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## On *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, China's Earliest Erotic Fiction

### ABSTRACT:

*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* (*Unorthodox Biography of Zhao Feiyan*) is a landmark in traditional Chinese fiction, being the earliest surviving example of erotic fiction and the first known work of palace literature – a genre that focuses on the experiences of women within the Rear Palace. The narrative concerns three main characters based upon historical individuals: emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty (r. 33–7 BC), his second empress Zhao “Feiyan” or “Flying Swallow” (d. 1 BC), a former dancing girl, and her younger sister and fellow denizen of the emperor’s harem, Zhao Hede (d. 7 BC). The work portrays imperial extravagance and lust, the manipulation of the emperor by his two favorites, and the tragic end of their triangle. It became influential for later writings about sexuality and gender. *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* has been variously dated from the Western Han to the Northern Song dynasty, a range of over a thousand years. This paper demonstrates that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is in fact a Tang-era text, probably produced not long before it began to circulate widely in the mid-ninth century AD.

### KEYWORDS:

*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, *erotic fiction*, *emperor Cheng of Han*, *Zhao Feiyan*, *Zhao Hede*, *palace literature*

### INTRODUCTION

The novella known as *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* 趙飛燕外傳 (*Unorthodox Biography of Zhao Feiyan*) is a landmark in traditional Chinese literature: it is the earliest surviving example of erotic fiction and the first known work of palace literature – a genre defined by its focus on life within the Rear Palace, particularly the lives of women.<sup>1</sup> The text has proved enormously influential; not only do many expressions still in common use in Chinese ultimately derive from it, but it has made a major impact on the subsequent development of fiction writing, not only in China but in East Asia as a whole. A number of scholars of traditional Chinese fiction have discussed the importance of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* as a precursor to late-Ming erotic novels, in particular *Jinpingmei* 金瓶

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of the novella as the earliest surviving example of Chinese erotic fiction is stressed in Mao Dun 矛盾, “Zhongguo wenxue nei de xingyu miaoxie” 中國文學內的性欲描寫, in Zhang Guoxing 張國星 and Fu Zengxiang 傅憎享, eds., *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo de xing miaoxie* 中國古代小說的性描寫 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 22–23.

梅 (*Plum in the Golden Vase*); furthermore, a study by On Shionoya 鹽谷溫 (1878–1962) considers its significance for early Japanese fiction as well, stressing its influence on such works as *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (*Tale of Genji*).<sup>2</sup> *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is known to have circulated widely in Korea, with many surviving wood-block editions having been found on the peninsula, and in recent years, scholars have begun to elucidate its influence on early Korean fiction.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that further research will serve to uncover yet more instances of the way in which this novella exerted a profound influence on the development of early fiction writing traditions in East Asia.

The short narrative contained in the work features three main characters, all based upon genuine historical individuals: emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty 漢成帝 (r. 33–7 BC), his second empress Zhao “Feiyan” or “Flying Swallow” 趙飛燕 (d. 1 BC), a former dancing girl, and her younger sister and fellow denizen of emperor Cheng’s harem, Zhao Hede 趙合德 (d. 7 BC).<sup>4</sup> The story begins with an account of the origins of the two girls – the offspring of an illicit relationship between a granddaughter of the king of Jiangdu 江都王 and a musician in her household. After their father’s death, the pair travel to Chang’an, the Han-dynasty capital, where eventually they enter the service of the princess of Yang’a 陽阿公主. From there, Zhao Feiyan is recruited into the harem of emperor Cheng, where she is so favored by his majesty that she is appointed as his empress. However, her failure to produce children – here attributed to the toxic effect of the potions she takes to preserve her youthful beauty – means that she is forced to accept the entry of her younger sister into the emperor’s harem to reinforce her own position. At the same time, she engages in a wide variety of promiscuous sexual relationships, in the hope that she may yet become pregnant.

<sup>2</sup> Li Jianguo 李建國, “Chuanqi zhi shou: ‘Zhao Feiyan waizhuan’ 傳奇之首趙飛燕外傳, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 古典文學知識 2004.1, p. 40; Wu Liqian 吳禮權, *Zhongguo yanqing xiaoshuo shi* 中國言情小說史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1995), p. 18; and On Shionoya 鹽谷溫, *Zhongguo wenxue gailun* 中國文學概論, trans. Sun Lianggong 孫俚工 (Taipei: Kaiming shudian, 1976), p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Pak Kye-hwa 朴桂花 and Min Kwantong 閔寬東, “Chungguk munŏn sosŏrŭi kung-naeyuipkwa suyongyangsang: Songdae ijŏn munŏn sosŏrŭl chungshimŭro” 中國文言小說의 국내유입과 수용양상: 宋代以前文言小說을 중심으로, *Chungguk ōmunhak nonjip* 中國語文學論集 82 (2013), pp. 329–45; and Min Kwantong 閔寬東, “Chungguk aejŏngnyu sosŏrŭi kung-naeyuipkwa p’anbonyŏn’gu” 中國愛情類小說의 國內流入과 板本研究, *Chungguk sosŏl nonch’ong* 중국소설논총 25 (2007), pp. 185–212.

<sup>4</sup> Zhao Feiyan’s personal name is not known; the best-known appellation Feiyan seems to have been reflected her skill as a dancer; see Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962; hereafter cited as *HS*) 97B, p. 3988. Zhao Hede is always referred to in early texts by her highest title, Zhaoyi 昭儀 (Lady of Bright Department); *ibid.*, p. 3989. *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is thought to be the first text to give her a personal name: “Hede.”

Emperor Cheng becomes more and more infatuated with Zhao Hede, to the point where his relationship with the empress is threatened: at one juncture in the narrative she seems to be on the verge of suicide over the failure of her marriage. The novella concludes with the decline of the emperor's health, his ever-increasing reliance on Zhao Hede for sexual satisfaction, and finally his death through accidental poisoning with a toxic aphrodisiac that she has administered. The portrayal of imperial extravagance and lust, the manipulation of the emperor by his two favorites, and the tragic end of their obsessive triangular relationship would prove enormously influential on later writings about sexuality and gender. Given its popularity, it is not surprising that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* was repeatedly rewritten and updated through the late-imperial era, thus bringing the work to new audiences.<sup>5</sup>

*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* has been variously dated, ranging from the Western Han dynasty to the Northern Song dynasty – a period of more than one thousand years. The debate on the dating began during Song, with scholars such as Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (ca. 1105–1180) suggesting that it represented a genuine Western Han text; meanwhile others, such as Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (fl. 1211–1249), argued on the basis of textual evidence that it must date to a much later period.<sup>6</sup> More recently, some scholars have dated the work to the Northern Song period. This implies that the author of the text had carefully culled all suitable quotations of material concerning Zhao Feiyan from late-Tang-dynasty poems, not to mention arranging for the insertion of spurious quotations into earlier compendia.<sup>7</sup> Such a supposition is fundamentally impossible,

<sup>5</sup> The first major rework of the novella was *Zhao Feiyan biezhuan* 趙飛燕別傳 (*Alternative Biography of Zhao Feiyan*) by Qin Chun 秦醇 (Northern Song dynasty; dates unknown); see He Manzi 何滿子 and Li Shiren 李時人, *Gudai duanpian xiaoshuo mingzuo pingzhu* 古代短篇小說名作評注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 139–47. This *biezhuan* represents an attempt to amalgamate *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* with the *Hanshu* biography of the Zhao sisters. A further reworking, entitled *Lüchuang xinhua* 綠窗新話 (*A New Tale from the Women's Quarters*), was produced during the Southern Song. It is based upon two specific incidents from *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, which in turn informs the two-chapter format. Thus, the first chapter is entitled “Zhao Feiyan Conducts an Affair with Chifeng” (“Zhao Feiyan sitong Chifeng” 趙飛燕私通赤鳳); the second “Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty Ingests *Shenxu* Paste” (“Han Chengdi fu shenxujiao” 漢成帝服慎恤膠); see Huangdu fengyue zhuren 皇都風月主人, *Lüchuang xinhua* 綠窗新話 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991). In addition, there is a major late-Ming pseudonymous rewriting of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* entitled *Zhaoyang qushi* 昭陽趣史 (*The Remarkable History of the Zhaoyang [Palace]*); see Yanyansheng 艷艷生, *Zhaoyang qushi* 昭陽趣史 (Taipei: Shuangdi chubanshe, 1994). The interrelationship among the different reworkings of the earlier novella are considered in Li Mengsheng 李夢生, *Jinhui xiaoshuo yetan* 禁毀小說夜譚 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2008), pp. 93–100.

<sup>6</sup> Chao Gongwu 晁公武, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968) 2B, p. 173; and Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968) 7, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Zhou Zhongfu 周中孚, *Zhengtang dushu ji* 鄭堂讀書記 (Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshuguan, 1968) 1, p. 188.

hence it can easily be dismissed. At the same time, there remain many adherents of the notion that it is a genuine literary work of Han date, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, arguing that the anachronisms are accidental or the result of some misunderstanding.<sup>8</sup> The present paper, however, aims to demonstrate that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is in fact a Tang-era text, probably produced not long before it began to circulate widely in the mid-ninth century AD.

Although the story's main protagonists are derived from genuine historical personages, the characterization of emperor Cheng, Zhao Feiyan, and Zhao Hede is not at all related to that found in the official history of the dynasty. In several places of *Hanshu* 漢書 (*History of the Han Dynasty*; ca. 90 AD), the portrayal accorded to the Zhao sisters is consistently hostile, their lowly origins as slave-entertainers are repeatedly stressed, and there is much emphasis on the hostility of senior government officials and members of the imperial house to the idea that a woman of such background could be raised to the position of empress.<sup>9</sup> The history claims that the Zhao sisters monopolized imperial favor, and when children were born to other women, the infants and their mothers were murdered. This account of their appalling behavior – the earliest known biographical description – can be contrasted with an alternative tradition found in a number of late-Han to early-medieval writings, most notably *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (*Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital*), *Sanfu huangtu* 三輔黃圖 (*Yellow Plans of the Three Capital Regions*), and *Shiyi ji* 拾遺記 (*Records of Gleanings from Lost Texts*). This less-hostile group of texts concentrates on the extravagance and promiscuity of the Zhao sisters, and emperor Cheng's infatuation with his favorites, but also includes some neutral or positive anecdotes about their behavior, and does not claim that they were murderers. This paper will argue that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is closely associated

1959), pp. 1243–44; and Chang Bide 昌彼得, *Shuofu kao* 說郭考 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1979), p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Zhizhong 王枝忠, *Han Wei liuchao xiaoshuo shi* 漢魏六朝小說史 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1997), p. 43; and Wei Yuchuan 魏玉川, “*Feiyan waizhuan kaolun*” 飛燕外傳考論, *Tangdu xuekan* 唐都學刊 21.6 (2005), pp. 38–40.

<sup>9</sup> The biography of Zhao Feiyan is given in *HS* 97B, pp. 3988–99; the complaints of government officials at her appointment are recorded in 60, pp. 2667–74; 77, p. 3252; and 81, pp. 3341–42. The consistently hostile *Hanshu* account, and the difficulties of obtaining any other information to balance the picture, is discussed in Michael Loewe, “Chengdi's Reign: Problems and Controversies,” in *Chang'an 26 BC: An Augustan Age in China*, ed. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2015), p. 233. For an unusual analysis of the allegations of murder leveled against the Zhao sisters, stressing the fundamental improbabilities of the *Hanshu* account, see Meng Xiangcai 孟祥才, “Pushuo mili de Zhao Feiyan zimei mousha huangzi an” 撲朔迷離的趙飛燕姊妹謀殺皇子案, *Liaocheng shiyuan xuebao* 聊城師院學報 2000.6, pp. 1–5, 11.

with this alternative tradition. The relationship between history and fiction in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is a complex one, which can only be comprehended by a detailed study of the various related texts, to demonstrate the way in which each adds to a multi-faceted portrayal of the remarkable protagonists.

#### ZHAO FEIYAN WAIZHUAN'S PREFACES AND POSTFACES

Today, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is frequently printed with three other short texts, purporting to be written by distinguished historical figures and full of information concerning the history of the novella. The first, variously known as “Ling Xuan zixu” 伶玄自序 (“Ling Xuan’s Author Preface”) or “Ling Xuan zixu” 伶玄自叙 (“Ling Xuan’s Author Postface”), is a fine and important work of literature in its own right.<sup>10</sup> It describes how, in his old age, Ling Xuan, who had previously held the position of chancellor of Huainan (*Huainan xiang* 淮南相), acquired a concubine named Fan Tongde 樊通德.<sup>11</sup> This woman, a close relative of Zhao Feiyan who also served in the imperial palace, then informed him of the events recorded in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. It is often stated that imperial-era fiction writing prioritizes the “male gaze” – literature written by men, from a male perspective, for an audience of other men.<sup>12</sup> While it is most likely that whoever wrote *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* was a man, the introduction of female agency in the author’s preface is interesting, because it points to the fact that it is a text that claims to reflect the viewpoints of women. In the conceit of the author’s preface, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* not only gives readers a privileged view of life in the women’s quarters of the Han imperial palace, but it is a view mediated through the eyes of its inhabitants, the women who lived and worked in emperor Cheng’s harem.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> As with the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, a number of expressions commonly used in the Chinese language are derived from this preface. Furthermore, the portrayal of the companionate relationship between Ling Xuan and his concubine would prove very influential in later literature; for a ground-breaking study of the use of this preface in the writings of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), see Wang Jiantang 王建堂, “Su Shi yu *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*” 蘇軾與趙飛燕外傳, *Leshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 樂山師範學院學報 2007.1, pp. 18–20. Other references to this text in the writings of Su Shi are considered in Zhiyi Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity: The Aesthetics and Ethics of Su Shi (2037–1101) in Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 35–36.

<sup>11</sup> Given that the kingdom of Huainan lasted from 202–122 BC, it is impossible that a person living at the end of the Western Han dynasty could have held the post of chancellor of Huainan. It was this point that made Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) decide that this text was a forgery; see Hong Mai 洪邁, *Rongzhai wubi* 容齋五筆 (SBCK edn.) 7, pp. 1b–2a (“Shengshuai buke chang” 盛衰不可常).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Song Gong, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2004), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Xiong Ming 熊明, “*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* kaolun: Jian lun Han Wei Liuchao zazhuan dui

Thus we have an example of palace literature – in effect a claim at being a description of the private lives of the imperial family written from an “inner” perspective on the basis of information supplied by someone who had experienced this kind of life first-hand, and who by definition had to be a woman.<sup>14</sup> As studies of other, later, forms of palace literature have made clear, readers showed considerable disquiet about writings in this genre produced by authors who came from outside the palace, and there was also great resistance to the idea of male authorship of such texts, because they were seen as unable to truthfully represent this kind of literature. Even when emperors wrote of life in the Rear Palace, their writings were considered superficial, since they failed to engage with the core experiences considered definitive of the genre: the inhabitants of the Rear Palace were female, and it is in their lives and emotions that readers of palace literature are interested. Ling Xuan’s text is conventionally joined by two other short postfaces, attributed to Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 43 BC–28 AD) and Xun Xu 荀勗 (d. 289 AD), respectively.<sup>15</sup> The first is the most interesting, since it describes the fate of the text during the time of the uprising of the rebel Red Eyebrows during Wang Mang’s short dynasty that had taken over the Western Han:

In the time of Wang Mang, there was a certain Bian Li, who held no official position but gave instruction in the Xiahou [tradition

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Tangren chuanqi de yunyu yu qidao” 趙飛燕外傳考論，兼論漢魏六朝雜傳對唐人傳奇的孕育與啓道, *Guji yanjiu* 古籍研究 2005.2, pp. 60–61, notes the strong relationship here between the preface and the main text, whereby the author’s preface establishes the narrative as an articulation of female experience, and then the text itself is dominated by its female characters.

<sup>14</sup> This also applies to palace literature elsewhere in East Asia, for example *Kyech’uk ilgi* 癸丑日記 (*Diary of 1613*), a Korean text concerning the persecution and murder of many of Queen Inmok’s 仁穆王后 (1584–1632) closest relatives by her stepson, presents all events from the perspective of a palace woman in her majesty’s service; see Kang Hanyōng 姜漢永, annot., *Kyech’uk ilgi* 癸丑日記 (Seoul: Minhyōp ch’ulp’ansa, 1962). For a study of this particular text; see JaHyun Kim Haboush, “The Vanished Women of Korea: The Anonymity of Texts and the Historicity of Subjects,” in Anne Walthall, ed., *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2008), pp. 280–98. It is the readers’ perception of the author as eyewitness to the events described which give the text its power, and allows the claim that this record is “authentic” even when it is contradicted by other sources.

<sup>15</sup> Huan Tan was an important philosopher and statesman who served in the governments of the very late-Western Han dynasty, the Xin dynasty, and the early-Eastern Han. His official biography is given in Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 28A, pp. 955–61. Xun Xu was one of the most distinguished scholars of the Jin dynasty, as well as being a close friend and advisor to emperor Wu 晉武帝 (r. 265–290 AD) for much of his reign. His official biography is given in Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 39, pp. 1152–57. Following the discovery of the bamboo texts in Ji commandery 汲郡 in around 279 AD, he was chosen to head the group of scholars collating and preparing the texts; his work is discussed in detail in Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: SUNY P., 2006), pp. 131–84.

of the] *Shangshu* (*Book of Documents*).<sup>16</sup> In the second year of the Gengshi reign-era [24 AD], the Red Eyebrows passed through Mao-ling, and Bian Li abandoned his maps and books to flee into the mountains to hide. Liu Gong entered his hut, and found a lacquer chest bound with metal bands.<sup>17</sup> He opened it up and thus obtained Xuan's book. In the second year of the Jianwu reign-era [26 AD], Jia Ziyi showed this book to me, and said: "Xuan was Bian Li's instructor in the *qin*."<sup>18</sup> 王莽時茂陵卜理者，不仕，以夏侯尚書授。時更始二年，赤眉過茂陵，卜理棄圖書隱山。劉恭入其廬獲金滕漆匱。發之，乃得玄書。建武二年，賈子翊以書示予曰：“卜理之琴師玄云也。”

The very suggestion that a copy of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* was found in a lacquer chest bound with metal bands makes a strong propagandistic point. It explicitly links it with the text “Jinteng” 金滕 (“Metal-bound Chest”), which is a section in the ancient *Shangshu* classic.<sup>19</sup> The authorship of “Jinteng” was traditionally attributed to the Duke of Zhou 周公 and the story of how he placed it in a metal-bound chest is recorded in a number of ancient texts.<sup>20</sup> The text itself stresses that the Duke of Zhou was the victim of unsubstantiated rumors concerning his treasonous conduct, only to be cleared by the discovery of the document in the metal-bound chest. Where in other texts Zhao Feiyan and her sister are accused of horrifying crimes, in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* this is not the case. By linking the work with “Jinteng,” the author of this passage suggests that they too may have been maligned by their enemies. It would be appropriate for *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* to claim a connection with these events, since it purports to be the “true story” of the Zhao sisters' relationship with emperor Cheng. Many of the schol-

<sup>16</sup> I think the family name Xiahou here implies a reference to Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (dates unknown), one of the most important Confucian scholars of the late Western Han dynasty and an expert in the *Shangshu*. His official biography appears in *HS* 75, pp. 3155-59.

<sup>17</sup> Liu Gong is a genuine historical figure – a member of the Han imperial family who was caught up in the Red Eyebrows uprising as a child; his younger brother Liu Penzi 劉盆子 (b. 10 AD) was chosen by the rebels as their candidate to become the next Han emperor. Eventually Liu Gong became a staunch supporter of the Gengshi emperor 漢更始帝 (r. 23-25 AD) and considered him the rightful leader of the restoration of the Han dynasty. Some biographical information about Liu Gong, an intelligent and energetic man caught up in very difficult circumstances, is given in Fan, *Hou Hanshu* 11, pp. 477-86.

<sup>18</sup> Ling Xuan 伶玄, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* 趙飛燕外傳 (CSJC edn.; hereafter cited as *Waizhuan*), p. 18. The reference here to Ling Xuan as a player and teacher of the *qin* is obscure; it is an aspect of his biography not mentioned elsewhere, though it serves to explain the acquaintanceship between the two men.

<sup>19</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648), *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), pp. 331-40.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 33, p. 1516; and Hong Yixuan 洪頤煊, *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 (SBBY edn.) B, p. 1a.

ars who have worked on *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* have also considered the prefaces as evidence of dating. Usually either the prefaces are all accepted as genuine, in which case the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is treated as a Western Han dynasty text in spite of the evidence to the contrary; or all the prefaces are dismissed as forgeries.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this study, the prefaces will not be considered as evidence for the date of the text because they are not necessarily intrinsic to the contents of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. However, given the exceptional literary qualities of Ling Xuan's author's preface, and the importance of this text for reinforcing the direction of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan's* narrative, it is entirely possible that the two were originally written by the same person.

#### A TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE *ZHAO FEIYAN WAIZHUAN*

There are no known manuscript or printed editions of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* that date to before the Ming dynasty. However, from then to the present day, the novella has been frequently reprinted in *congshu* 叢書 (collectanea) and other compilations of China's early fiction writing.<sup>22</sup> Comparison between extant recensions makes it quite clear that although many different versions have been in circulation since the late-imperial era, they are all ultimately derived from one single source. As a demonstration of the strong links among all known printed editions of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, they all contain the same mistake. At one point, Zhao Feiyan is given a large number of gifts by her younger sister to celebrate her appointment as empress. In the list of presents, all versions list nineteen items consisting of twenty-five objects rather than the twenty-six (items or objects; it is not clear) that the text itself says it should contain, and they all give the same description of one item: "One sandalwood statue [ornamented with] *tongxiang*-scented tiger-skin 通香虎皮檀象一座."<sup>23</sup> This bizarre object is likely to be the creation of the amalgamation of two items in the list into one; the missing items are the result of textual loss at this point.<sup>24</sup> It is impossible that all re-

<sup>21</sup> Li Jianguo, *Songdai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 宋代志怪傳奇叙錄 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1997), p. 161, is unusual for considering the preface attributed to Ling Xuan to be a forgery, but accepting the authenticity of those attributed to Huan Tan and Xun Xu, thus allowing him to accept the authenticity of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* as a genuine Han dynasty text.

<sup>22</sup> The only detailed study to date of the early publication history of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is Lin Yuhong 林子弘, "Zhaofeiyan waizhuan chengshu jiben chuancheng bijiao yanjiu" 趙飛燕外傳成書及版本傳承比較研究, *Guoli zhongyang tushuguan Taiwan fenguan guankan* 國立中央圖書館臺灣分館館刊 9.3 (2003), pp. 86-91.

<sup>23</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> The previous item on the list is described as: "One rug of clove-scented black wildcat fur 含香綠毛狸藉一鋪," so it is likely that the *tongxiang*-scented tiger-skin refers to a similar rug. The description of what the sandalwood statue represents has thus been lost.

censions would contain this identical error if they were not ultimately derived from the same source. Although it is not clear if this error was already present in Tang times, thanks to the multitude of quotations preserved in *Leishuo* 類說 (1136; *Categorized Stories*) by Zeng Zao 曾慥 (?–1155/1164), it is evident that it was found in the Northern to Southern Song transition period.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore entirely likely that it dates to an extremely early version of the text in its present transmitted form, and indicates that the wording of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* has been stable for the last one thousand years or so.

For a text which purports to date to the Western Han dynasty, it is concerning when there is evidence that its authors did not fully understand Han dynasty terms. There are a number of instances of this kind of problem in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*; for example, before her marriage to emperor Cheng, Zhao Feiyan is said to have been engaged in a sexual relationship with an individual described as a “hunter from the Feathered Forest (*Yulin sheniao zhe* 羽林射鳥者).<sup>26</sup> This suggests that whoever wrote *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* believed the Yulin to be some kind of hunting park or garden, whereas in fact, this was an elite military unit established by emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BC).<sup>27</sup> The text is also filled with references that would be anachronistic for a Western Han-dynasty date: the empress bathes in “Five Skandhas” (*wuyun* 五蘊) perfumed waters – a Buddhist allusion although Buddhism would not reach China until the Eastern Han dynasty.<sup>28</sup> In another anachronism, emperor Cheng refers to Zhao Hede as Guifei 貴妃 or “Honored Consort” – a term that was first coined in the Liu-Song 劉宋 dynasty by emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝 (r. 453–464).<sup>29</sup> As with the Han dynasty title of Zhaoyi, it refers to the most senior of the emperor’s consorts, after the empress herself. The appearance of this title in the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* story is clear evidence that the text – at least in its present form – does not date to the Western Han dynasty.

In addition to such problems in demonstrating the “Han-era” nature of the text, there are also many occasions when *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* shows strong “Tang” influence. Many modern scholars have specifically associated its composition with the scandals surrounding

<sup>25</sup> Zeng Zao 曾慥, *Leishuo* 類說 (SKQS edn.) 1, pp. 12a–17a.

<sup>26</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *HS*19A, p. 727; and 28B, p. 1644. Yang Hongnian 楊鴻年, “Huben Yulin” 虎賁羽林, in *Han-Wei zhidu congkao* 漢魏制度叢考 (Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1985), pp. 130–46, gives a detailed account of what is known of the workings of this elite unit.

<sup>28</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Shen Yue 沈約, *Songshu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 41, p. 1269. This locution is found in *Waizhuan*, p. 13.

the relationship between Tang emperor Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (r. 721–756 AD) and Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719–756 AD): the earlier example of emperor Cheng and his favorite was thus being used to criticize the behavior of a contemporary ruler.<sup>30</sup> Of particular importance for dating this text to after the Age of Disunion (420–589 AD) is the account of the inhabitants of Zhenla 真臘 when they present emperor Cheng with a ten-thousand-year-old clamshell and a night-shining pearl as tribute.<sup>31</sup> The earliest reference to the Mekong-delta state of Zhenla in Chinese literature is found in *Suishu* 隋書 (*History of the Sui Dynasty*), which records a succession of embassies beginning with that of 616 AD; prior to this point, the government in China was not informed of the major shift in power in the Mekong region that occurred with the rise of Zhenla.<sup>32</sup> Another indicator of a Tang-dynasty date is found in what appears to be an instance of a taboo on the personal name of Tang emperor Gaozong 唐高宗 (r. 649–683 AD). Whereas in *Hanshu*, empress-dowager Wang ordered the arrest of those concerned in the death of emperor Cheng with the words: “Fu, the director of the Yeting... can assist the censor, the chancellor, and the chamberlain for law enforcement in investigating the emperor’s actions and the circumstances of his sudden attack of sickness 掖庭令輔等... 與御史, 丞相, 廷尉治問皇帝起居發病狀”, in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* this is given as: “The empress-dowager ordered that the Zhaoyi be placed under restraint 太后使理昭儀.”<sup>33</sup> This latter text thus avoids the use of the character *zhi* 治, Gaozong’s personal name.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore some of the objects mentioned in the text seem to provide clear evidence of a specifically Tang date. For example, when empress Zhao is presented with a mirror by her younger sister it is described as: “A heptafoil mirror in the shape of

<sup>30</sup> Wu Zhida 吳志達, *Zhongguo wenyan xiaoshuo shi* 中國文言小說史 (Ji’nan: Qi-Lu shushe, 1994), p. 58; Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, *Zhongguo wenyan xiaoshuo shigao* 中國文言小說史稿 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), p. 31; and Xing Peishun 邢培順, “*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* tanlun” 趙飛燕外傳探論, *Zhonghua nüzi xueyuan Shandong fenyuan xuebao* 中華女子學院山東分院學報 2009.1, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 7. The reference to a night-shining pearl is also highly problematic for a text claiming to date from the Han dynasty, since it is generally agreed this term did not appear in Chinese literature prior to the medieval period; see Chen Lijun 陳麗君, “*Shiyi ji xinci xinyi kaoshi*” 拾遺記新詞新義考釋, *Ningbo daxue xuebao (Renwen kexueban)* 寧波大學學報 (人文科學版) 19.2 (2006), p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 82, pp. 1835–37. As has been noted by a number of scholars, the appearance of this name in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* precludes a Han date for the text. See for example Lin Feiyun 林飛雲, “Guanyu ‘jin suojian Hanren xiaoshuo’ xiezuo niandai de yanjiu” 關於‘今所見漢人小說’寫作年代的研究, *Wuzhou xueyuan xuebao* 梧州學院學報 2007.10, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> See *HS* 97B, p. 3990; and *Waizhuan*, p. 15, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Xing Peishun, “*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* tanlun,” p. 59.

a water-caltrop 七出菱花鏡一奩。”<sup>35</sup> An object of this kind cannot have been made prior to Tang, since all early Chinese mirrors were either round or square.<sup>36</sup> Such instances serve as a *terminus post quem* for the compilation of the text in its present form.

There is a small but important group of references to *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* that are preserved in late-Tang poetry; these indicate a *terminus ante quem* for the compilation of the text in its present form. To begin with what appears to be the earliest of these directly inspired works: the name of one of empress Zhao's lovers, Yan Chifeng 燕赤鳳, appears in a poem by Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858): “Chifeng Comes to the Residence of Empress Zhao” (“Zhaohou louzhong Chifeng lai” 趙后樓中赤鳳來).<sup>37</sup> This name was not associated with the biography of the empress prior to the circulation of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*.<sup>38</sup> Han Wo 韓偓 (844–923) is not merely the first poet to mention Zhao Hede by name, in his poem “On Bathing” (“Yongyu” 詠浴) he also says: “Who would have imagined that the serving maids outside the curtains, / Could have extorted so many gold ‘cakes’ from the ruler? 豈知侍女簾帷外, 剩取君王幾餅金.”<sup>39</sup> This appears to be a reference to emperor Cheng's voyeurism as described in the novella – to avoid Zhao Hede discovering his activities and refusing to participate, he bribed her servants. Moreover, in Luo Qiu's 羅虬 (fl. 874 AD) poem “Lines to Compare [Du] Hong'er” (“Bi Hong'er shi” 比紅兒詩) one line reads: “She lightly combs out her little chignon, of the kind called ‘Dawdling Approach’ 輕梳小髻號慵來.”<sup>40</sup> Again, this is a reference to the hairstyle

<sup>35</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Mirrors of the type described here, in the shape of a flower, do not appear to have been produced before the Tang; see Shanghai bowuguan 上海博物館, ed., *Lianxing shenye, yingzhi liangong: Shanghai bowuguan zang tongjing jingpin* 練形神冶, 瑩質良工; 上海博物館藏銅鏡精品 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2005), pp. 213–87; and Hua Guangpu 華光普, *Zhongguo lidai tongjing mulu* 中國歷代銅鏡目錄 (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe), pp. 202–62.

<sup>37</sup> Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠, *Li Shangyin shige jijie* 李商隱詩歌集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), p. 1932 (“Ketan” 可嘆).

<sup>38</sup> Wang Jiantang 王建堂 and Song Haiying 宋海鷹, “*Feiyan waizhuan de wenshi yu liubo*” 飛燕外傳的問世與流播, *Jindongnan shifan zhuanke xueyuan xuebao* 晉東南師範專科學院學報 19.4 (2002), p. 36; and Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, *Han Wei Liuchao xiaoshuo jianshi* 漢魏六朝小說簡史 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Chen Jilong 陳繼龍, *Han Wo shi zhu* 韓偓詩注 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2000), p. 358. In the early-imperial era, the golden “cakes” mentioned here were round discs specially made to be given as rewards. Interestingly, Han Wo was the nephew by marriage of Li Shangyin, so it is possible that the two men had access to a family copy of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. This impression is strengthened by the fact that Han Wo's poem “Rhapsody on a Red Banana” (“Hong bajiao fu” 紅芭蕉賦) is the first known text after *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* to refer to the name “Zhao Hede”; see Chen Yuanlong 陳元龍 et al., comp., *Yuding lidai fu hui: buyi* 御定歷代賦彙, 補遺 (SKQS edn.) 15, pp. 22a–23b.

<sup>40</sup> Cao Yin 曹寅 and Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al., comp., *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 7628.

worn by Zhao Hede in our novella, and no prior instance of this term is known. In addition, Wang Jiantang 王建堂 and Song Haiying 宋海鷹 have noted the existence of what appears to be a further quotation of this kind, although it seems to be derived from a lost section of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*.

Duan Chengshi 段成式 (ca. 803–863 AD) mentions in an essay entitled “Jihuan pin” 髻環品 (“Jewels to Encircle the Chignon”) that “Zhao Hede wore the chignon [called] ‘Enjoying Sorrow’ 趙合德有欣愁髻.” It is likely that this is indeed derived from *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, and represents another reference from mid-ninth-century literature.<sup>41</sup> To these can be added the numerous quotations from the text, (in this case referring to it as *Zhaohou waizhuan* 趙后外傳 [*Unorthodox History of Empress Zhao*]), given in *Yunxian zaji* 雲仙雜記 (*Miscellaneous Records of the Immortals in the Clouds*) compiled by Feng Zhi 馮贄 (fl. ninth century).<sup>42</sup> It is most likely that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* was composed in its present form not long before it began to circulate in the late Tang, around the mid-ninth century: if such a highly admired and influential piece of writing was already in existence, it is not clear why nobody would have mentioned it. Although early scholarship on *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is conspicuous by its absence, the text had an enormous impact on Chinese culture from the moment it became widely available to literati readers in the late Tang.<sup>43</sup> As demonstrated above, the plethora of quotations from this text found in encyclopedias and other compendia, and the large body of poetry that it inspired, are proof of how influential *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* really was.

#### ZHAO FEIYAN WAIZHUAN'S ANTECEDENTS: XIJING ZAJI

There are a number of texts ranging from Han to early-medieval times that contain parallels with *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. These include *Xijing zaji*, *Sanfu huangtu*, and *Shiyi ji*. In no case are the textual parallels particularly close, although they are sufficiently similar to be recognizable as referring to the same events. Given these differences, it is entirely possible that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* drew on other sources of

<sup>41</sup> Wang and Song, “*Feiyan waizhuan de wenshi yu liubo*,” p. 36. Duan Chengshi’s essay is quoted in Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuofu* 說郛 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), j. 77, p. 3602.

<sup>42</sup> Feng Zhi 馮贄, comp., *Yunxian zaji* 雲仙雜記 (CSJC edn.), j. 9, p. 72 (“Yan Chifeng” 燕赤鳳); and j. 10, p. 76 (“Wenrouxiang” 溫柔鄉).

<sup>43</sup> Kazuyuki Fukazawa 深澤一幸, “Shinmatsu shijin ga *Chō Hien* o nozoku” 清末詩人が趙飛燕を窺く, *Zinbun gakuho* 人文學報 (2008), pp. 33–66, provides a useful overview of some of the large body of poetry produced from the Song dynasty onwards, inspired by this novella.

this period that have not survived; and indeed on popular traditions – this has been well-documented elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> The following analysis will begin with *Xijing zaji*, which contains by far the largest number of textual parallels, and provides the most illuminating evidence concerning the process of the text formation of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. Unfortunately, the textual history of *Xijing zaji* itself is extremely problematic. In its present form, it consists of 132 individual notes or anecdotes concerning life in the capital city – in particular the imperial palaces – during the Western Han dynasty. It is accompanied by an afterword purporting to be written by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–363 AD), which attributes original authorship of the text to Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 AD). According to this afterword, Liu Xin created *Xijing zaji* as a long work in order to fill lacunae in *Hanshu*; Ge Hong is said to have then reedited this and thus compiled as a two-juan work.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately for the claims that this represents a précis of a genuinely late-Western Han text, composed by such an extremely distinguished scholar as Liu, there are no references to *Xijing zaji* prior to the sixth century. Furthermore, the text was originally anonymous; the afterword attributed to Ge Hong is first mentioned in the Tang dynasty.<sup>46</sup> Although some scholars have attributed it to the Liang-dynasty scholar Wu Jun 吳均 (469–520), and others have assigned the text to Xiao Ben 蕭贲 (d. 549), there is at present no consensus on either its dating or authorship.<sup>47</sup> However, although there appears to be no known references to the *Xi-*

<sup>44</sup> Zhao Xiupei 趙修霏, “Song chuanqi ‘diangu lihe’ de chuanqi shoufa, yi liupian Song chuanqi wei li” 宋傳奇‘典故離合’的傳奇手法,以六篇宋傳奇為例, *Wen yu zhe* 文與哲 2009.12, pp. 165–94.

<sup>45</sup> Cheng Lin 成林 and Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦, *Xijing zaji quanyi* 西京雜記全譯 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1993; hereafter cited as *Xijing zaji*), pp. 224–25. It has long been noted that some sections of the transmitted *Xijing zaji* are either identical or very closely related to *Hanshu* passages, making the claim that the former was intended to complement the latter difficult to substantiate; e.g., Yong Rong 永榕 et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), j. 140, p. 1182.

<sup>46</sup> *Xijing zaji* is described as anonymous in the catalogue of the Sui imperial library – the first known bibliographic reference to this work; see Wei, *Suishu* 33, p. 966. What may be the earliest reference to the attribution to Ge Hong appears in the work of Zhang Jianzhi 張柬之 (625–706 AD), however, the text of the latter does not survive and Zhang Jianzhi’s comment is recorded in a Song text; see Chao Zaizhi 晁載之, *Xu tan zhu* 續談助 (CSJC edn.), pp. 16–17 (“Dongming ji ba” 洞冥記跋). There are later indubitably Tang references to Ge Hong’s authorship of *Xijing zaji*; see Liu Zhiji 劉知幾, *Shitong* 史通 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> The earliest reference to the theory that this book was the work of Wu Jun seems to come from Duan Chengshi 段成式 (late Tang; see n. 41, above, and related discussion), who attributes this idea to Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581 AD); see Duan, *Youyang zazhu* 酉陽雜俎 (Ji’nan: Qi-Lu shushe, 2008), p. 76. The attribution to Wu Jun seems to have been a strong local tradition in the Yangtze Delta region; see Chao, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 6, p. 242. Alternatively, the attribution to Xiao Ben is based upon the fact that he is said to have authored a text entitled *Xijing zaji* in sixteen juan; this is recorded in his official biography; see Li Yanshou 李延壽,

*jing zaji* text itself that predate the 530–540s, this does not mean that the text does not contain older material. Furthermore, no matter how late the date of compilation is placed, it must still be earlier than the transmitted text of *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*.<sup>48</sup> The complex relationship among *Hanshu*, *Xijing zaji*, and *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is interesting because it suggests that the latter may have drawn on much earlier material than is readily apparent.

The first reference to the Zhao sisters in *Xijing zaji* is contained in the first *juan* of the text, and consists of an extensive description of the residence of Zhao Feiyan's younger sister, after she assumed the title of Zhaoyi. This account of Zhaoyang Residence, here called Zhaoyang Hall (Zhaoyang dian 昭陽殿), begins in exactly the same terms as a much shorter description given in *Hanshu*; however, *Xijing zaji* lists the luxurious appointments of this palace in much greater detail. It is not clear whether the remainder of this account is an imaginative recreation of the splendors of the Zhaoyi's residence, or whether it represents a longer quotation from the same text as that from which the *Hanshu* description is also derived. In the translation below, and in the Chinese text, the section identical to the *Hanshu* is underscored:

Zhao Feiyan's younger sister lived in Zhaoyang Hall, where the central courtyard was [painted] with vermilion and the main hall itself was [ornamented with] red lacquer. The doorways were all faced with copper which was then covered with a layer of pure gold gilding. The steps were made of white jade, while the close-studded wall timbers were decorated with gold rings, set with jade discs from Lantian, and ornamented with pearls and kingfisher feathers. Above there were arranged nine bronze dragons, each of which was holding a bronze "Nine Star" bell in its mouth, and

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*Nanshi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 44, p. 1106. The theory that this compilation should be attributed to Xiao Ben is discussed in some detail in William Nienhauser, "Once Again, the Authorship of the *Hsi-Ching Tsa-Chi* (Miscellanies of the Western Capital)," *JAOS* 98.3 (1978), pp. 219–36.

<sup>48</sup> David Knechtges, "*Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (Diverse Notes on the Western Capital)" in David Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 3, pp. 1648–55. For different perspectives on this vexed textual history, see Lao Gan 勞幹, "Lun *Xijing zaji* zhi zuozhe ji chengshu niandai" 論西京雜記之作者及成書年代, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所季刊 33 (1962), pp. 19–34; Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦, "*Xijing zaji* de zuozhe" 西京雜記的作者, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化 2 (1994), pp. 93–96; Ding Hongwu 丁宏武, "Cong xushi shijiao kan *Xijing zaji* yuanshi wenben de zuozhe ji xiezuo shidai" 從敘事視角看西京雜記原始文本的作者及寫作時代, *Tushuguan zazhi* 圖書館雜誌 29.4 (2010), pp. 68–76; and Wang Shouliang 王守亮, "*Xijing zaji* zuozhe wenti shukao" 西京雜記作者問題述考, *Linyi daxue xuebao* 臨沂大學學報 34.2 (2012), pp. 56–58.

[decorated with] multi-coloured banners. They were tied around the middle with bands of purple silk patterned in green, [ornamented with] gold and silver pendants. Every time there was a windy day, these banners and pennants would flutter and flash, lighting up the whole hall, while the chimes of the bells and pendants would startle all who heard them. In the middle there was arranged a painted wooden screen, with a pattern like the fine threads of a spider's web, together with a jade armrest and jade couch, a white ivory stool and bearskin rug.<sup>49</sup> The fur on this mat was more than two *chi* long: [if the Zhaoyi] fell asleep and pulled the rug over herself, she was completely hidden from view; if she sat on it, [the fur] covered her knees. The rug was impregnated with various aromatics, so that having once sat on the fur, the scent would cling to her for more than one hundred days. There were also four jade mat-weights, which were all translucent and completely flawless. A number of the window-leaves were made of green glass: they were also all translucent. Not even the smallest hair could remain concealed on them. The rafters were all carved with dragons and serpents, coiling around [each other], every scale and claw beautifully defined. Everyone who saw [this palace] was completely stunned. The artisans Ding Huan and Li Ju [who made this] were unmatched in their skill. Once the work was completed, he explained it to his sister's son, Fan Yannian,<sup>50</sup> but very few other people even knew about it and no one was able to continue the tradition.<sup>51</sup>

趙飛鸞女弟居昭陽殿，中庭彤朱，而殿上丹漆，砌皆銅沓黃金塗，白玉階，壁帶往往爲黃金釘，含藍田璧，明珠，翠羽飾之。上設九金龍，皆銜九子金鈴，五色流蘇。帶以綠文紫綬，金銀花鑷。每好風日，幡旒光影，照耀一殿，鈴鑷之聲，驚動左右。中設木畫屏風，文如蜘蛛絲縷，玉几玉床，白象牙簟，綠熊席。席毛長二尺餘，人眠而擁毛自蔽，望之不能見，坐則沒膝。其中雜熏諸香，一坐此席，餘香百日不歇。有四玉鎮，皆達照，無瑕缺。窗扉多是綠琉璃，亦皆達照，毛髮不得藏焉。椽桷皆刻作龍蛇，縈繞其間，鱗甲分明，

<sup>49</sup> The term *dian* 簟 normally means a mat made from woven bamboo; see, e.g., Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shouwen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007), p. 341 ("Zhubu" 竹部). Here, however, the item is specifically described as ivory, so it would seem to mean some kind of low stool, which would then be covered with a bearskin rug. By according such an item to the Zhaoyi, *Xijing zaji* links her with a previous imperial consort who was associated with performance, namely consort Li (Li Furen 李夫人). According to *Xijing zaji*, p. 187, emperor Wu of the Han had a special *dian* made for her from ivory.

<sup>50</sup> As noted by Cheng Lin and Cheng Zhangcan in their commentary, the text appears to be corrupt at this point. Li, "Chuanqi zhi shou," p. 35, suggests that this surname is in some way the source for the name of the Fan family in *Zhao Feiyuan waizhuan*.

<sup>51</sup> *Xijing zaji*, pp. 28-29.

見者莫不競慄。匠人丁緩，李菊，巧爲天下第一。締構既成，向其姊子樊延年說之，而外人稀知，莫能傳者。

Although *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* clearly draws here on some of the same material as does *Xijing zaji*, this particular description of Zhao-yang Hall is not one of them. There is no specific description in the former text of the abode of either the empress or her younger sister. This is indicative of the clear separation between *Hanshu* and *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, which applies to all the material related to the Zhao sisters in *Xijing zaji*.

Also found in the first *juan* of *Xijing zaji* is another anecdote concerning Zhao Feiyan concerning the presentation of a long list of gifts to the empress by her sister. It mirrors one of the central episodes in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*: an exchange of gifts between the two women. In both texts a very detailed list of items is given, presumably to emphasize the extravagant spending and wasteful luxury in which the sisters were now engaged, having been raised out of their natural milieu as entertainer-prostitutes thanks to the besotted foolishness of emperor Cheng. However, although the two accounts are clearly related, there is not a single item on the list which is the same.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*'s list records many objects that did not exist prior to the Sui-Tang period, suggesting that it represents a rewriting or updating of the earlier account.

*Xijing zaji* is also not entirely consistent in its portrayal of empress Zhao. In *juan* five, it includes a very short anecdote describing a particular musical instrument, which serves to introduce quite a different depiction of the empress from that found elsewhere, focusing on her expertise as a *qin* player. The *qin* she uses is not merely an exceptionally beautiful and finely made object, it is also specifically said to have been ornamented with images of exemplary women:

Empress Zhao had a precious *qin* named “The Phoenix.” It was decorated with dragons and cock-phoenixes, [together with] hornless dragons and hen-phoenixes, [not to mention] images of wise exemplary women from antiquity, all done in relief [inlaid carvings] in gold and jade. She was an expert in performing the melodies “The

<sup>52</sup> The list is given in *Xijing zaji*, p. 40. Anthony Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2007), p. 181, suggests not merely that the list is of genuinely Western Han date (specifically 16 BC), but that it was actually derived from the imperial archives, as a genuine record of the presents given to empress Zhao by her younger sister. The main problem with this interpretation is that some items are said to display *qibao* 七寶 designs – this may be the Buddhist term *saptaratna* or it may be simply a coincidence. However, if it is the former, this list cannot date to the reign of emperor Cheng.

Whirlwind” and “Traveling Far Away.”<sup>53</sup> 趙后有寶琴，曰鳳凰，皆以金玉隱起爲龍鳳螭鸞，古賢列女之象。亦善爲“歸風”，“送遠”之操。

To spend time contemplating such depictions was considered a deeply meritorious act in the Han dynasty and later, and is praised in many ancient texts.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, of the consorts of emperor Cheng, this kind of moral training was specifically associated with Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (ca. 48–6 BC).<sup>55</sup> For empress Zhao to participate in it as well provides a quite different perspective on her personal behavior while living in the palace. Clearly what is at issue here is not whether empress Zhao genuinely spent time viewing images of moral exemplars, but that at least one source of *Xijing zaji* (and this must have belonged to a very different textual tradition to that of *Hanshu*!) thought that she might have done. This anecdote thus belongs to a more positive biographical tradition than that found in the official history of the dynasty.

In the second *juan* of *Xijing zaji* there is a story that has been transformed during transmission between its appearance in this text and in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. In this case it concerns a man named Qing Anshi 慶安世, who is identified as one of empress Zhao’s many lovers. Although the two texts retain considerable differences in detail, it is likely that Qing Anshi, the attendant-gentleman who is so good at performing music and so much beloved by Zhao Feiyan, is actually the same character as Feng Wufang 馮無方, the much-loved attendant-gentleman who provides her musical accompaniment in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*.<sup>56</sup> Both texts are also as one in their description of empress Zhao’s sexual promiscuity, when she hoped that another man might father a child with her when emperor Cheng failed. The only significant difference is in the identity of these anonymous sexual partners. *Xijing zaji* states that men were smuggled into the palace from outside, while *Zhao Feiyan*

<sup>53</sup> *Xijing zaji*, p. 166. Although *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* makes little overt use of this anecdote, the same two tunes are said to have been performed by Zhao Feiyan for the delectation of the emperor; see *Waizhuan*, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Moral training through the contemplation of pictures of female exemplars is first mentioned in the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty; see *HS* 100A, pp. 4200–1. This important form of instruction is mentioned with particular approval in Fan, *Hou Hanshu* 10B, p. 438, where the virtuous and well-educated Liang Na 梁嬀 (116–150 AD), the wife of Han emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 125–144 AD), constantly viewed this kind of image. On images of exemplary women found in Eastern Han art; see Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1989), pp. 170–80.

<sup>55</sup> The *official* biography of Ban Jieyu contains two references to her self-cultivation practices, through the viewing of pictures of moral exemplars. The first is found in the account of one of her conversations with emperor Cheng; see *HS* 97B, p. 3983. The second is included within the text of her “Rhapsody in Self-Commiseration” (“Zidao fu” 自悼賦); see *HS* 97B, p. 3985.

<sup>56</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 9.

*waizhuan* identifies them as men who worked within the palace, either as elite office-holders or as servants in the imperial household:

When Qing Anshi was fifteen years old, he was appointed as an attendant-gentleman by emperor Cheng. He was good at playing the *qin*, and could perform the songs “Two Phoenixes” and “Leaving Behind the Hen-Phoenix.”<sup>57</sup> Empress Zhao was deeply impressed by this and reported it to his majesty, whereupon he was allowed to come and go [inside the palace], having sex [with the empress], and receiving unparalleled love and favor. He always wore boots made of the lightest silk, and waved a cooling fan, with a cloak of purple satin. He was actually living with the empress. She wanted to have children, but in the end she never produced any offspring. Since empress Zhao had no children, she set aside a room on the excuse that she wanted to pray and make supplications, which with the exception of her own servants and maids, no one was allowed to enter, not even the emperor. She had idle young men brought in [to the palace] in covered carriages, dressed in women’s clothing. They would come to the Rear Palace for weeks at a time, and engage in lewd sexual acts [with the empress]: she never seemed to need a rest [from her debauchery]. If one of the men became exhausted, she would immediately demand that he be replaced. However, in the end she never had any children.<sup>58</sup>

慶安世年十五，爲成帝侍郎。善鼓琴，能爲“雙鳳”“離鸞”之曲。趙后悅之，白上，得出入御內，絕見愛幸。嘗著輕絲履，招風扇，紫綈裘，與后同居處。欲有子，而終無胤嗣。趙后自以無子，常託以祈禱，別開一室，自左右侍婢以外，莫得至者，上亦不得至焉。以駟車載輕薄少年，爲女子服，入後宮者日以十數，與之淫通，無時休息。有疲倦者，輒差代之，而卒無子。

Empress Zhao’s childlessness was reported from the time of the composition of *Hanshu* onwards; this must be taken as a historical fact. There can also be no doubt that the political problems caused by the lack of an heir to the throne dominated court politics throughout the reign of emperor Cheng, and that relationships between rival factions within the imperial house were poisonous. However, allegations of empress Zhao’s promiscuous sexual behaviour are not found in any indubitably Han textual sources. This has led some scholars to argue that the accounts of empress Zhao’s licentious behavior in *Xijing zaji* could potentially have been influenced by later scandals in imperial houses

<sup>57</sup> Xu Jian 徐堅, *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005) 16, p. 386, identifies these two song titles as famous early pieces of *qin* music.

<sup>58</sup> *Xijing zaji*, p. 60.

during the Age of Disunion, in particular the appalling behavior of Jia Nanfeng 賈南風 (257–300 AD), the first empress of emperor Hui of Jin 晉惠帝 (r. 290–301, 301–307 AD).<sup>59</sup> Empress Jia, married at the age of fourteen to a man whose mental problems were well-known, became notorious first for her jealousy (which resulted in the murder of a number of her husband's consorts), and then for her own adultery: she is said to have assassinated her discarded lovers lest they reveal her affairs.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, rather than relating this scurrilous story to later historical individuals, it is equally possible to approach the problem from the wider perspective of women's history.

Feminist scholars in recent years have thoroughly researched a number of historical figures from various different cultures whose careers and posthumous reputations show a striking similarity with the treatment accorded to empress Zhao. In particular, these women share the characteristic that they were actresses, entertainers, or courtesans before they were raised to power by marrying a monarch as his official consort. Although many of these women were treated with considerable respect in immediately contemporary sources, after their deaths, it was common to accuse them of engaging in the most extreme sexual practices, participating in orgies and behaving with rampant promiscuity.<sup>61</sup> The career of the empress Theodora of Byzantium (ca. 500–548 AD) involved a quite different cultural and historical setting from that of Zhao Feiyan, but the two women both rose from extremely humble entertainment backgrounds to positions of considerable power – the author of *Xijing zaji* seems to have lacked the imagination of Procopius (ca. 500–560 AD) in the *Apókryphe Istoría* (*Secret Histories*), where he accuses Theodora of participating in astonishingly lewd floor-shows in her early years as a performer, as well as engaging enthusiastically in prostitution and debauchery, not to mention developing a life-long

<sup>59</sup> This theory is discussed in Zhang Xiaofeng 張小鋒, “Zhengshuo Zhao Feiyan” 正說趙飛燕, *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知識 2006.8, p. 76.

<sup>60</sup> For the biography of this violent and uncontrolled woman; see Fang, *Jinshu* 31, pp. 963–66.

<sup>61</sup> See for example Alexis Schwarzenbach, “Imagined Queens between Heaven and Hell,” in Regina Schulte, ed., *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500–2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 306–26. A number of empresses in subsequent Chinese dynasties also came from entertainer-courtesan backgrounds, but maintained better posthumous reputations than did Zhao Feiyan. For example, the career of empress Liu 劉皇后 (1079–1113) is considered in Beverly Bossler, “Gender and Entertainment at the Song Court,” in Anne Walthall, ed., *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2010), pp. 261–79; and that of Song empress Yang 楊皇后 (1162–1232) in Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2010), pp. 163–69.

interest in sorcery and black magic.<sup>62</sup> Empress Zhao's promiscuity forms an important narrative element in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, and this is clearly related to the account given in *Xijing zaji*. However, there is no reason to believe that there is any factual basis to the story at all. It is very striking that where *Hanshu* stresses the evils perpetrated by the Zhao sisters, there is no suggestion that Zhao Feiyan's sexual morality left anything to be desired. *Xijing zaji*, on the other hand, does not mention the murders and other crimes attributed to the agency of the Zhao family at all, concentrating instead on Zhao Feiyan's orgies. This indicates that the two texts are drawing on quite different traditions.

*ZHAO FEIYAN WAIZHUAN'S ANTECEDENTS: SANFU HUANGTU*

The textual history of *Sanfu huangtu* is complex, and there is no scholarly consensus as to the date of compilation. However, it remains an extremely important source of information about the Han-dynasty capital city, containing as it does many detailed accounts of the architecture that are not found in other sources. Writing during the Southern Song dynasty, Chao Gongwu identified this writing as identical with a work titled *Huangtu* 黃圖 (Yellow Plans) in one *juan*, recorded in the catalogue of the imperial library preserved in the official history of the Sui dynasty.<sup>63</sup> It would be difficult, however, to consider the latter one-*juan* text as identical to the extant *Sanfu huangtu*, which consists of six *juan*.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, according to evidence noted by Cheng Dachang 程大昌 (1123–1195), it appears that *Sanfu huangtu* in its present form dates to the Tang period, although Cheng also noted much older material within the text.<sup>65</sup> This dating is borne out by a study of specific geographical terms in *Sanfu huangtu*, especially place-names not known until the Tang dynasty.<sup>66</sup> This indicates at the very least that the pres-

<sup>62</sup> For his scandalous portrayal of empress Theodora's early career as a prostitute, actress, and strip-tease performer; see H. B. Dewing, *Procopius: The Anecdota or Secret History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1969), pp. 105–13 (chap. ix, sects. 8–28). Her belief in magic and dealings with other persons claiming to be able to contact evil spirits is described in *ibid.*, p. 263 [xxii, sects. 25–28].

<sup>63</sup> Chao, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 2B, p. 167. For the original reference, see Wei, *Suishu* 33, p. 982.

<sup>64</sup> The difference in *juan* numbers may indicate that these in fact were be completely different texts, as explained in He Qinggu 何清谷, "Sanfu huangtu de chengshu ji qi banben" 三輔黃圖的成書及其版本, *Wenbo* 文博 1990.2, pp. 28–32.

<sup>65</sup> Cheng Dachang 程大昌, *Yonglu* 雍錄 (SKQS edn.), j. 1, pp. 7a–8a.

<sup>66</sup> For example, one item in *Sanfu huangtu* states: "Guo Palace was constructed by empress-dowager Xuan, and it stands on the border of what is today Guo county in Qi prefecture 魏宮, 宣太后起, 在今歧州魏縣界"; see He Qinggu 何清谷, *Sanfu huangtu jiaoshi* 三輔黃圖校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), p. 37. The name of Qi prefecture is not a Han-dynasty term; it was introduced only in 619 AD, and in 756 AD changed to Fengxiang commandery 鳳翔郡.

ent transmitted text must have been significantly rewritten at this point. Miao Changyan 苗昌言 (*jinsi* 1142) was the first scholar to suggest that *Sanfu huangtu* should be considered a genuine Han text; his lead was followed by a number of other Song bibliophiles, including Chen Zhen-sun.<sup>67</sup> This theory is now generally adopted, but with some reservations. There is undoubtedly a certain amount of extraneous material within *Sanfu huangtu*, and hence the date of composition and the process by which the present text was compiled are still quite unclear.

*Sanfu huangtu* contains only one short story specifically concerned with the biography of Zhao Feiyan. The story describes her and emperor Cheng amusing themselves at the Taiyi Pool, and it is related – though not directly – with *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*. The same anecdote is also found, with very minor textual differences in *Shiyi ji*, indicating that the two are derived from the same source, and hence the two texts will be considered together here. In the translation below and in the Chinese text, the characters found only in *Shiyi ji* and not in *Sanfu huangtu* will be underscored:

Emperor Cheng would often amuse himself with Zhao Feiyan on holidays in the autumn at Taiyi Pool: there was a vessel made from *shatang* wood, so expensive it was quite unbelievable. It had mica ornaments on the bird-shaped figurehead on the prow – this was called the Cloud Boat. They also carved great paulownia-wood [blocks] in the shape of dragons and serpents, ornamented to make them look real, these were placed on either side of the Cloud Boat as outriggers. The rudder and oars were made from purple cassia-wood. Having watched the clouds as they sculled across the waters, they would amuse themselves by plucking caltrops in the canal. His majesty was worried that the rocking [of the boat] might alarm Feiyan, so he ordered the Sharpshooters in attendance to keep the Cloud Boat steady on the waves with a golden anchor.<sup>68</sup> Every time a light wind blew, Feiyan would immediately want to follow the wind and go out into the waters; his

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Guo county was not established until 691 AD, in the reign of Wu Zetian. Meanwhile, another item states: “The Yellow Mountain Palace is located thirty *li* west of Xingping county 黃山宮, 在興平縣西三十里”; see *ibid.*, p. 197. This county was established during Sui, and become Jincheng county 金城縣 in 708 AD, and then Xingping county was restored in 757 AD. Such examples are discussed as evidence of the formation of *Sanfu huangtu* in its present form in He, “*Sanfu huangtu de chengshu*,” p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> For the former, see Miao Changyan 苗昌言, “*Sanfu huangtu xu*” 三輔黃圖序, quoted in He, *Sanfu huangtu jiaoshi*, p. 5. See also Chen, *Zhizhai shulu jieti*, j. 8, p. 235.

<sup>68</sup> The Sharpshooters were an elite regiment of archers formed during the reign of Han Wudi in 104 BC; see *HS* 19A, p. 731.

majesty used a jade-green belt to tie up Feiyan's skirts, and then they went back. Later on Feiyan gradually found herself alienated [from his majesty]. She would often ask in alarm: "How can I expect you to tie up my skirts again, when I am of such humble birth?" To this day there [exists] the Escaping the Wind Tower at Taiyi Pool, which is where Feiyan tied up her skirts.<sup>69</sup>

帝常以三秋閑日與趙飛燕戲於太液池，以沙棠木爲舟，貴其不沉沒也。以雲母飾於鷁首，一名雲舟。又刻大桐木爲虬龍，雕飾如真，以夾雲舟而行。以紫桂爲柁樁。及觀雲棹水，玩擷菱渠。帝每憂輕蕩，以驚飛燕，命飲飛之士以金鎖纜雲舟於波上。每輕風時至，飛燕殆欲隨風入水，帝以翠纓結飛燕之裙游倦乃返。飛燕後漸見疏。常恐曰：“妾微賤，何復得預纓裙之游？”今太液池尚有避風臺，即飛燕結裙之處。

This anecdote, as with so many others concerning the relationship between emperor Cheng and Zhao Feiyan, stresses the incredible luxury and extravagance of the circumstances in which they lived, as well as his besotted love for her. So great was emperor Cheng's devotion that he was prepared to perform even the most menial tasks, such as tying up her skirts, for his beloved wife. Indeed more than that, his service is recorded in the very landscape, with the construction of a special building to commemorate this action. As with *Xijing zaji*, *Sanfu huangtu* and *Shiyi ji* provide a parallel with *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* which is close enough to be identifiable, and yet is equally somewhat removed from the form in which it appears in the latter. Unlike the innocuous terms in which this event is described in the earlier texts, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* talks in veiled terms of the empress's trying to commit suicide at Taiyi Pool; in this version of events her skirts were not tied up by the loving emperor Cheng, but were torn as she attempted to throw herself to her death.<sup>70</sup> However, the appearance of two essentially identical versions of the same story in Han to early medieval texts, and a significantly different account in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, indicates that the latter was drawing upon older material, which ended up being rewritten and adapted for a new audience.

<sup>69</sup> See Hu, *Sanfu huangtu jiaoshi*, pp. 264–65, and Meng Qingxiang 孟慶祥, *Shiyi ji yizhu* 拾遺記譯注 (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1989), j. 6, p. 168, respectively.

<sup>70</sup> *Waizhuan*, p. 10, says that this resulted in a Rear Palace fashion for short pleated skirts, which was called "Restraining the Immortal Skirts 留仙裙." Wang Xuxiao 王旭暉, "Handai richang fushi yanjiu" 漢代日常服飾研究, *Fushi daokan* 服飾導刊 2013:6.2, p. 8, uncritically taking this text as evidence of Han high fashion, when instead it is more likely it is intended as a criticism of the heartless and artificial way of life found in the imperial harem.

## ZHAO FEIYAN WAIZHUAN'S ANTECEDENTS: THE SHIYI JI STORIES

The collection of stories known as *Shiyi ji* was compiled during the Northern Dynasties by Wang Jia 王嘉 (d. 390 AD). It seems that the aim of the compiler was to gather otherwise neglected stories of strange and unusual happenings from high antiquity to the Jin dynasty into one useful compendium; the result is often described as one of the most important early compilation of *zhiguai* tales.<sup>71</sup> The earliest bibliographical information about the work comes from the Liang dynasty in a preface composed by Xiao Qi 蕭綺 (dates unknown). The preface describes the text as having originally consisted of nineteen *juan* and 220 individual tales; however, by Xiao's time the work had suffered considerable textual loss. As a result, when he reedited the collection, only ten *juan* remained.<sup>72</sup> The attribution to Wang Jia is today generally accepted, though in the late-imperial era certain scholars called it into question – most notably Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), who suggested that *Shiyi ji* was in fact written by Xiao Qi and merely attributed to Wang Jia.<sup>73</sup> Robert Campany, in his detailed study of the text, takes issue with the account given in Xiao Qi's preface, suggesting that he misunderstood the nature of the text. Campany considers it to be fragmentary and states that the *Shiyi ji* text operates on two levels. It consists of many tales that are concerned with the ruler's acquisition of marvels that come to him either as the result of tribute, or which he actively searches for with the assistance of an adept. This is coupled with an underlying narrative concerning the correlated succession of the Five Phases cycle as it applies to cycles of historical eras – the sections pertaining to emperor Cheng are found under the element Fire.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> For studies of the text and its influence on later Chinese literature; see Wu Liwen 吳俐雯, "Shiyi ji dui houshi wenxue de yingxiang juli" 拾遺記對後世文學的影響舉例, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 85.2 (1992), pp. 4–48; Wang Xingfen 王興芬, "Zashi zazhuan wei ti, dili bowu wei yong: Lun Shiyi ji de wenti tezheng" 雜史雜傳為體, 地理博物為用, 論拾遺記的文體特徵, *Xi-bei shida xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 西北師大學報 (社會科學版) 46.3 (2009), pp. 35–40; and Zhang Chunhong 張春紅, "Shiyi ji chuanguo de shenqihua zhuiqiu" 拾遺記創作的神奇化追求, *Xizang minzu xueyuan xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 西藏民族學院學報 (哲學社會科學版) 31.2 (2010), pp. 73–77.

<sup>72</sup> The text of Xiao Qi's preface is given in Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚, *Liangwen ji* 梁文紀 (SKQS edn.), j. 14, pp. 34a–35b ("Wang Zinian Shiyi ji xu" 王子年拾遺記序). Thus, in the catalogue of the Sui imperial library, the text is recorded as "Wang Zinian's (Wang Jia) *Record of Gleanings from Lost Texts*" (*Wang Zinian Shiyi ji* 王子年拾遺記) recompiled by Xiao Qi, in ten *juan*; see Wei, *Suishu* 33, p. 961. Xiao Qi's intervention in the text is considered in Zhang Kan 張侃, "Shitan Xiao Qi dui Shiyi ji de zhengli he piping: cong xiaoshuo pipingshi de jiaodu jiayi kaocha" 試探蕭綺對拾遺記的整理和批評, 從小說批評史的角度加以考察, *Fudan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexueban)* 復旦大學學報 (社會科學版) 1995.2, pp. 82–87.

<sup>73</sup> Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房叢書 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2001), p. 318.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Campany, *Strange Writings: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 64–67, 306–18.

Although this underlying structure is not particularly relevant to understanding *Shiyi ji*'s stories that concern Zhao Feiyan, these particular tales do fit one major theme of *Shiyi ji*: that the demands made by dynastic rulers for strange and marvellous objects to ornament their palaces are excessive. These demands – even when they appear benign – are in fact grossly expensive and disruptive, and hence they are indicative of the rottenness at the heart of the system.

Among the many stories of strange phenomena found in *Shiyi ji*, there are two short anecdotes concerning the relationship between emperor Cheng and Zhao Feiyan, both of which focus on events that occurred in the lavish palace buildings near Taiyi Pool. The first anecdote has already been described, but in the second one (which has no counterpart in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*), the focus is on the emperor's pleasures and the strange and unusual buildings and objects that he has had constructed:

Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty liked to go about in plain clothes. Next to Taiyi Pool he erected the “Roaming Free Palace,” with lacquer pillars supporting hangings of black satin.<sup>75</sup> All the paraphernalia and clothing, not to mention the carriage in which he rode, were plain black, and he delighted in going there at night, scorning the light of lamps and candles. All the beautiful women officials in the palace were dressed in black clothes, and Ban Jieyu and her juniors each wore a dark-red silk belt. Even the strings of their hats and the bags hanging from their belts that they wore were made of brocade or embroidery. In addition they were veiled in magnolia-patterned silk gauze. Only when they arrived at the Roaming Free Palace would they take up lamps. Once the emperor had finished enjoying himself, they would still the drums yet carry on dancing, but not a speck of dust was raised by their steps. On every fine evening [his majesty] would set out like this. They constructed a “Flying Hall,” one *zhang* square, much like today's palanquin, and specially selected knights from the Flying Forest imperial guard would shoulder it and run. The emperor from his vantage point on top of the palanquin felt as though he was speeding along; hearing them [run] from in their midst was like the sound of wind and thunder: since it went so fast he called this the “Cloud Thunder Palace.” The favoured [denizens of the] palace

<sup>75</sup> A palace of this name was constructed by Murong Xi, emperor Zhaowen of the Later Yan dynasty 後燕昭文帝慕容熙 (r. 401–407 AD). Its construction is mentioned in Fang, *Jinshu* 124, p. 3105. However, there is no evidence that a palace of the same name was constructed by Emperor Cheng.

[where he stopped], would all lay out carpets to cover the ground, since [his majesty] disliked the racket caused by chariots making ruts and horses stamping their hooves. Even though [his majesty] was far too fond of his plainclothes journeys and lavish banquets, his people did not hate him, nor were they put to any trouble by this. Every time he rode back and forth on his imperial carriage, the expensive clothes and fancy foods [provided for] his beloved consorts would be left by the side of the road [afterwards]; the old and poor among the people of the capital would all sing out: “Long live the emperor!” This occurred in the Hongjia (20–17 BC) and the Yongshi (16–13 BC) reign eras, when the country was wealthy and the people were rich, and there had been no wars for a long time. However, when Liu Xiang and Gu Yong remonstrated, he set fire to the Roaming Free Palace and the Flying Hall, and gave up enjoying his banquets and excursions.<sup>76</sup>

漢成帝好微行。於太液池旁起宵游宮，以漆爲柱，鋪黑絨之幕。器服乘輿，皆尚黑色，既悅於暗行，憎燈燭之照。宮中美御，皆服皂衣。自班婕妤以下，咸帶玄綬。簪佩雖如錦綉。更以木蘭紗綉罩之。至宵游宮乃秉燭。宴幸既罷，靜鼓自舞，而步不揚塵。好夕出游。造飛行殿，方一丈，如今之輦，選羽林之士，負之以趨。帝於輦上，覺其行快疾，聞其中若風雷之聲，言其行疾也，名曰雲雷宮。所幸之宮，咸以氈絨藉地，惡車輻馬迹之喧。雖惑於微行昵宴，在民無勞無怨。每乘輿返駕，以愛幸之姬寶衣珍食，舍於道傍，國人之窮老者皆歌萬歲。是以鴻嘉，永始之間，國富家豐兵戈長戢。故劉向谷永指言切諫，於是焚宵游宮及飛行殿，罷宴逸之樂。

This strange description of emperor Cheng’s pleasures, traveling by night in dark clothes to feast in a specially-built black palace, has no parallel in other texts concerning his life and reign. However, in the context of rhetoric about the worthiness of a ruler, any sense of his self-centered extravagance is balanced by the depiction of his generous gifts to the poor and needy, his determination not to drag the country into expensive wars, and his willingness to listen to advice.

The *Shiyi ji* account of the life of Zhao Feiyan, as with other medieval texts, makes no mention of the many murders she and her sister are supposed to have committed in the imperial palace. Likewise, there is scant reference to her origins and no mention at all of the outrage that many members of the imperial house felt at the elevation to empress of someone born a slave. Instead, these texts belong to quite a different tradition, one that talks virtually exclusively about luxurious living and ostentatious spending: the emphasis is on the enjoyment

<sup>76</sup> Meng, *Shiyi ji yizhu*, j. 6, pp. 166–67.

of a wide variety of sensual pleasures. There are stories that attest to Zhao Feiyan's musical talents. There are stories that list the exotic perfumes with which she scented herself and the fine silks she wore, not to mention descriptions recounting the expensive ornamentation of her palace, the lovely and rare objects that she owned, and her own personal beauty. Such anecdotes attest to a truth that pertains to the historical Zhao Feiyan as well: women from entertainer backgrounds who were brought into the Rear Palace were there for the pleasure that they brought to the ruler. However, the *Shiyi ji* stories concerning emperor Cheng and his wife are interesting because they suggest that the expensive refinements of living for the imperial household were not necessarily viewed as intrinsically problematic: at a time when the country was wealthy and the ruler well-meaning and benevolently inclined, the regime could afford his extravagances.

#### CONCLUSION

The *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* itself contains no information concerning authorship, and makes no claim as to date. The three prefaces and postfaces, on the other hand, provide a provenance for the text which is either completely unverifiable or demonstrably invented. Although a number of modern scholars of traditional Chinese fiction, including Wu Zhida 吳志達 and Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, have noted that Tang-dynasty novellas conventionally do make reference to authorship, this is not true of forged or substantially rewritten texts: particularly those which were misattributed to famous individuals or which claimed to derive from other historical periods. It is to this group of writings that *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* belongs. Although the text draws upon earlier material, this study serves to demonstrate that the novella, in its present form, must date to the Tang dynasty, and began to circulate widely from approximately the year 850. The vocabulary and terminology used means that a significantly earlier date is not possible; the large number of quotations of this text which are preserved in indubitably late-ninth-century sources means that it cannot have been produced much later.

The presence of related but not identical material in earlier texts also provides evidence concerning the process by which the work was produced. First, if the author was a Tang-era person intent on forging a "Han" text, it is hard to see why he would not simply use the various *Xijing zaji*, *Sanfu huangtu*, and *Shiyi ji* anecdotes unchanged. The rewriting of these vignettes in *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* has resulted in the introduction of anachronistic details, which serve to betray the later origins

of the text. Furthermore, if the author was using *Xijing zaji* in particular as a source, it is also not at all clear why he would have eschewed all the information in this text associated with *Hanshu*. At the same time, there are some anecdotes concerning Zhao Feiyan that are unique to *Xijing zaji* and *Shiyi ji*, with no counterpart in either *Hanshu* or *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*; it is again not clear why someone writing a “history” of emperor Cheng’s harem would not simply include all relevant material from these two texts. The fact that the story of the presentation of gifts and other anecdotes that were eventually included appear in a different and sometimes demonstrably earlier form in Han to early-medieval period texts suggests that elements from *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* were in circulation long before it finally crystallized during Tang.

*Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is an important landmark in the history of Chinese literature. Although the text dates to the Tang rather than the Han, this does not affect its significance as the earliest surviving example of erotic fiction, and the first Chinese example of palace literature. Furthermore, it remains unique among the fictional writings of this period in terms of narrative complexity, with no comparable work being produced until many centuries later. However, considering its importance, *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* has been the subject of astonishingly little academic research. Part of this is no doubt due to ongoing concerns about the problem of dating and authenticity: as long as it continues to be dismissed as a “forged text” there will be little study of it. At the same time, the text does not fit comfortably into any present categorization of literary development, and there are no other early fictional writings that deal with such candor about matters of sexuality: it is a strange tale by a completely unknown master who describes a triangular relationship marked by obsessive desires and internecine rivalry, and it is set against a backdrop of unimaginable power and wealth. Hence, further research is needed in order to understand the place of this text within traditional Chinese literature.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>HS</i>	Ban Gu 班固, <i>Hanshu</i> 漢書
<i>Waizhuan</i>	Ling Xuan 伶玄, <i>Zhao Feiyan waizhuan</i> 趙飛燕外傳
<i>Xijing zaji</i>	Cheng Lin 成林 and Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦, <i>Xijing zaji quanyi</i> 西京雜記全譯