The legendary Judge Bao, popularly referred to as Baogong 包公, or as Clear-Sky Bao (Bao Qingtian 包青天), was celebrated as a paragon of justice and incorruptibility in a variety of literary and dramatic genres in the course of the last millennium, and still plays a significant role in contemporary popular culture across East Asia. Although recent scholarship usually portrays Baogong-related stories and dramas as a cohesive, linear tradition, the Baogong lore is a multilayered cultural phenomenon, extremely varied in the scope of its genres and themes. Notwithstanding the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, this paper will argue that an important undercurrent throughout the Baogong lore is his mythical role as a judge in the netherworld. Already in the early stages of Baogong’s mythmaking process, he came to be associated with the courts of the netherworld, and in particular with the position of King Yama (Yanluo wang 閻羅王). This chthonic role not only underlies the history of the Baogong lore in literature and drama, but also has become the most prominent feature in Baogong's religious veneration in recent centuries. Nowadays, more than two dozens Baogong temples across mainland China and Taiwan still commemorate his role as judge in the courts of hell, many worshipping Baogong directly as King Yama.

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Literary and dramatic portrayals of Baogong’s role as a judge in hell and his association with King Yama offer a window onto the workings of late-imperial Chinese conceptualizations of life, death, and the afterlife. These conceptualizations assign a cardinal role to government authorities in regulating and determining the destinies of mankind, not only on earth but in the netherworld as well. Life and death are thus conceptualized in administrative and legal terms, exemplifying an enormous faith in the bureaucratic system. This faith is not curbed by the shortcomings of the bureaucratic system, with its corruption and malfeasance, but rather it inspires expressions of a serious need for better bureaucratic functionaries, whether in the realm of the living or the dead. It is possible even to suggest that the trust in such a dynamic becomes an organizing principle for all of human existence. Namely, the only way to overcome the myriad flaws of the bureaucratic system and to ensure justice for mankind, in this life as well as the next, is to assign an incorruptible, unbiased, and sagacious judge. For many centuries, the legend of Baogong served in that capacity, a beacon of hope for a multitude hungry for justice. The bureaucratic and judiciary conceptualization of the cycle of life and death thus assigned Baogong a double role: as the ideal judge in the realm of the living, and as King Yama in the realm of the dead.

This paper examines the origins of Baogong’s identification with King Yama in literature and the role that the identification had in shaping the Baogong legend and worship. I argue that Baogong’s legendary role as a judge in hell is particularly indebted to a corpus of short courtroom stories from the late-Ming period that elaborate on his duties as King Yama, setting the course for the development of the Baogong lore of the following centuries. Baogong’s mythmaking and deification process played a part in shaping the Chinese perception of the netherworld in late-imperial China, and particularly influenced the assimilation of King Yama, originally an Indic deity, into the mainstream of

Chinese culture. The expansion of Baogong’s role as King Yama in literature, drama, and religious worship in recent centuries indicates a growing pessimism among many Chinese regarding the judicial system in the world of the living, an attitude that in some sense may provide more opportunities for people to delegate their hoped-for justice to the courts of the netherworld. The Baogong phenomenon has been an enduring cultural icon and as such offers a glimpse into the workings of the Chinese popular imagination; it shows the profound connections and influences that have existed for centuries in and among China’s literature, drama, and religious veneration.

KING YAMA AND THE CHINESE NETERWORLD

In order to understand the significance of Baogong’s role as King Yama in literature and religious worship in late-imperial China, it is imperative to draw attention to the development of Yama and Chinese notions of the afterlife. Naturally, neither of those ever constituted unified cultural constructs, and their history should not be regarded as a linear “evolution.” The following paragraphs do not presume to offer a comprehensive summary of such multifaceted cultural constructs, for it would surpass the scope of this paper. Instead, I would like to highlight facets of King Yama and Chinese conceptions of the netherworld that are specifically relevant to this discussion.


Recent scholarship discussed this interconnectivity in regards to other legendary figures. Meir Shahar, for instance, has shed light on the relationship between popular literature and the worship of the god Jigong 捷公; see *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998). Gary Seaman examined the ritualistic roots of the novel *Beiyou ji 北遊記* (The Journey to the North), as well as its role in propagating the cult of the god Zhenwu 真武; see *Journey to the North: An Ethnohistorical Analysis and Annotated Translation of the Chinese Folk Novel Pei-Yu Chi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
trayed as an ambivalent deity, an onlooker who does not interfere in the mechanisms of karmic law, and around the time of the formation of the Tibetan Bar do, Yama is depicted as supervising karmic judgment, though without interfering in it. Yama’s introduction into the Chinese bureaucratic conceptualization of the netherworld opened a new stage in his development, but even then he was still portrayed as an ambivalent figure. In medieval China, Yama appears as a bodhisattva and protector of Buddhist worshippers. Furthermore, Buddhist and Daoist sources stress his benevolent character, claiming he was demoted from the first court of hell to the fifth due to his leniency. Nevertheless, as karma came to be envisioned as a judiciary system of netherworld courts, Yama was viewed as a punitive authority in the netherworld, similar to the Lord of Mount Tai (Taishan fujun). The fifth-century indigenous Buddhist scripture Guanding jing recounts that King Yama is responsible for keeping the registers of the living and examining their behavior (which is recorded and filed by other low-ranking officials in the netherworld), and finally for prescribing punishments according to the severity of their deeds.

In the literature of the Sui and Tang period, King Yama gradually eclipsed the Lord of Mount Tai, who was until then the dominant figure in literary portrayals of hell. Around that time, Yama lost some of his earlier characteristics as a benign deity and assumed some of the Lord of Mount Tai's traits as a severe administrator. With the growing influence of Buddhism, hell was viewed as an underground prison (diyu), whose entry is marked by “The River of No Recourse” (naihe),

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8 Regarding the pilgrimage to Mount Tai and the cult of Taishan fujun, see Wilt L. Idema, “The Pilgrimage to Taishan in the Dramatic Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” CLEAR 19 (Dec., 1997), pp. 23–57.


10 Fan Jun, “Tang dai xiaoshuo zhong de Yanluo wang: Yindu diyu shen de Zhongguo hua” 藝術小說中的閻羅王: 印度地獄神的中國化, Huagiao daxue xuebao 華僑大學學報 1 (2007), pp. 93–95. The Lord of Mount Tai was linked to Buddhist hells in popular Buddhism by the 3d c. AD, and eventually became one of the kings of hell. In Chinese Tantric Buddhism, the Lord of Mount Tai became one of King Yama’s acolytes. See Faure, “Indic Influences on Chinese Mythology,” pp. 52–55.
and its exit is marked by a large wheel of fortune that projects the dead into their next life. The Tang-era conceptualization of King Yama as a punitive albeit benign lord of the dead is described in the *chuanqi* 傳奇 tale “Du Zichun zhuăn” 杜子春傳, during the imaginary journey of the protagonist Du Zichun through purgatory. The seventh-century text *Mingbao ji* 萬報記 depicts King Yama’s position in hell as parallel to that of the emperor in the human world, albeit subject to orders from religious practitioners in the world of the living. According to this text, when a Daoist priest submits a memorial seeking blessing, the heavenly officers send it to King Yama, who carries out the requests as officials would have done with an imperial command. Of particular importance is the tale of the monk Mulian (*Maudgalyāyana*) in the Dunhuang bian-wen 變文 text “The Transformation Text on Mulian Saving His Mother from the Dark Regions.” In it, the court of King Yama is described as a transitional zone between death and rebirth, where Yama acts as a ruler of the underworld and keeper of the records of deeds. King Yama also appears in seven stories in the eighth-century work *Guangyi ji* 廣異記, where he occupies a cardinal position in the netherworld. In two of these stories (167 and 168), King Yama summons officials directly from the world of the living in order to recruit them to his netherworld court as assistants or clerks. This becomes a recurrent

11 Teiser, *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, p. 2, and idem, “‘Having Once Died and Returned to Life’: Representations of Hell in Medieval China,” *HJAS* 48.2 (1988), pp. 172–73, 184–85. This river appears in several sources; perhaps the most famous among them are the Tang bian-wen scripture “Mulian Saving His Mother from the Dark Region” and the “Scripture on the Ten Kings,” where the river is located in the second court of hell, presided over by the King of the First River. Interestingly, the motif of a river that the dead must cross in order to enter the netherworld also appears in the Vedic tradition as the river Vaitarani, as well as in Greek mythology as the five rivers of Hades (Styx, Akkeron, Kokytos, Phlegethon, and Lethe). See Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004), p. 208.
motif in late-imperial depictions of the relationship between the realms of the living and the dead, culminating in the identification of famous officials as netherworld judges.

The Scripture of the Ten Kings (Fo shuo shiwang jing 佛説十王經) is the earliest surviving text that mentions all ten kings of hell by name. Stephen Teiser considers the system of the ten kings to be a synthesis of two monolithic conceptualizations: the Indian concepts of samsara and karma on the one hand, and the Chinese kinship system and imperial bureaucracy on the other hand. The Indian notion of karma, which was conceived originally as a rule of nature, was understood in Tang China as a bureaucratic procedure, wherein the deceased must go through a long and complicated process of judgments overseen by powerful officials. One of the most unusual features of the Scripture of the Ten Kings is its recurring usage of legal terminology, which is of special interest here. Despite their dreadful role as the judges of the dead and the gruesome tortures they inflict upon sinners in hell, the work portrays the kings as agents of compassion, serving a higher purpose. King Yama himself, we are told by the Buddha 会毘卢, will become a Buddha named Puxian 普賢 (Samantabhadra in Sanskrit) in a future lifetime.

While Buddhist influences on the Chinese hells took root in the Scripture of the Ten Kings, the Song-dynasty Compiled Accounts of the Jade Ephemeris (Yuli chao zhuan 玉曆鈔傳) represents a standardized vision of the netherworld as a confluence of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian ideas that dominated the popular perception of the netherworld since the Song dynasty. It maintains the basic bureaucratic structure depicted in the Scripture of the Ten Kings, but alters the names and the or-

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17 Teiser, Scripture of the Ten Kings, p. 8. The earliest surviving copy of the text was written in 908 A.D. However, the earliest reference to the ten kings, by the cleric Daoxuan, dates to 664. Daoxuan mentioned a treatise by the monk Fayun about the ten kings that was lost sometime after the thirteenth century; ibid., pp. 48–49. See also discussion of this text in Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福, Dao Fo shi wang diyu shuo 道佛十王地獄説 (Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1996), pp. 239–88.

18 Teiser, Scripture of the Ten Kings, p. 3. Despite the popularity of the text from the Tang dynasty onward, and its incessant duplication, it was not incorporated into the Buddhist canon until 1912. However, by the end of the tenth century it “was recognized as a noncanonical and indispensable source on King Yama”; ibid., pp. 9, 50.


20 Ibid., p. 168. This terminology doubtlessly contributed to the popular conceptions of righteous human officials, such as Baogong, as office-holders in hell.

21 Ibid., p. 7.

22 Xiao, Dao Fo shi wang diyu shuo, pp. 418–19. The dating of this text is somewhat of a conundrum; legends attribute its origins to a Daoist priest of the 11th c. named Danchi, and the first printing of the text to the 12th c. See also Timothy Brook, Jerome Bourgon, and Gregory
der of some of the courts, replacing Buddhist deities with non-Buddhist figures, and adding an array of sub-hells (xiao diyu 小地獄). According to this text, the dead who arrive at the fifth court of hell ruled by Yama have already undergone tortures in the preceding courts. Here they witness the results of their earthly sins, suffer corporal tortures, and are then sent to the sixteen sub-hells, which are divided according to the nature of the sins committed.\(^{23}\)

Not only was the bureaucratic judicial system of the netherworld modeled after the earthly bureaucracy, but it was intimately tied to it. Certain netherworld administrators even occupied parallel roles in the world of the living and in the realm of the dead. In the Dunhuang manuscript “Han Qinhu hua” 韓擒虎話, for instance, the Sui-dynasty general Han Qinhu takes up the post of an official in the netherworld (yinsi zhi zhu 隘司之主).\(^{24}\) Another famous example is Prefect Cui Ziyu 崔子玉, an official in both administrations of the living and the dead, who appears in the Dunhuang manuscript “Taizong in Hell” (Tang Taizong ru ming ji 唐太宗入冥記), which received a later adaptation in *Journey to the West*.\(^{25}\) Prefect Cui became a popular deity in northern China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.\(^{26}\) He also appears in a Yuan-dynasty play, *The Wrong Creditor* (Yuanjia zhaizhu 冤家債主) by Zheng Tingyu 鄭廷玉, which also mentions an inscription in a temple to Prefect Cui. The play’s protagonist goes to the court of Prefect Cui in order to sue King Yama and his messenger, the Earth God (tudi gong 土地公), since he holds them responsible for the death of his family. Of particular interest to the following discussion is the fact that Prefect Cui, while seated in a netherworld court next to King Yama, mentions Baogong’s double duty in the world of the living and the dead.\(^{27}\)


\(^{25}\) The Dunhuang manuscript of *Taizong in Hell* was translated into English by Arthur Waley, and reprinted in John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U.P., and Columbia U.P., 2000), pp. 1081–82. The story appears in chapters 10–12 of the *Journey to the West*.

\(^{26}\) Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, pp. 217–20. Regarding the connection between the careers of Prefect Cui and Baogong as netherworld officials, see Abe, *Hōkō densetsu no keisei to tenkai* to kenka, pp. 37–38.

Late-imperial views of the afterlife consisted of a mélange of elements from Daoist and Buddhist traditions, sharing a basic bureaucratic framework informed by Tang and Song judicial systems. Daoist funerary rituals paralleled the legal system of the Song, not only in terminology but also by including rites resembling legal procedures, such as interrogation (xun 讯), accusation (he 劫), investigation (kao 考), and the like. Furthermore, the Daoist Ritual Master was regarded as an official responsible for regulating the behavior of spirits and ghosts according to the legal and administrative laws of the Song dynasty.\(^{28}\) Officials of the netherworld were in some cases subjected to “demon codes” (guilü 鬼律) or in others to “celestial codes” (tianlü 天律) that regulated their behavior through legalistic restrictions. The judges of the netherworld were threatened with various punishments (demotion, forced labor, and even death) if they failed to act according to these regulations.\(^{29}\) Insomuch as the regulations resembled the bureaucracy in the world of the living, they projected an idealistic perception of the law, wishing perhaps that the courts in the world of the living would follow in the footsteps of the better-regulated chthonic system.\(^{30}\)

**EARLY PORTRAYALS OF BAOGONG IN THE NETHERWORLD**

The connection between Baogong and King Yama dates back to the lifetime of the historical Bao Zheng 包拯 (999–1062), who was compared by his contemporaries to King Yama for his sternness and unbiased enforcement of the law.\(^{31}\) During Bao Zheng’s service as the prefect of Kaifeng, a popular saying stated that “Bribes and connections will never reach King Yama, old Bao 关節不到, 有閻羅包老.”\(^{32}\) In the centuries following Bao Zheng’s death, his association with the

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\(^{29}\) See Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, pp. 219–21, and Katz, *Divine Justice*, pp. 38–39. One of these codes, the “Heavenly Code as Proclaimed by Nüqing in Vermillion from the Mixed Cave On-High,” was divided into sections, according to specific categories (earth gods, stove god, ghosts of the dead, judges of the underworld, etc); each group was given its own set of regulations.

\(^{30}\) Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China*, p. 221.


\(^{32}\) Franke, *Sung Biographies*, p. 828. Ma translated this saying as: “Wherever justice is not guaranteed, there are the Yama and Old Pao.” Ma’s translation implies that Yama is not identified with Baogong, contrary to Franke’s translation; Ma, “Pao-Kung Tradition,” p. 44.
netherworld expanded further. By the thirteenth century, Baogong was perceived in northern China as a judge in the Court of Swift Retribution of hell (*subao si* 迅報司), one of the seventy-two courts in the netherworld, ruled by the Lord of the Eastern Peak (*dongyue dadi* 東嶽大帝), also known as Lord of Mount Tai. The judge of the Court of Swift Retribution was portrayed as an impartial judge, not only in hell but in the world of the living as well. 

Valerie Hansen quotes an anecdote by Yuan Haowen (1190–1257) according to which Baogong – as the judge in charge of the Court of Swift Retribution – saved a kidnapped girl by assuming the voice of a medium. Hansen also mentions an inscription from Mount Tai dated 1285, which lists seventy-five netherworld offices under three higher supervisors and six courts; Baogong appears among the officers of the netherworld. Wilt Idema has suggested that “Judge Bao’s Office of Speedy Retribution was only a recent addition to the Taishan bureaucracy.”

In the early stages of Baogong’s mythmaking process, his role as a judge in hell was a recurring theme, albeit a minor one. Baogong assumes the position of judge in the Court of Swift Retribution in several northern and southern plays (*zaju* 杂剧 and *nanxi* 南戲) of the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. The play *Little Zhang Murders a Son to Save His Mother* (*Xiao Zhang tu fen er jiu mu* 小張屠焚兒救母), for instance, mentions Baogong’s position as this court’s judge. In the play *Little Butcher Sun* (*Xiao Sun tu* 小孫屠), Baogong is said to reign as judge in the world of the living by day, and serve in the realm of the dead by night.

In *Pilgrimage to Taishan*, p. 54.

In *Pilgrimage to Taishan*, p. 45.

several *cihua* 词話 works whose time of composition falls between the Southern Song and early Ming. In a *cihua* titled *Emperor Renzong Recognizing His Mother* (Renzong ren mu zhuan 仁宗忍母傳), Guo Huai 郭槐 is duped to believe he is being tried in hell, a ruse to coerce him into admitting his crimes; the prison cell he occupies is decorated as a netherworld court, while Baogong masquerades as a judge in hell, and the emperor himself masquerades as King Yama. In another *cihua*, *The Tale of the Early Career of Rescriptor Bao* (Bao daizhi chushen zhuan 包待制出身傳), a fortuneteller informs the young Baogong that he will not only win rank and fame, but that he will also be “Judging at daytime the world of light [the world of man], at night the world of shade [the underworld].” However, these works merely mention Baogong’s chthonic position in passing; they neither elaborate on Baogong’s duties in the netherworld, nor describe the cases that Baogong decides in the courts of the netherworld.

It is important to note that Baogong is not the only figure to assume the position of King Yama in late-imperial Chinese fiction. The Ming-dynasty Judge Xu (Xugong 徐公) also takes Yama’s position in a work titled *Judgments of the Living King Yama* (Huo Yanluo duan an 活閻羅斷案). In *Xiyou bu* 西遊補, Sun Wukong agrees to act as replacement for the previous King Yama, who died of illness.

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41 A collection of *cihua* 词話 dating from the Chenghua 成化 period (1465–1488) of the Ming dynasty and printed in Beijing was discovered in 1967 in the grave of a Ming official outside Shanghai. This collection of prosimetric stories contains eight *cihua* about Baogong. Although the collection was printed in the late-15th c., the composition of the stories probably occurred in the previous two centuries; Idema suggests 1250–1450 as timeframe. The collection is richly decorated with woodblock illustrations, twelve of which depict Baogong sitting in trial. Although these tales could have been recited and chanted before an audience, they were most likely printed for reading. Idema translated all eight in *Judge Bao and the Rule of Law*. See also Abe, *Hōkō densetsu no keisei to tenkai*, pp. 8–13, and Anne McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefable* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 55, 60–61.

42 See a translation of this *cihua* in Idema, *Judge Bao and the Rule of Law*, pp. 67–104.

43 McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefable*, pp. 114–16. McLaren also elaborates on the *cihua* and their connection to exorcism and anti-corruption campaigns during festivals. It is interesting to note that in another *cihua*, titled “Newly Printed Fully Illustrated Chantefable of the Wealthy and Virtuous Kai Zongyi” (“Xin kan quan xiang shuo chang Kai Zongyi fu gui xiao yi zhuan” 新刊全相説唱開宗義富貴孝義傳), it is the Buddha who masquerades as King Yama, in order to test the loyalty and unity of the Kai family; ibid., pp. 54–55, 124–53.


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indicate that King Yama was sometimes regarded more as a title or a bureaucratic position, which can be occupied by different individuals, rather than a specific person, thus breaking away from the Indic roots of Yama as a personified deity. However, since late Ming, King Yama was associated with Baogong more than any other historical or mythical figure. The predominant association of King Yama with the legend of Judge Bao in recent centuries points to an increasingly personified view of Yama as Baogong.47

BAOGONG AS YAMA IN LATE-MING SHORT STORIES

The first work of fiction to describe Baogong’s role as judge of hell in detail is one titled Longtu gongan 龍圖公案,48 an anthology of short courtroom stories that was published in Suzhou in the Wanli period.49 Although the popularity of courtroom (gongan 公案) anthologies waned in the beginning of the seventeenth century, Longtu gongan remained in circulation during the next two centuries, and its tales continued to inspire storytellers and dramatists. Baogong’s relationship with the realm of the dead in late Ming courtroom stories is not uniform. Some stories portray Baogong as assuming the role of King Yama, whereas in other stories from both Longtu gongan and Baijia gongan 百家公案, he descends to the netherworld to assist King Yama or to seek his assistance in solving cases.

Out of the hundred stories in Longtu gongan, Baogong assumes the role of Yama in a dozen that take place in the netherworld. Baogong

47 It is also important to note that during Ming and Qing times, the title Yanwang 閻王 was sometimes used to refer both to King Yama and the other judges of hell. In Baogong-related works, particularly those discussed in the following section, Baogong is identified specifically with King Yama 閻羅王.

48 The historical Bao Zheng was granted the title Auxiliary Academician of the Longtu Pavilion (longtu ge zhi xueshi 龍圖閣直學士) in 1052. See Ma, “Pao-Kung Tradition,” p. 42, and Franke, Sung Biographies, pp. 827–28. Since then, Baogong was often referred to as Longtu in fiction and drama.

49 The full title of this work is Xiu xiang Longtu gongan 繡像龍圖公案, or Illustrated Cases of the Longtu Studio. The author of this anthology, or more likely the editor, is not mentioned. However, the front cover bears the name Ting Wuzhai 聽五齋, whose comments 评论 appear occasionally at the end of each pair of stories. Following the front cover is a four-page preface by Tao Langyuan 陶烺元 (z. Naibin 乃斌). Six other gongan anthologies are related to Longtu gongan, and nearly half the stories in the collection are taken from Baijia gongan 百家公案. Judging by the relationships between these anthologies and the preface by Ting Wuchai, Ma sets the terminus ante quem of Longtu gongan around 1594 or 1597. See Ma, “Pao-Kung Tradition,” pp. 125, 160–91, and Y. W. Ma, “The Textual Tradition of Ming Kung-an Fiction: A Study of the Lung-t’u Kung-an,” HJAS 35 (1975), pp. 190–220. Longtu gongan exists in several versions which include a hundred, sixty-six, or sixty-two stories, organized into ten, eight, or five juan. The version which was available to me in the C. V. Starr East Asian Library at the University of California, Berkeley, contains a hundred stories in five juan.
descends to the netherworld with the help of an “otherworldly bed” (yinchuang 陰床), which enables him to travel between the human realm, the heavens, and the netherworld. All twelve stories share a similar rigid structure, which was probably intended to imitate juridical procedures. These stories are far from the best in the collection; they are didactic, fragmented, and dull. Yau-Woon Ma has suggested that they were written hastily by the compiler in order to reach the round number of one hundred. Whereas most stories in Longtu gongan are derived from other sources, its stories about Baogong’s role as judge in hell, which are analyzed next, do not appear in any other gongan collection, and stand out from the rest of the stories in this anthology, both in terms of style and theme.

Invariably, Baogong’s predominant duty as a judge in hell is to compensate the victims of earthly bureaucratic corruption and malfeasance. In the story “Hidden Honesty, Concealed Integrity” (zhong jie yin ni 忠節隱匿), an honest official is wronged after refusing to bribe his superior; after unsuccessfully appealing to the authorities in the world of the living, he turns to seek justice in the netherworld. In the case that follows, a chaste widow, whose husband died on the battlefield before they were wed, did not receive official recognition since she could not bribe local officials; her indigence forced her to commit suicide, after which she arrived at the netherworld. In both cases, Baogong rewards the injured party with a happy and prosperous life in their next incarnation, while sentencing the corrupt officials to suffer retribution for their crimes. This story not only integrates Baogong’s battle against corruption with King Yama’s duties in the realm of the dead, but also represents Neo-Confucian ideals, such as the chastity of widows, that are repeatedly propagated by the gongan collections.

Baogong’s adamant battle against bureaucratic corruption and malfeasance continues even within the administration of the netherworld. The story “Long Time Bachelor” (jiu guan 久鰥) recounts the case of a gifted scholar named Zhao Neng 趙能, who failed to pass the imperial examinations and never married. His complaint spurs Baogong to question the Lord of Marriage (zhanghun si 掌婚司) and the Lord of Records.

50 The “otherworldly bed” seems to be an original addition of late Ming Baogong-related stories. It also appears in several stories of the Baijia Gongan, and resurfaces again in chapter 27 of the late-19th-c. novel Sanxia wuyi 三俠五義.
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(zhulu si 注祿司), who cannot find Zhao Neng in their records. Further investigation reveals that the scholar’s name was miswritten in the otherworldly records (Zhu 朱 instead of Zhao 趙), thus preventing him from fulfilling his destiny. Baogong writes a memo to the celestial administration, informing all relevant authorities that the scholar named Zhao should be replaced with Zhu; that he will pass the examinations, and shall marry a woman née Wang. In this story, the netherworld courts are portrayed as a complicated administrative system, which suffers from the same bureaucratic shortcomings that permeate the courts on earth. This portrayal is doubtless inspired by earlier depictions of the netherworld, such as those found in Mingbao ji.54 Bureaucratic mistakes in the netherworld are often employed by authors as an opportunity to recount the experiences of a living person who witnessed the courts of hell and lived to tell about it. “Record of a Returning Soul,” for instance, recounts how in the eighth century, the monk Daoming was summoned to the court of King Yama as a result of a case of mistaken identity and later released.55 Nevertheless, unlike earlier works, the emphasis in the tales from Longtu gongan is placed on Baogong’s efforts to eradicate these bureaucratic faults. In fact, “Long Time Bachelor” reaches its zenith when Baogong embarks on an investigation in the netherworld courts, which strikes panic among the demon-officials. Here, in his adamant battle against corruption, the Baogong legend stands in line with his historical persona.

Popular conceptualizations of the netherworld abound with tales of an “eye for an eye” type of retribution that weighs the culprits’ punishments according to the crimes they had committed. Such retribution is also portrayed in several Longtu gongan stories. In “The Rafters Corpse” (shi shu chuan 尸數椽), Baogong condemns to deafness a magistrate who did not listen to the complaints of the people in his next incarnation; and, for his failure to report to his superiors, he is to be reborn a mute as well. In “Falsely Reporting Good and Evil” (shan’e wangbao 善惡罔報), a servant who murdered a man by covering him in snow is doomed to be boiled in hot oil.56 These solutions are in keeping with popular


55 Teiser, Scripture of the Ten Kings, pp. 67–68.

56 This punishment is probably related to the Buddhist and Daoist depictions of the fifth court of hell as “the boiling court.” See Teiser, “‘Having Once Died and Returned to Life,’” pp. 445–46, and Goodrich, Chinese Hells, pp. 44–49, 51, 62, 72–76, and 94–95.
representations of netherworld retribution, marked by the predominant mechanism of meting out punishment by weighing the torture according to the sin committed.

Despite such harsh punishments, Baogong’s role as a netherworld judge, as it is portrayed in *Longtu gongan*, is directed more towards compensating the righteous than punishing the wicked. Considering the gruesome aspects of earthly judiciary processes, on the one hand, and the terrifying portrayals of the courts of the netherworld in later popular literature and art, on the other, it is surprising to discover in these stories a relatively benign judgment process in the afterlife. Ironically, torture is much more prevalent in Baogong stories and dramas that take place in earthly courts. This emphasis on compensation, and Baogong’s surprisingly kind attitude in these stories, draw him closer to the earlier stages in the development of Yama, who was once portrayed as a benign ruler of the dead, the Lord of Ancestors.⁵⁷ It also reflects a prevalent vision of the netherworld in late-imperial fiction and drama as a realm brimming with opportunity; a chance to set history right (as in *Xiyou bu* 西游補) or correct contemporary social and personal wrongs (as in *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭).⁵⁸

Baogong’s unbiased judgment in the realm of the dead does not offer any hope of affecting one’s judgment in the afterlife through ritual, that is, by bribing netherworld personnel or appealing for heavenly forgiveness. Embedded in this depiction of the netherworld courts is the idea that leading a virtuous life is the only path to take in order both to avoid afterlife retribution and to achieve a good reincarnation. This didactic moral was somewhat in keeping with the then-popular “morality books” (*shan shu* 善書),⁵⁹ only without leaving much hope of manipulating judgment in the afterlife by accumulating counter-merit.

*Longtu gongan* stories of Baogong in the netherworld also address tensions between the concept of karmic retribution and the Chinese kinship system. In “Posterity Cut Off” (*juesi* 絕嗣), a man complains that he never had any offspring despite his virtuous character, whereas a certain sinful acquaintance had many sons. When examining the Virtue Register (*shan bu* 善簿) and the Transgression Register (*e bu* 恶簿), Baogong discovers that the current state of affairs is a direct result of the accumulated merit in both men’s ancestral lineage. Thus, the righteous man suffers retribution for the transgressions committed by his

Baogong as King Yama

ancestors, while the sinful man enjoys the fruits of his ancestors’ merit. Baogong’s solution follows the logic of personal karmic retribution; the righteous man will be rewarded in his next incarnation, whereas the sinful shall suffer retribution for his transgressions in the next life.

The concept of inherited moral debt existed in China prior to the introduction of Buddhism. In Qin- and Han-period commentaries of the *Yijing*, disasters were attributed to moral transgressions committed by family members. Late-Han Daoist scriptures refer to this notion as “inherited burden” (*chengfu*). In his *Baopuzi neipian*, Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343 AD) states that one is punished for one’s sins during one’s lifetime, but if one dies before the “counters and markers” of one’s sins are exhausted, then “the curse extends to the descendants.”

In an early commentary on the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三國志注, illness is portrayed as retribution for one’s moral digression. According to the third-century *Xiang’er* 想爾 commentary to the *Laozi*, one’s transgressions would also inflict disaster upon one’s descendants. A fourth-century Shangqing text titled *The Sword Scripture* (Jianjing 剑經) refers to it both as *chengfu* and as “dark virtue” (*yinde*). The *Great Petition for Sepulchral Plaints* (Da zhong song zhang 大冢訟章), a medieval Celestial Masters ritual, aims to absolve the living from the polluting transgressions of their ancestors. The notion of accumulated good


merit is equally old; it is promoted by the *Yijing*, *Huainanzi*, and *Tai-ping jing*, as well as by several Shangqing texts, such as the above-mentioned *Sword Scripture* and *Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits* (*Ling shu zi wen shang jing* 灵書紫文上經). In later centuries, Buddhist notions of karmic retribution and reincarnation converged with popular conceptualizations of inherited moral debt, which was increasingly conceived in legal and bureaucratic terms.

Interestingly, in *Longtu gongan*, not all cases brought before Baogong in the netherworld relate to the dead. Conflicts in the world of the living also find their way to the courts of hell, in search of a better judicial process. For instance, in “Evil Teacher Wrongs His Pupils” (*e shi wu tu* 恶师误徒), a man hires a teacher, only to discover later that he is illiterate. The man accuses the teacher of fraud, while the teacher claims he has been mistreated. They descend to the netherworld and bring their grievance before Baogong, who finds both men guilty; the teacher is found guilty of fraud, and the employer – of negligence. The final verdict is that in their next incarnations, the teacher will be the employer’s water buffalo, and in the following round of reincarnations, the employer will be the teacher’s pig, thus achieving some level of equality between the two parties. In “Confused Fortunes” (*qiao zhuo dian dao* 巧拙颠倒), a living woman descends to hell to complain to Baogong about her unsuccessful marital match to an ugly, untalented man. Baogong, half mockingly, promises the woman a reward in her next life if she serves her husband faithfully in this one.

These descents to the courts of the netherworld in order to solve issues in the world of the living are significant in two ways. First, they portray the courts of the netherworld as a judicial alternative to that on earth, criticizing its shortcomings and inefficiency. The fact that the courts of the netherworld appear less threatening than those in the world of the living is enough to suggest that the earthly system is profoundly flawed. Second, the stories indicate a shift in the role of King Yama. In its various transformations, Yama’s portrayal vacillated between demonic and benign. Although some of Yama’s demonic aspects also appear in

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68 Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 360. This text was revealed to the Daoist Yang Xi (330–386?) and later included in the first of the tripartite divisions of the Daoist canon; *ibid.*, pp. 275–76.
late-imperial Chinese perceptions of the netherworld courts as terrifying prisons and chambers of torture, in the earlier stages of Yama’s assimilation in China, he was portrayed as a rather compassionate judge and keeper of records.\textsuperscript{70} In his convergence with the Baogong lore, it is actually Yama’s earlier characteristics as a benign ruler of the realm of the dead that are more pronounced. In the \textit{Longtu gongan} courtroom stories, Baogong, acting as King Yama, appears as an otherworldly authority responsible for the destinies of all living things, whose duties include both punishing and compensating. In this respect, he is not only the lord of the dead, but of the living as well. This portrayal, in fact, comes closer to the ancient Indic depiction of Yama than to late-imperial Chinese visualizations of the netherworld, where the judges of hell are depicted as terror-striking demonic authorities.

The frequent exchanges between the realm of the living and the dead are also reminiscent of Yama’s ambivalent image as a deity responsible for the fortunes of mankind. The tantric visualization of Yama, for instance, was more focused on longevity than on retribution.\textsuperscript{71} It is sometimes argued that the late-imperial conception of the netherworld and its judges and functionaries has gradually shifted from a benign realm of the dead, to a terrifying array of torture chambers and cruel prosecutors. The portrayal of Baogong as King Yama in these late-Ming courtroom stories is a digression from this narrative, and seems to complicate our understanding of the netherworld judicial process.

Although Baogong’s duties in hell vary somewhat from story to story, his chief responsibility is rewarding righteous men and women who were wronged during their lifetimes, and in most cases compensation to them is bestowed only in the next incarnation. Philosophical discussions concerning karmic retribution, morality, or eschatology are entirely absent from these stories; they project a somewhat simplistic and didactic conceptualization of judgment in the afterlife. Baogong stories that take place in the netherworld portray it as a realm closely tied to the world of the living. The courts of the netherworld mirror the bureaucracy on earth, including its shortcomings, and interact with it by borrowing its officials and imitating its procedures. This fluidity between the two realms and the bureaucratic nature of the netherworld echo ancient Chinese beliefs concerning the afterlife that predate the arrival of Buddhism in China. As a rectifier of wrongs and compensator of those who suffered injustice, Baogong as Yama fulfills a vital exor-

\textsuperscript{70} One of Yama’s manifestations is Mara, the enemy of the Buddha. See Siklos, “Evolution of the Buddhist Yama,” p. 179.

\textsuperscript{71} Faure, “Indic Influences on Chinese Mythology,” pp. 52–58.
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cistic role as well; by offering justice to the dead, he prevents their return to the world of the living as malevolent ghosts. His role as a judge in hell, therefore, should also be understood in relation to the need to separate the worlds of the living and the dead, and avert dangerous, illegitimate crossovers between hell and earth.

Baogong’s constant battle against corruption, as described, above, transcends the realm of man and continues to preoccupy him even in the realm of the dead. In a way, the mechanisms of karmic retribution render the judges of hell obsolete. Yama’s relatively sympathetic characteristics as judge notwithstanding, the netherworld bureaucracy was largely perceived as suffering from the ailments of corruption and malefeasance, and therefore potentially unreliable and cruel. In other words, judgment in the afterlife somehow had become a far cry from the ancient view of karmic retribution. In this way, Baogong’s role as King Yama symbolizes a desire to rectify the shortcomings of both the earthly and otherworldly bureaucracies. Furthermore, by judging the living in his netherworld court, Baogong is regarded as responsible for the destinies of mankind, which draws him closer to the responsibilities of the Indic Yama. In this respect, Baogong’s role in the netherworld redefines the workings of karmic retribution, as well as the relationship between the human and netherworld bureaucratic systems.

Since their publication in the late Ming, the stories of Baogong in the netherworld have reverberated in works of fiction and drama, shaping Baogong’s popular image, and in turn his religious veneration, especially his ties to the netherworld. Regional dramatic adaptations given in late Ming anthologies, as well as local versions of earlier zaju and chuanqi dramas, show Baogong in action as Yama.\(^72\) For instance, in the Beijing drama *Tanyin shan* 探陰山, Baogong descends to the netherworld to consult the Registers of Life and Death (*shengsi bu* 生死簿) before reaching a verdict in a certain case.\(^73\) In contemporary ritual, worshippers in Yama temples and in Baogong temples prayed for good

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\(^72\) Ding lists numerous examples, such as the Yue play *Baogong shen Kang Qi* 包公審康七, and the Nanchang play *Yao qian shu* 插錢樹; see Ding, *Su wenxue zhong de Baogong*, pp. 370–88. Regional dramas about Baogong have yet to be documented and studied extensively.

fortune in this life and the next. Baogong’s image, as a severe judge, on the one hand, and an incorruptible compensator for the lack of justice in the world of the living, on the other, represents an interesting moment of conflation of the Indian and the Chinese models of the afterlife, and played a pivotal role in his assimilation into Chinese culture.

BAOGONG’S MAGICAL MIRRORS

Although we have Baogong as a devoted judge, with an acute sense of justice, sentencing the souls of the dead is anything but a simple task. Netherworld officers and their registers fall short of providing adequate information about the lives and mentalities of the dead to achieve just and accurate verdicts. In the story “Longevity and Premature Death Distributed Unevenly” (Shouyao bujun 寿夭不均), a presumably righteous man who feels wronged for his short lifespan pleads his case before Baogong in the netherworld. Baogong discusses the matter with the Lord of Morality (shan e si 善惡司) and the Lord of Longevity (zhu shou guan 注壽官), but cannot reach a verdict. Something about this man’s case seems to be wrong, but Baogong cannot pin it down. Fortunately, Baogong possesses an instrument surpassing all other means of weighing justice: a “sin-revealing mirror” (niejing 孽鏡) that reflects one’s true nature and immoral deeds in life. Gazing into the mirror, Baogong watches the plaintiff’s life unfolds before his eyes. Not only does the mirror capture this man’s deeds and misdeeds chronologically, as in a movie, but it also allows Baogong to peer into the man’s mind and examine his innermost thoughts. In this story, Baogong discovers that despite the upright appearance of the complainant, he is actually evil at heart. The mirror, in other words, provides a window onto one’s soul.

This extraordinary mirror changes the rules of the game; no longer do otherworld authorities need make do with confused mounds of paperwork or toil like their counterparts on earth to extract confessions from plaintiffs and defendants through torture, as we saw. Information on the conduct of mankind had so far been accessible to otherworldly authorities only in textual form through various documents and registers, such as the above mentioned Virtue Register (shan bu 善簿), Transgression Register (e bu 惡簿), and Registers of Life and Death (shengsi bu 生死簿). The mirror, however, provides an almost unmediated visual representation of deeds. In reflecting one’s past and present, the mir-

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ror is an embodiment of the rule of karma. This visual effect brings to mind the Western scales of justice, but in this case the mirror reveals actual deeds, and is not an abstract tool that simply quantifies them. Supplying the judge with this visual depiction enables more accurate sentencing while transforming this episode into a remarkably theatrical and memorable scene.\(^{75}\)

The “sin-revealing mirror” is a recurrent motif in late-imperial Chinese literary and visual representations of hell, and in particular of the fifth court ruled by King Yama. It appears to be a Chinese invention, mentioned, since the seventh century, in a variety of Chinese literary and visual sources portraying the netherworld.\(^{76}\) It appears under the same name (niejing) in the Compiled Accounts of the Jade Ephemeris, where the mirror is located in the first court of the netherworld, along with the registers of deeds.\(^{77}\) Here, those with numerous transgressions are led to a “sin-revealing mirror platform” (niejing tai), from where they can watch their misdeeds in life. The mirror appears even earlier, in the Tang-era Scripture of the Ten Kings, where it is called the “mirror of deeds” (yejing).\(^{78}\) The mirror is stationed at the fifth court of King Yama, and the souls of the dead reach the court on the seventh day:

Yama rāja puts an end to the sounds of dispute, but in their hearts sinners are resentful and unwilling. With their hair yanked and their heads pulled up to look in the mirror of actions, they begin to know that affairs from previous lives are rendered distinct and clear.\(^{79}\)

While the visualization of the netherworld in Baogong stories seems to be indebted to both the Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Compiled Accounts of the Jade Ephemeris, Baogong’s sin-revealing mirror is closer to the model presented in the former, whose composers gave visual potential to the mirror by including illustrations of King Yama using it in the fifth court to judge the dead.\(^{80}\)

\(^{75}\) Abe Yasuki discusses some of Baogong’s extraordinary instruments of justice in literature and drama; Abe, Hokō densetsu no keisei to tenkai, pp. 43–59.

\(^{76}\) Teiser, Scripture of the Ten Kings, pp. 175 and 188. Bernard Faure discusses the mirror briefly in relation to esoteric Buddhism in Faure, “Indic Influences on Chinese Mythology,” p. 56.

\(^{77}\) See Xiao, Dao Fo shi wang dityu shuo, p. 394, and Brook, Bourgon, and Blue, Death by a Thousand Cuts, pp. 128–29.


\(^{79}\) Teiser, Scripture of the Ten Kings, pp. 213–14.

\(^{80}\) Ibid, p. 184, plates 8a–8b.
By Ming times, the mirror became a frequent symbol of truth, impartiality, and correct judgment in fiction and drama. One particularly noteworthy example is a famous episode of netherworld judgment in *Xiyou bu* in which Sun Wukong, assuming the role of King Yama, uses a “treachery-reflecting water-mirror” when judging the treacherous Qin Kuai.\(^{81}\) *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義) mentions a mirror that reveals evil thoughts, as in the above Baogong story.\(^{82}\) In Ming drama and fiction, the mirror is used in two ways: either as an instrument of judgment, or as a symbol of impartiality and selflessness in passing judgment. Courtroom stories of Baogong assuming the role of King Yama conflate these two uses, and the mirror motif came to be identified with the judge and the process of judgment — together.

In netherworld courtroom stories, the mirror seems to replace Yama’s acolytes (the companion deities Siming and Silu, Taishan fujun, and the God of Five Paths), whose main responsibility is to report the good and evil deeds of mankind.\(^{83}\) Furthermore, the mirror’s accuracy also alleviates the burden of confession through torture, which plagued the Chinese judicial system in both realms. Thus, it offers the means for an efficient, just, and near-painless courtroom experience for the deceased. In these courtroom stories, Baogong gradually transforms into a one-man justice system, neither cruel nor benign. He comes to represent an ideal form of justice: quick, indifferent, and free from bureaucratic maladies.

Another recurring mirror motif in late-imperial Chinese literature, and particularly in Baogong-related stories, is the “demon-revealing mirror” (照妖鏡, or 照魔鏡) — a magical mirror that distinguishes between humans and demonic beings.\(^{84}\) For instance, in the famous novel *Xiyou ji*, Sun Wukong employs “demon-revealing mirrors” on multiple occasions.\(^{85}\) In *Nanyou ji* 南遊記, when Huaguang 華光 descends to Fengdu to rescue his mother and disguises himself as a celestial messenger, the guards of Fengdu use a “demon-revealing mirror” to reveal his true form.\(^{86}\) An early example of this mirror is also found in the *cihua* tale “Dragon-Design Bao Sentences the White

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83 Regarding Yama’s acolytes, see Faure, “Indic Influences on Chinese Mythology,” pp. 46–60.
85 See chapters 6, 45, and 58.
Weretiger” (包龍圖斷白虎精傳), when Baogong summons a Celestial Master to expose the true identity of a weretiger, the Celestial Master suggests they use a mirror (“Karmascope” in Idema’s translation) to expose the weretiger. In the drama The Five Flower Cave (五花洞), Baogong uses a “demon-reflecting mirror” to distinguish between a human couple and a couple of animal-spirits impersonating them. The “demon-reflecting mirror” reappears in the nineteenth-century novel Sanxia wuyi 三俠五義, where it also saves Baogong’s life. The relevant scene can now be seen in a temple mural at the Kaifeng-gong temple in Daliao, Taiwan: depicted is the young Baogong holding the mirror while escaping from a cave.

Although the origin of these extraordinary mirrors is unclear, one possibility is exorcistic and funerary rituals. In regional dramas, for instance, the mirror is used not only to reveal the demons’ true form, but to combat them as well. An early reference to a similar magical mirror is found in The Secret Rites of the Spells of the Divine Emissary the Immovable One, translated by Vajrabodhi (662–732), where the mirror is used in a Tantric Buddhist ritual involving spirit possession. In late-imperial China, bronze mirrors for quelling demons were buried along with the deceased as funerary sacrifices. In the late-Ming novel Beiyou ji 北游記, a “demon-reflecting mirror” is used by a demon named Fu Ying 副應 to combat the Dark Warrior (玄武, also known as Zhenwu 真武) and his horde of generals, who are in fact converted demons. Since in late-Ming courtroom stories Baogong assumes the position of King Yama in hell and the role of exorcist in the world of the living, the symbolic significance of sin-revealing and demon-quelling mirrors most likely informed his image as an impartial judge, cum exorcist.

Baogong’s extraordinary mirrors also left a mark on popular oral traditions. Folktales about Baogong’s mirrors particularly abound in

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87 A translation of this tale is in Idema, Judge Bao and the Rule of Law, pp. 105–32.
88 Ibid., p. 128, note 7.
90 In chapter 2 of Sanxia wuyi, Baogong’s second aunt repeatedly attempts to assassinate him. After failing to poison him, she tricks him into falling into a deserted well. Fortunately, Baogong is saved by a mysterious mirror he finds there that shows him the way out of the well. See Deng Shaoji and Wang Jun, the Seven Heroes and Five Gallants (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2005), pp. 14–15.
91 Ding, Su wenxue zhong de Baogong, pp. 259, 369–70, and 404.
92 Strickmann, Chinese Magical Medicine, pp. 206–7.
93 McLaren, Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefable, p. 25.
94 See Yu Xiangdou, Beifang Zhenwu xuan tian shangdi chushen zhizhuan 北方真武玄天上帝出身志傳 (Shanghai: Guben xiaoshuo jicheng, guji chubanshe, 1990), pp. 202–3. For an
Anhui and Henan, where such stories are linked to the history of local temples and scenic spots. Some go as far as to draw a connection between Baogong’s mirrors and the crescent moon on his forehead, claiming that the crescent moon is a mirror inlaid into his forehead.\textsuperscript{95} The mirrors became essential images of Baogong as the ultimate judge and a key feature in his iconography as well.

**THE ZHA-GUILLOTINE**

The zha, a guillotine-like instrument of execution comprised of two vertical axes, is a prime example of Baogong’s persistent chthonic association in popular imagination. In the nineteenth-century novel *Sanxia wuyi*, Baogong receives three zha-guillotines, each intended for the execution of criminals of a different social rank: a dog-shaped zha for commoners, a tiger-shaped zha for officials, and a dragon-shaped zha for the highest echelons of society, that is, high officials and members of the imperial family.\textsuperscript{96} The design of these curious instruments is the result of a word play between Baogong and his clever advisor Gong-sun Ce. However, the zha are used only in a few incidents in *Sanxia wuyi*, and it appears that they serve more as a deterrent than as routine instruments of execution. By granting him the three zha, the emperor bestows absolute judicial authority, allowing Baogong to transcend bureaucratic obstacles, corruption, and the influence of powerful individuals, and to lay down the law as he sees fit. The role of the three zha in the novel is very similar to that of two particular symbols Baogong receives from the emperor in Yuan plays: a sword and a golden badge that allow him to decide cases without consulting his superiors.\textsuperscript{97} Although *Sanxia wuyi* depicts Baogong as a mere mortal, stripped of any

\textsuperscript{95} Ding, *Su wenxue zhong de Baogong*, pp. 243–52.

\textsuperscript{96} This storyline takes place in chapter 9. See also Susan Blader, “A Critical Study of the San-xia wu-yi and its Relationship to the Long-t’u Kung-an Song-book,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1977); idem, *Tales of Magistrate Bao and His Valiant Lieutenants* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U.P., 1998); idem, “Oral Narrative and its Transformation into Print: The Case of Bai Yutang,” in Vibeke Bordahl, ed., *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 1998), pp. 167–69; and Song, *Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. It is interesting to note that this focus on rank and social segregation is a deviation from the general image of Baogong, and also contradicts the principles of the historical Bao Zheng as presented in his biographies.

supernatural abilities or otherworldly duties, the appearance of the zha is a remnant of Baogong’s past role as a judge in hell, reminding us of an earlier stage of his mythmaking process.

The origins of the zha in Chinese literature seem to be rooted in King Yama’s fifth court of hell, as described already. Certain temples dedicated to Yama, bearing no connection to Baogong, also house zha sculptures (see figure 1). Wolfram Eberhard describes the zha as the typical instrument of torture in the fifth court, and lists several Taiwanese temples where he saw this instrument. Vincent Durand-Dastès addresses the religious significance of Baogong’s instruments of torture and execution by highlighting the connection between the zha and ritualistic instruments of exorcistic law-enforcement (fa bao 法寶). In addition, he notes that the execution mode of cutting a man in half, or yao zhan 腰斬, is borrowed from ritualistic contexts, where it is associated with vanquishing otherworldly menaces. Interestingly, Durand-Dastès infers that cutting the criminal off at the waist might symbolize the weighing of justice, as suggested by the expression heng zha 衡鍘, meaning “balancing guillotine.”

By the end of the nineteenth century, literary and visual representations of Baogong and the zha were frequent. Several chuanqi and regional dramas dating to late Ming, such as the Wanli-period plays Zhenzhu ji 珍珠記 and Taofu ji 桃符記, mention the zha as one of Baogong’s staple characteristics, along with his sternness and notorious humorlessness. The scripture “Lü zu shi jiang yu zun xin Yuli chaozhuan Yanluo jing” 吕祖師降諭遵信玉曆鈔傳閻王經 Durand-Dastès depicts as Baogong presiding over the fifth court of hell, punishing culprits with the zha. A Zhejiang baojuan dated 1844, Maihua zhuan baojuan 賣花傳寶卷, portrays Baogong executing Cao Guojiu 曹國舅 with a zha. In illustrations depicting the seventh and eighth hells from the Vidor collection of the National Museum of History in Taipei, Baogong is

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598 For instance, I came across a tiger-shaped zha in a Taiwanese temple dedicated to King Yama (Yanluo dian 閻羅殿) in Gaoliong 高雄. Curiously, although this temple does not include any references to Baogong, it appears under the section of Baogong temples in the guidebook “Taiwan miao shenzhuan 台灣廟神傳.”
599 Eberhard, Guilt and Sin in Traditional China, p. 54.
604 Cao Guojiu is one of the Eight Immortals, a mythical group of immortals celebrated since the Tang dynasty in poetry, drama, fiction, art, and material culture. Regarding the story cycle of Cao Guojiu, see Wu Guangzheng 與光正, Baxian gushi xitong kaolun 八仙故事係
seen interrogating a kneeling woman and watching a man being cut in half by a zha. Baogong’s facial appearance in these illustrations is identical to that used when made-up for the stage: it consisted of a black face and a crescent moon on his forehead. This iconography persists in an illustration of King Yama, seated in the fifth court surrounded by his bailiffs. In front of him, at the center of the picture, is a tiger-shaped instrument, identical to the zha, on which is written “tiger knife hell 虎刀地獄,” suggesting the existence of a sub-hell where this instrument is used. Two demons operate this blade as they chop a man at the waist.

The zha had an enormous impact on the popular imagination concerning Baogong. Nowadays, numerous Baogong temples in mainland China and Taiwan house sculptures of the three zha (see figures 2 and 3). The fact that local dramas across China portray Baogong executing criminals with the zha and that so many zha replicas are in Baogong temples indicate that the zha have become one of Baogong’s permanent pan-Chinese cultural icons.

BAOGONG AS YAMA IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Baogong veneration has gone hand in hand with Baogong lore; nowadays, whether at government-sponsored sites commemorating the historical Bao Zheng or at rural, privately-operated temples for the legendary Baogong, history and fiction are closely intertwined.

105 Paul Vidor and the National Museum of History (Guoli lishi bowuguan 国立歷史博物館), Ten Kings of Hades: The Vidor Collection 十殿閻王, 魏伯儒捐贈 (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1984), pp. 55, 60, 67, 69, and 76. Information plaques at the Kaifeng-fu museum 開封府 in Kaifeng, Henan, also address the origins of Baogong’s iconography in drama.


107 Ibid, pp. 35–37. Additional illustrations of the zha are found on pages 60, 67, 69, and 76. A very similar representation of the zha also appears in an illustration of the sixth court of hell in (n.a.) Diyouthou 地獄游記 (Taizhong: Shexiang tang zazhishe, 1986), p. 8.
Scattered across mainland China and Taiwan, most Baogong temples do not maintain connections with other Baogong temples, or even know of their existence. Nevertheless, one prominent feature shared by all Baogong temples is their preoccupation with various aspects of the Baogong myth, shaped by a millennium of popular culture. Central to Baogong’s mythical persona, as demonstrated in the previous sections, is his association with judgment in the afterlife, and particularly with the position of King Yama of the fifth court of hell. This aspect has had a large impact on the way he is worshiped.

The historical Baogong has been venerated continuously since the Northern Song dynasty in his hometown of Hefei and in the ancestral temple of the Bao clan in Baogong zhen, Anhui province. The earliest concrete evidence I have encountered of Baogong worship outside the Hefei area is a stele dated to the fourth year of the Ming-dynasty Chenghua reign (1468) located at the Baogong ci in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province. Moreover, certain courtroom stories about Baogong from the same time describe his being venerated by grateful-commoners. In Taiwan, the oldest Baogong temple dates back to the eighteenth century, and among the thirty-six Baogong temples recorded in Qing-dynasty and Republican-era local gazetteers examined by Abe Yasuki, four are still operating (located in Anhui, Henan, and Guangdong provinces). New Baogong temples were established in mainland China and Taiwan in the latter half of the twentieth century, and...
more are now under construction. Following the enormous success of television dramas about Baogong in the 1980s and 1990s, a surge of visitors and donations swept Taiwanese Baogong temples. It would be difficult to tally precisely the number of Baogong temples in current operation, but a very modest estimate would be around twenty temples in mainland China and thirty temples in Taiwan.

Baogong Park 包公园 in the city of Hefei, Anhui province, is the largest compound dedicated to Baogong in China. It contains not only a ci temple, but also the tombs of Bao Zheng and his closest family members. The temple itself was established in the mid-nineteenth century by the statesman Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 (also a native of the Hefei region), and renovated in 1981. In recent years the temple has become a local landmark and a site of political pilgrimage by party officials who go there to praise Bao Zheng’s celebrated incorruptibility. Despite its attempts at historicity, the layout of the temple is heavily indebted to the fictional character of Baogong to such a degree that one finds it hard to draw a line between history and myth. For instance, Bao Zheng’s statue in the main hall is accompanied by his four knights-errant (who made their debut in Ming vernacular fiction) and sculptures of the three animal-headed zha (featured in illustrations of hell and in Sanxia wuyi). Moreover, in other wings of the compound, life-sized statues reenact scenes from famous Baogong stories. The temple not only attracts tourists, but also worshippers on pilgrimage (jinxiang 進香) there, as well as spirit-mediums who come to commune with Baogong’s spirit.

The Baogong miao 包公廟, situated amidst fields on the outskirts of Shangqiu 商丘, Henan province, is an interesting example of a privately-operated temple for the legendary judge. It was built in 1982 by a farmer named Wang Zuncai 王尊才, who still resides near the temple. The temple is usually closed and does not receive visitors regularly, except during Spring Festival celebrations, when the basement is used as storage and a backstage for processions. Stone inscriptions in the

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72–89. It is important to note that Baogong is also revered in temples in which he is not the main deity. See Katz, Divine Justice, p. 95.

114 The tombs were originally located outside Hefei. They suffered damage during the Great Leap Forward, when the area was transformed into a steel factory. The tombs were only moved to the park compound in the late 1990s. See also Chen Guidi 陈桂樫 and Chuntao 春桃, Baogong yigu ji 包公遺骨記 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005).

115 The image of Bao Zheng/Baogong in contemporary public discourse about widespread corruption in the ranks of the Chinese government deserves further research.

116 This is according to Mrs. Zhao Huiying 趙會英 of the temple’s staff, whom I interviewed in 2010.
court yard make several attempts at historicity; they claim, for instance, that the temple was first established in the Song dynasty following a visit of the historical Bao Zheng to the area, and was later rebuilt in the twentieth century as a show of gratitude by the locals for Baogong’s miraculous assistance during the Japanese occupation and the famine of 1960. The inspiration for the design of the temple’s rooms came from an illustrated version of *Sanxia wuyi*, which Mr. Wang laid out to show me. Two of the temple’s halls contain morbid reenactments of scenes from Baogong stories with life-sized statues made of wood and papier-mâché. One of them shows Baogong, with a black face sporting a white crescent, seated behind a desk and attended by three courtroom constables on either side, while at the far end of the room lies a man who has been beheaded by a dog-headed *zha* (see figures 3 and 4). This temple illustrates many of the shared features of mainland Baogong temples – the connections with the historical Bao Zheng and the narratives and iconography.

Baogong temples in mainland China suffered greatly throughout the previous century; only a fraction of the temples remain, and their scale of operation is significantly reduced. Although Baogong was worshipped as a judge in hell in mainland China in the past, nowadays his chthonic position plays only a minor role in his veneration. Nevertheless, most mainland temples still commemorate Baogong’s chthonic position in one way or another. The Baogong ci 包公祠 of Hefei and Zhaoqing (see figure 5), for instance, address Baogong’s role as a judge in hell in couplets hanging in the main hall. The Baogong ci and the Kaifeng fu 開封府 in Kaifeng mention this role on information plaques that hang in side rooms. The Baoxiang fu 包相府 in Guangdong sports a mural depicting Baogong listening to the pleas of the dead, while the adjacent Baomo yuan 資墨園 contains murals and carvings portraying Baogong conducting trials in hell. Baogong’s legendary instruments of execution, the *zha*, appear in most Baogong temples in mainland China and Taiwan, even in temples that do not portray Baogong as King Yama.

117 Anne S. Goodrich records how Baogong was worshipped as King Yama in 1932 in the temple Shiba diyu miao 十八地獄廟 in Beijing. See Goodrich, *Chinese Hells*, p. 74. Currently, Baogong’s figure as a paragon of justice and incorruptibility is used, somewhat paradoxically, by both state officials (to maintain an image of honest public service) and the people (to criticize state officials). In my conversations with worshippers and temple staff members, I was given the impression that veneration of Baogong might invite undesired attention from government authorities, since it is often associated with criticism of state bureaucracy and its widespread corruption.
Baogong’s chthonic duties feature more prominently in temples dedicated to Baogong across Taiwan, where he is often worshipped as King Yama alongside Dizang and other officers of hell. A couplet at the entrance to the Mingsheng gong 明聖宮 temple in Taipei (see figures 6 and 7), established in 1941, reads:

In rewarding and punishing the multitude he does not tire day or night,
Dealing with the yin [realm] and the yang [realm],
In his authority over the people,
Justly and publicly he distinguishes virtue from malice.”\(^{118}\)

Haiqing gong 海青宮 Temple near Santiao lun 三條侖, on the western coast of Taiwan, is the largest and oldest Baogong temple on the island.\(^{119}\) It was established in 1738, following the vision of a local villager in which King Yama commanded him to establish a temple in his name. The vision featured a boat reaching the shore carrying the Bao family’s books, Baogong’s statue, and two wooden signs that read “The Hall of the Kings of Hell” and “Prince Yama.”\(^{120}\) Today, the temple enjoys immense popularity and attracts worshippers from near and far who communicate with the spirit of Baogong in the netherworld.\(^{121}\) Many visitors are accompanied by spirit-mediums and flock there especially on weekends. Around the courtyard, the temple’s clerks work diligently, filing and stamping indictments and confessions that will be presented to the judges of hell.

In Chinese and Taiwanese temples, Baogong’s position in the netherworld is viewed, with some variations, either as concomitant with his official position on earth, or as a position assigned to him after his death. Baogong is most frequently portrayed in temples as an incorruptible judge who fulfills a double role in serving both the realms of the living and the dead, styled after his portrayal in fiction and drama. Some temples hold that the historical Bao Zheng assumed the position of King Yama after his death.\(^{122}\) For instance, the hagiography of King Yama in Haiqing gong Temple’s records is, in fact, a summary of

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\(^{118}\) 賞罰群黎不免晝夜辦陰陽, 司權萬姓正真公明分善惡.

\(^{119}\) See also description of this temple in Abe, Hokō densetsu no keisei to tenkai, pp. 489–94.

\(^{120}\) According to interviews with temple employees I conducted in 2009 and to a temple written work titled “Zhui ben su yuan zhao ji ding ding” 追本溯源肇基鼎定, printed in 2007.

\(^{121}\) According to the temple’s staff, these mediums arrive individually, usually together with the worshippers who hired them, and are not associated with, or paid by, the temple’s management.

\(^{122}\) This belief is rooted in a cycle of folktales discussed in Ding, Su wenxue zhong de Baogong, pp. 188–98.
Bao Zheng’s biography from Song-dynasty historiography. Qingtian tang Baogong miao 青天堂包公廟 Temple, in Puli 埔里, central Taiwan, published a prayer scroll for King Yama that opens with a biography of the historical Bao Zheng. It recounts how Baogong was assigned the position of King Yama by the Jade Emperor for his loyalty and filial devotion.

A unique account of Baogong’s links to the netherworld is given by Kaifeng gong Baogong miao 开封宮包公廟 Temple in Daliao village 大寮村, southern Taiwan (see figure 8). According to the hagiography of Baogong there, he was an incarnation of the Big Dipper. After Baogong died, he passed through the ten courts of hell and became Lord Ma (Maguogong 馬國公). As Lord Ma, he served as the ruler of the netherworld and, as a reward for his service, was later granted another hundred years of life on earth. Hence, in 1415 he reincarnated as the official Liu Yuyun 劉玉暈, a prison inspector who requested to be transferred to oversee Baogong’s temple, so that he could “dwell among the devotees and bestow fortune upon worshippers.” This hagiography also identifies the spirit of Baogong and Lord Ma with the Stellar God of Literature (wendian xing jun 文典星君). Finally, the record describes the divine inspiration for the establishment of this temple following a revelation of Baogong through a spirit-medium in 1967, when a session of spirit-writing produced a poem conveying the god’s wish that a temple for Lord Ma be built there.

The identification of Baogong with King Yama in Taiwanese religious worship is also celebrated in popular morality books, such as Journey to Purgatory (Diyu youji 地獄遊記), attributed to the god Jigong 濟公 and composed throughout a series of spirit-writing sessions. This book has been distributed to the public, free of charge, in temples throughout Taiwan since 1978. Currently, the book is also distributed in several Baogong temples. We read that during a visit to the fifth court of hell, the protagonists Jigong and Mr. Yang 揚生 are invited to have tea with

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123 In the temple’s literature, it appears under the title “Yanluo tianzi shengping shilue” 閻羅天子生平事略.
124 See also description of this temple in Abe, Hoko densetsu no keisei to tenkai, pp. 498–501.
125 This notion also appears in several academic works but without references to its source. See, for instance, Li Yongping 李永平, Baogong wenxue ji qi chuanbo 包公文學及其傳播 (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 2007), pp. 383–85; Chen, Yuhuang dadi xin yang, pp. 47–49, 111; Ma, Zhongguo minjie zhushen, pp. 72–89.
126 Regarding the Daliao Kaifeng gong Baogong temple and its connection to Lord Ma, see Abe, Hoko densetsu no keisei to tenkai, pp. 501–4.
BAOGONG AS KING YAMA

King Yama, during which they discuss, among other things, his identity as Bao Zheng in the world of the living. In short, despite the thematic and geographic disparity between Baogong temples in mainland China and Taiwan, they share a vision of Baogong that is indebted to his chthonic position as King Yama.

EPILOGUE

Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) recounts a strange event during a performance of the drama Bao Judges the Black Pot Case (Bao xiaosu duan wu pen 包孝肅斷烏盆) by a theatre group in Guangdong during the Qing-dynasty Qianlong reign. As the actor playing Baogong went up on stage, he saw the figure of a wounded and disheveled man kneeling before him, presenting a complaint. Frightened out of his wits, the actor fled the stage, leaving the audience in an uproar. Rumors of this uncanny event and the chaos it had unleashed made their way to the magistrate, who summoned the actor for an investigation. Since the ghost did not appear during the actor’s interview in court, the magistrate ordered the actor to return to the stage and bring the ghost to court with him. Although the actor managed to bring the ghost to court, the magistrate could not see it, and became furious. The ghost then led the actor and officers of the yamen to the countryside, where they uncovered the body of a man that had been thrown haphazardly into the burial mound of a local gentry-woman. The ensuing investigation revealed that after the woman’s funeral, the undertakers robbed and murdered a passer-by, and buried him in the same mound. According to Yuan Mei, tradition has it that when undertakers bury a corpse, they say that if one wishes to appeal for justice, there is no other way but to appeal to Longtu (Baogong) in the afterlife. The ghost heard this saying and therefore presented its complaint before the actor playing Baogong.

This anecdote not only demonstrates the pervasive image of Baogong as a judge in the netherworld, but also reveals the profound impact of Baogong lore on popular imagination. Yuan Mei, though stressing the historicity of his account, describes a chain of events that

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128 See Diyu youji, pp. 95–96. This conversation, accompanied by illustrations (portraying Baogong as King Yama, with black face and crescent), also appears in a comic-book edition of the Journey to Purgatory, called [n. a.], Manhua diyu youji 漫畫地獄游記 (Taizhong: Shengxiantang zazhishe, 2009), pp. 94–95. See also Shahar, Crazy Ji, pp. 190–94.

129 Much of the history and development of Baogong worship in mainland China and Taiwan remains a mystery, which I intend to explore in further depth in the future.

follows all the narrative rules of a Baogong courtroom story or drama. The question of fictionality and historicity in the genre of biji prose that typifies Yuan Mei’s anecdote, though interesting in itself, is not the key issue here. The most remarkable aspect is that the events he describes in “real life” reenact a Baogong-style plotline that mirrors the events taking place in the drama performed that day in Guangdong – Bao Judges the Black Pot Case. Yuan is not merely a casual recorder of unofficial history or an ethnographer of the strange; he becomes a part of the very cultural phenomenon he records.

Yuan Mei’s anecdote and other, similar, accounts shed light on the role of drama and regional drama in particular, in propagating the image of Baogong as a judge in the netherworld. As discussed above, Song- and Yuan-dynasty plays that portray Baogong as assuming responsibilities in hell and communicating with ghosts have planted the seed for his role as King Yama, later elaborated in the short courtroom stories of Ming times. These stories nurtured the popular view of Baogong as Yama, and inspired other works of different genres. One might suggest that drama was crucial in the development of iconic images of Baogong and in the worship of Baogong as King Yama.131

Adaptations of late-Ming courtroom stories into works of prose and drama had a particularly profound influence on local folklore in areas that housed Baogong temples and on baojuan texts that identified Yama as Baogong.132 According to a Qing-dynasty folktale from the Changsha area, an actor playing Baogong was approached during a temple festival by a female ghost who claimed that she had suffered an injustice and pleaded for Baogong’s help.133 A native of the area, she had been murdered by her adulterous husband and his lover. As a ghost, she now led the actor, along with several other actors and monks, to the place where the two murderers had buried her body. In this case, too, a performance of a Baogong drama transforms into a Baogong-style murder case, with the actor assuming a medium-like function of communicating with the dead and resolving injustices. Another tale, from Tianjin during Qing times, involves a performer clad in a Baogong costume who was approached by a headless ghost in a haunted house. The ghost recounted that he was on his way to buy tea, when people residing in this particular house robbed and murdered him, then buried his body in the yard. In the conclusion of the tale, it is suggested that

131 Ding, Su wenxue zhong de Baogong, pp. 391–92.
132 Li, Baogong wenxue ji qi chuan bo, pp. 373–78.
the make-up of the actor playing Baogong was too convincing, and that if actors do not wish to attract wronged ghosts they should paint the crescent on their forehead a little crooked.\textsuperscript{134} We see in these stories that performers who play Baogong assume his role not only as a great judge in the afterlife, but also his ability to communicate with ghosts. Baogong performances are conceived as bridging the realm of the living and the netherworld, thus conflating entertainment and ritual. Put differently, the stage becomes a liminal space between the two realms, wherein the performer playing Baogong acts as a medium.

Although the Baogong legend should not be regarded as a stable, cohesive cultural construct that developed linearly, Baogong’s role as a judge in the netherworld and in particular his identification with King Yama constitute an undercurrent throughout Baogong-related works during the last millennium. This undercurrent has become especially pronounced in contemporary religious veneration of Baogong. Vernacular fiction and drama in recent centuries inspired Baogong’s trademark emblems – his iconography, his “sin-revealing mirror,” and the \textit{zha}; and these marked the mature stage in his mythmaking and deification process. Baogong’s iconography, a black face sporting a crescent moon on the forehead, is a visual representation of his unbiased verdicts and his role in the realm of the dead. Baogong’s extraordinary mirror cements his image within a larger context of the development of the popular perception of judgment in the afterlife, in which King Yama has increasingly attained a predominant role. The \textit{zha}, whose origins are rooted in visual representations of the courts of hell, have captivated the imagination of readers, viewers, and worshippers, and today the \textit{zha} are present in most Baogong and numerous King Yama temples. Considering that Baogong’s emblems are increasingly integrated into the worship of King Yama, and that in the course of the twentieth century, temples previously dedicated to King Yama have transformed into Baogong temples,\textsuperscript{135} it is possible that the conflation of the two figures will intensify in the future. Finally, Baogong’s role as King Yama in literature and religious worship attests to the firm grip of the bureaucratic metaphor on the popular perception of the cycle of life and death. The perpetual hunger for justice and the desire to improve one’s lot were interwoven into late-imperial conceptualizations of death and the afterlife, imagined in bureaucratic and judicial terms.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., pp. 719–22.
\textsuperscript{135} Liu, \textit{Yanluo wang chong bai de yanjiu}, pp. 40–42.
Death did not always symbolize the threat of a punitive judgment day, but also represented the final chance to rectify wrongs. The legend of Judge Bao offered a last resort for those seeking justice, whether in this life or the next.

Figure 1. Statue of a Tiger-headed zha
This is at Yanluo dian 閻羅殿, Gaoxiong 高雄, Taiwan. The temple seems to be unrelated to the Baogong lore, but houses replicas of zha. (Photograph by author)

Figure 2. Statues of the Three zha
At Bao xiaosu gong ci 包孝肅公祠, Hefei, Anhui province. (Photograph by author)
Figure 3. Statue of a Man Executed by a Tiger-headed zha
At Baogong miao 包公廟, Shangqiu 商丘, Henan province. (Photograph by author)

Figure 4. Baogong Statue
In one of the halls of Baogong miao 包公廟, Shangqiu 商丘, Henan province. Baogong’s face is painted black, and a white crescent moon is painted on his forehead. On both sides of Baogong’s desk stand statues of clerks and courtroom bailiffs. All statues at this temple are made from wood and papier-mâché, inspired by an illustrated edition of the adventure novel Sanxia wuyi. (Photograph by author)
Figure 5. Baogong Statue
Main hall of Bao xiaosu gong ci; in Hefei, Anhui province. (Photograph by author)

Figure 6. Baogong Altar
At Mingsheng gong, Taipei, Taiwan. Adjacent halls are dedicated to Dizang and Guanyin. (Photograph by author)
Figure 7. Wooden Plaque Hanging above Baogong’s Altar
At Mingsheng gong; the text reads 第五殿, 閻羅天子 (“The fifth hall, Prince Yama”).
(Photograph by author)

Figure 8. Main Entrance of Kaifeng gong Baogong miao 开封包公廟
In Daliao 大寮, Taiwan. (Photograph by author)