should follow the *bao* principle. The protagonists of *Shuihu Zhuan* are clear exemplars of the *bao* principle. They are therefore regarded as ideal *haohan* in the knight errant narrative. The cult of *qing* movement in the Ming and Qing dynasties, rooted in Chinese culture and philosophy, further enhances the positive ethical judgement, because the movement is especially embodied in the narrative literature. The authenticity of *qing* is especially stressed in the *qing* zeitgeist. Confirming this requirement, the heroes of *Shuihu Zhuan* are further positively ethically judged.

The investigation of the forming of ethical evaluation must consider its social, cultural, and historical context; *Shuihu Zhuan* is no exception. The specific context of *Shuihu Zhuan* decides its status in Chinese literary history. However, we should also bear in mind that there are much perverse narratives about atrocities in the work according to its universal value.

Notes

1. In the Song dynasty, the setting of the novel, mutton was regarded as a delicacy—expensive and only enjoyed by rich aristocracy. Therefore, when the waiter implies there is nothing relatively cheaper than mutton in the restaurant, Li Kui believes that the waiter assumes he is impoverished and cannot pay for the mutton. This provokes Li Kui who then splashes fish soup onto the waiter (Chen Xizhong 陳熙中 127-128).
2. Li Zhi thought that Song Jiang was so generous that he was a *haohan* (好漢), as he commented: “It is really true that one cannot become a good fellow without money, but the one having money is reluctant to be a good fellow. Alas!” (“沒錢做不得好漢·真真真！然有錢的又不肯做好漢·嗟哉!”; my trans.) (Chen Xizhong 陳曦鐘 et al. 699).
3. “How about Li Kui?” “He is a genuine man.” (曰：“李逵何如人也？”曰：“真人也。”; my trans.) (Jin Shengtan 金聖歎, *Jin Shengtan Pingdian Caizi Quanji* 金聖歎評點才子全集. 472).
4. Membership in the 108 heroes in *Shuihu Zhuan* is mainly based on only one criterion: whether he or she is considered as a *haohan* (Altenburger 7).
5. In an article, Li Zhi remarks on the importance of a childlike mind for ethics: “If one loses one’s childlike heart-mind, one loses the genuine heart-mind. Losing the genuine mind is losing the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never regain that with which he began” (“若失卻童心·便失卻真心；失卻真心·便失卻真人。人而非真·全不復有初矣。”) (*A Book to Burn* 111). He also stressed the significance in literary creation that: “[a]ll the most exquisite literature in the world flows directly from the childlike heart-mind. As long as the childlike heart-mind is preserved, the Principles of the Way will not be endlessly perpetuated, what one hears and sees will have no authority, no period will lack great literature, no person will lack literary talent, and not a single pattern, genre or word will fail to be genuine!” (“天下之至文·未有不出於童心焉者也。苟童心常存·則道理不行·聞見不立·無時不文·無人不文·無一樣創制體格而非文者。”; Li Zhi, *A Book to Burn* 108).

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