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Fact and Fiction: Liu E's Treatment of Characters in The Travels of Lao Can

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Fact and Fiction:

Liu E's Treatment of Characters in *The Travels of Lao Can*

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Introduction

The waning years of the Qing period (1644-1911) were a tumultuous time in Chinese history. Intellectuals witnessed increased contact with foreign powers and were forced to consider how China, still under dynastic rule, could modernize and also maintain the traditions and culture of Chinese civilization. This dichotomy gave rise to several conflicts in the late 19th century: the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), led by Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814-1864); the Tongzhi Restoration (1860-1874) that called for the revitalization of traditional Chinese order; the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), in which China met humiliating defeat, ceding Taiwan to Japan; the Hundred Days Reform (1898) to establish institutional and social changes, rejected by Empress Cixi and her supporters; the political stirring of the southern revolutionaries; and the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.¹ Political and social fragmentation reached a new height, causing distress for intellectuals of this generation. One such figure was scholar, entrepreneur, and writer Liu E 劉鶚 (1857-1909). He was a man of Jiangsu² born into a scholarly family, “equally sensitive to the values in traditional Chinese culture,” just as he was a pioneer of his time, aware of the “urgent needs of a new age”³ when the lack of industrial development made China vulnerable to foreign power and influence.

¹ See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990). The latter half of the Qing dynasty may be considered one of Chinese history’s most unstable periods. Hong Xiuquan was a Christian convert who led the Taiping faction and established their capital in Nanjing. After Qing forces put down the rebellion, the Qing court promoted the Tongzhi Restoration, which is associated with the Self-Strengthening Movement that emphasized the combination of Chinese and Western learning. Control over Korea led to the Sino-Japanese War and the invasion of Manchuria, China’s Northeastern region. Reformers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Sun Yat-sen began movements to address China’s political and social problems. When these issues became critical, the Boxers attacked foreigners and their supporters in 1900.

² See Liu Dewei 劉德威 and Liu Defen 劉德棻, *Liu E: Liu E guju 劉鶚: 劉鶚故居 [Liu E’s Former Home]* (1997). Liu E’s former home is located in Chuzhou, Jiangsu Province.

³ Harold E. Shadick, “*The Travels of Lao Ts’an: A Social Novel*,” *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* 2 (1939): 44.

Liu E is remembered as an unconventional scholar of his time. He became known through his novel *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 (*The Travels of Lao Can*, hereafter referred to as *Travels*), a novel Chinese reformer Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) praised for its lyrical style. Critics have grouped Liu E with his contemporary Li Boyuan 李伯元 (1867-1906) who wrote *Guanchang xianxing ji* 官場現形記 (*The Bureaucrats*), a scathing novel that satirizes corrupt officials within the Qing bureaucracy.⁴ In his influential *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Xun describes Liu E's literature in a similar light: that *Travels* "attacks bureaucracy . . . [written to] reveal the damage done by strict officials."⁵ Liu E and his contemporaries were aware of the nation's fragmented state and concerned for China's future; critics are therefore justified in emphasizing the castigatory nature of these works.

Yet, aside from some similarities in attacks on Qing officials, Liu E's novel differs from the literature of his contemporaries, for the reader can glimpse into the thinking and vision of an author who felt closely the effects of a country struggling to maintain order. Liu E writes in his preface to *Travels*, "Spiritual nature gives birth to feeling, and feeling gives birth to tears . . . If weeping takes the form of tears, its strength is small. If weeping does not take the form of tears, its strength is great: it reaches farther."⁶ In the final passage, Liu E grounds his novel in the

⁴ For an introduction to Li Boyuan's novel, see Hu Shi, *Zhongguo zhanghui xiaoshuo kaozheng* 中國章回小說考證 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1980), 437-456. For an analysis of the novel, see Donald Holoch, "A Novel of Setting: The Bureaucrats," in *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 76-115.

⁵ Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shiliu* 中國小說史略, revised edition (1935), translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang as *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), 382-83.

⁶ Harold E. Shadick, trans., *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 2. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *TL* 1.

Chinese past, praising writers whose literature were “tears of strength:” Qu Yuan 屈原 (fl. late 4th-early 3rd c. B.C.), poet of the ancient Chu Kingdom; the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (35 B.C. - 86 B.C.) who wrote the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*); the Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770); and Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (?-1763), author of *Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). In a spirit of praise similar to Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (d. 1661),⁷ Liu E alludes to past Chinese writers who were distressed at the state of their kingdom and society, writing to express their concerns and thinking.

It can be suggested *Travels* also reflects the broader values, concerns, and beliefs of the author, specifically in his treatment of characters and plot lines. Liu E’s thinking as revealed through his novel is, however, better understood with consideration to his background and life. He was a native of Dantu 丹徒 (modern Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province) and the second son of Liu Chengzhong 劉成忠 (1818-1884). Liu E’s father attained his *jinshi* 進士 degree and held official post in Beijing, later stationed in Henan Province as provincial censor (*yushi* 禦史).⁸ Although born into a scholar-gentry family, Liu E refused to undergo preparation for the eight-legged essay required for the civil service examination. Liu E’s learning has been described as unconventional because of his interest in Western learning and his contact with the Taigu School

⁷ See David L. Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1.

⁸ See Liu Delong 劉德隆, Zhu Xi 朱禧, and Liu Deping 劉德平, eds., *Liu E ji Lao Can youji ziliao* 劉鶚及老殘遊記資料 (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin chubanshe, 1985), 5. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *ZL*.

of Thought (*Taigu xuepai* 太谷學派). This was an esoteric, syncretic, semi-religious movement of Confucian doctrine that combined elements of Buddhism and Daoism.⁹ In 1880 (age 23), Liu E traveled to Yangzhou and met Taigu spiritual leader Li Longchuan 李龍川 (1808-1885) where he became his disciple.¹⁰ Liu E also met Taigu disciple Huang Baonian 黃葆年 (1841-1924), who later became his intimate friend as evidenced in Liu E's 1902 letter to him.¹¹

Liu E never did pass the civil service examinations, but as a member of the Taigu School, he studied core Chinese philosophies and developed a deep sense of compassion for his country and people. In 1888, he became sub-prefect (*tongzhi* 同知) of Henan, serving under Governor Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835-1902) to address the Yellow River's annual flood problems. After preventing major disasters in Henan, he began charting the Yellow River in Shanxi, Henan, and Shandong. The following year in 1889, governor of Shandong Zhang Yao 張曜 (1832-1891) recognized Liu E's abilities and recruited him as an advisor on river management.¹² Liu E later wrote several books in 1893, including *Maps and Studies on the Historical Changes of the*

⁹ Sources on the Taigu School in connection with Liu E can be found in three articles, two by Liu Huisun 劉蕙孫 and the other by Yan Weiqing 嚴薇青, collected in *ZL*, 591-631. More general sources on the Taigu School can be found in Lu Jiye's 盧冀野 "Taigu xuepai zhi yange ji qi sixiang" 太谷學派之沿革及其思想 [Successive Changes in the Taigu sect and its thought], *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 24 (1927): 71-75, and Ma Y.W.'s "Qingji Taigu xuepai shishi shuyao" 清季太谷學派史事述要 [Brief discussion of the historical events surrounding the Taigu sect of the late Qing], *Dalu Zazhi* 大陸雜誌 28 (May 1964): 13-18.

¹⁰ For Liu E's recount of this experience in his *Tieyun shicun* 鐵雲詩存 [*The Extent Poetry of Tieyun*], see *ZL*, 43.

¹¹ *ZL*, 299-301.

¹² *ZL*, 9.

Yellow River (*Lidai huanghe bianqian tukao* 歷代黃河變遷圖考), which covered topics such as mathematics, river conservancy, electricity, and principles of machinery.¹³

Liu E understood that Western learning has its practical uses (*xixue wei yong* 西學為用). He intended to strengthen China's industry through the borrowing and application of Western technology. In 1893, Liu E joined the London-based Peking Syndicate (*fu gongsi* 福公司) as supervisor. He planned to work with foreigners and develop China's industry through industrial projects such as constructing railroads and opening coal mines. At first hopeful about the industrial prospects, Liu E discovered the company's draft treaty violated the rights and interests of Chinese workers. He traveled from Taiyuan to Beijing three times to request changes in the contract, but in the end, he was dismissed from the company. Liu E then left for Shanghai and raised funds with a friend to open a general merchandise store called the Five Story Shopping Mall (*wu cenglou shangchang* 五層樓商場), but Liu E was later forced to close the business.¹⁴

After the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Liu E traveled to Shanghai where he met with his friend Lian Mengqing 連夢青 (d. 1914). Lian Mengqing made a living by writing for Shanghai's Commercial Press in a magazine called *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 秀像小說 (*Illustrated Magazine*), edited by Li Boyuan, author of *The Bureaucrats*.¹⁵ To assist his friend, Liu E submitted manuscripts to this magazine, which began serializing *Travels* in 1903. After *Travels* was

¹³ Collected in *ZL*, 118-26. This includes the *San sheng Huanghe tushuo* 三省黃河圖說 [*Handbook for the Three Provinces and Yellow River*]. According to the editors of *ZL*, this is part of Liu E's larger 1893 text.

¹⁴ *ZL*, 12.

¹⁵ *ZL*, 273n. 6. For the issue concerning Li Boyuan's deletion of sections in Chapter 10-12, See Timothy C. Wong, "Notes on the Textual History of the *Lao Ts'an Yu-chi*," *T'oung Pao* 69, nos. 1-3 (1983): 25.

published in 1907, enemies in the official court deemed Liu E a traitor. They accused him of being guilty for allegedly selling government-owned lands to foreigners for personal profit, and being a “profiteer of large granary stores” (*sidao taicang su* 私盜太倉粟). In 1908, Liu E was exiled to Xinjiang where he died of a stroke the following year at the age of 52.¹⁶

Liu E’s life and background strongly influence his treatment of various plotlines and characters, as well as his attention to landscape and setting in the novel. Specifically, Liu E’s experiences in Shandong working along the Yellow River and his contact with the Taigu School are sources of inspiration for much of the novel’s content. He gives the reader insight into the biographies of real people through his portrayal of the different characters in *Travels*, creating a late 19th century depiction of Chinese society.

The novel takes place in the province of Shandong, a year or two before the Boxer Rebellion. The narrator traces the journey of Lao Can: a Jiangnan 江南 (south of the river) man who becomes an itinerant doctor. In Chapter 2, he visits some natural scenery in Jinan 濟南 such as Daming Lake 大明湖 and the Four Great Springs 四大泉. Later on, he speaks with commoners and hears of Yu Xian 玉賢, an honest, but brutal official. Yu Xian falsely accuses citizens in Caozhou *fu* 曹州府 of banditry, torturing them to confession and sometimes to death. In Chapter 7, Lao Can meets the young scholar Shen Ziping 申子平. Lao Can sends him to the mythical Peach Blossom Mountain (*taohua shan* 桃花山) in search of Lao Can’s old friend, Liu

¹⁶ ZL, 12-14.

Renfu 劉仁甫: a mountain recluse whose dealings with local bandits and connections in the government are essential to ending Yu Xian's tyranny. Chapter 8-11 describes Shen Ziping's meeting with the beautiful and intelligent Maiden Yu (*Tu Yugu*) 涂瓊姑, with whom he discusses philosophy and politics. Later, he meets Yellow Dragon (*Huang Longzi* 黃龍子), a prophetic and spiritual figure.

The story returns to Lao Can in Chapter 12. He is trapped in Qihe *xian* 齊河縣 because large blocks of ice prevent him from crossing the Yellow River. After admiring the natural scenery, he recalls a few lines of poetry from the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) and contemplates the fate of his country and society, crying tears that freeze up instantly. He returns to his room, and later meets his old friend Huang Renrui 黃人瑞. He introduces Lao Can to the two courtesans, Cui Hua 翠花 and Cui Huan 翠環. These young women explain how they became courtesans after the Yellow River struck their hometown in a heavy flood, killing several hundred thousand peasants. Huang Renrui later arranges Cui Huan's marriage to Lao Can in order to rescue her and her younger brother from an unpleasant life.

In the last quarter of the novel, Liu E blends elements of the Chinese criminal case story (*gong an* 公案)¹⁷ into the plot. Lao Can hears of another brutal official named Gang Bi 剛弼 who

¹⁷ See George A. Hayden, "The Courtroom Plays of the Yuan and Early Ming Periods," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1974): 192. The *gong an* may be translated as "courtroom drama." These stories have three important elements: a crime, the crime's solution or punishment, and a clerk or judge who solves the crime.

wrongly accuses and tortures the Jia 賈 family in an attempt to solve a murder case of thirteen people. In the end, Lao Can visits the recluse Green Dragon (*Qing Longzi* 青龍子) in the Black Pearl Grotto (*xuan zhu dong* 玄珠洞) to obtain an herb that can revive the thirteen victims, and in the process, discovers the culprits behind the murder case. Lao Can's travels continue in the sequel, *Lao Can youji erji* 老殘遊記二集,¹⁸ but this work of literature as a whole cannot be considered finished, for evidence has not surfaced to clarify what the author's final vision of the novel was.

This prompts questions concerning the novel's textual history and when Liu E actually finished the first twenty Chapters of *Travels*. Timothy C. Wong's research explores this issue to understand when the Text Proper (*chu pian* 初篇), the Sequel (*er pian* 二篇), and the Fragment (*wai pian* 外篇) were written and published. Wong clarifies important issues concerning the novel's textual history: Liu E wrote Chapter 1-10 and 12-14 of the Text Proper between 1903 and 1904. He suggests that after the first ten Chapters were serialized in the *Riri xinwen bao* 日新聞報, Liu E continued writing the novel about a year later and finished the Text Proper by the end of 1905.¹⁹

¹⁸ The first six Chapters of this Sequel has been trans. into English by Lin Yutang 林語堂 and published in *A Nun of Taishan and Other Translations* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936). The translation was revised and published again, as part of Lin's *Widow, Nun, and Courtesan* (New York: The John Day Co., 1951). Timothy Wong has translated the last three Chapters of the Sequel in "The Sequel to Lao can youji: Chapter 7-9," *Renditions* 32 (1989): 20-45.

¹⁹ Wong, "Textual History," 24, 31.

Literary critics have also asked how to interpret the different facets of Liu E's novel. C. T. Hsia (1969) confirms *Travels* as a work "grounded in political reality" that addresses "China's fate as a whole."²⁰ He also explores Liu E's treatment of Lao Can and Yellow Dragon, concluding that both characters represents Liu E's ideal self: Lao Can, the traveling moral figure who helps the oppressed people, and Yellow Dragon, a prophet archetype who views the world's events as connected to the struggle of humanity and China's cycle of rise and decay.²¹

Donald Holoch (1980) later addresses the allegorical nature of *Travels* by explores the plot, description, and structure of the novel. He argues the novel reflects Liu E's philosophical views, supporting Průšek's argument that *Travels* is "the last great apologia of the old Chinese civilization before its fall."²² Holoch concludes *Travels* can "be interpreted as an allegorical [novel]"²³ through the novel's plot, content, and character Lao Can: a scholar-turned-doctor free from the politics of officialdom, carrying only morality and social responsibility to face the nation's political fragmentation.

Holoch's research also touches on an important point: Liu E's attention to several genres of Chinese literature.²⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee (1985) suggests examining the protagonist Lao Can as a solitary traveler, and to read the novel as part of *youji* 游記 literature: traditional Chinese travel writing, as indicated in the title of *Travels*. He discusses Liu E's novel as a series of journeys: first, the examination of the relationship between humanity and nature; second, the observation

²⁰ C.T. Hsia, "The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning," in *C.T. Hsia on Chinese Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 259, 247.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

²² Holoch's translation of Jaroslav Průšek, "Liu O et son roman *Le Pèlerinage du Lao Ts'an*," in *Chinese History and Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1970), 140.

²³ Donald Holoch, "The Travels of Laocan: Allegorical Narrative," in *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 145.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

of the sociopolitical climate of Chinese society before the Boxer Rebellion; and finally, the expounding of philosophical and esoteric wisdom in the mythical Peach Blossom Mountain.²⁵

Timothy C. Wong (1989) closely examines Liu E and the protagonist Lao Can, urging scholars to reexamine the novel with consideration to Liu E's life and career. He suggests Liu E did not write with intentions to "build a literary monument for the ages," nor was Liu E concerned "whether [the novel] would be identified as his."²⁶ However, Wong confirms that the traveling doctor Lao Can is "a wishful self-portrait" of the author and suggests examining the novel requires close attention to the "extratextual historical or biographical circumstances"²⁷ that influenced Liu E to write.

In response to Timothy Wong's call for a historical analysis of Liu E and *Travels*, Luke S.K. Kwong (2001) places Liu E in the greater context of late-Qing culture and society. He explores the "inner world of thoughts, feelings and aspirations of China's educated elite"²⁸ with attention to Liu E's Confucian message of moral and social responsibility. According to Kwong, the ethical views and actions of Liu E's alter-ego Lao Can reflects Liu E's greater thinking with special attention to statecraft as a Confucian, "balance with an inner calm" as a Daoist, and a "bodhisattva's compassion" as a Buddhist.²⁹

Finally, Timothy C. Wong (2002) emphasizes the need to examine the novel outside Western notions of fiction. Instead, he suggests reading *Travels* as part of the *xiaoshuo* 小說

²⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, "The Solitary Traveler: Images of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature," in *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, ed. Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 282-85.

²⁶ Timothy C. Wong, "The Name 'Lao Ts'an' in Liu E's Fiction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 1 (1989): 105-6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁸ Luke S. K. Kwong, "Self and Society in Modern China: Liu E (1857-1909) and *Laocan Youji*," *T'oung Pao* 87 (2001): 360.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 382-83.

tradition that “indicates pre-existent facts to which all *Chinese* fictional writings at least pretended to adhere,”³⁰ and to consider Liu E’s commentary (*pingyu* 評語) to the novel as informal or private history (*waishi* 外史 or *yeshi* 野史) that complements official history. Wong contends the commentary is “integral to the text,” because it emphasizes “what is *not* fictionalized.”³¹ These points suggest commentary in *xiaoshuo* must be carefully examined, particularly in *Travels*, for the novel’s commentary assists the reader in understanding Liu E’s inspiration for the treatment of character, events, and plotlines in his novel.

To read *Travels* without regard to Liu E’s moral philosophy would deter the reader from understanding Liu E’s greater message: political action will not remedy China’s peril, and revitalizing spiritual, moral values are necessary amidst China’s gradual change towards modernity. From Liu E’s involvement in industrial development and the Taigu School, his view of China’s future undeniably includes both the use of Western technology and the upholding of Chinese tradition. Liu E’s novel may be “the last great apologia of the old Chinese civilization,”³² but perhaps Liu E did not think “ancient” Chinese civilization would simply end in China’s future. Earlier writers were a source of inspiration for Liu E, and in his efforts to cope with the instability of a broken society and struggling government, he shared their mood, concerns, and inspiration to write. Wong declares Liu E is a writer who “never broke out of

³⁰ Wong, “The Facts of Fiction: Liu E’s Commentary to the *Travels of Lao Can*,” in *Excursions in Chinese Culture: Festschrift in Honor of William R. Schultz*, ed. Marie Chan, Chia-lin Pao Tao, and Jing-shen Tao (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002), 160.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 163, 166.

³² Jaroslav Průšek, “Liu O et son roman *Le Pèlerinage du Lao Ts’an*,” in *Chinese History and Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1970), 140.

traditional Chinese paradigms.”³³ Therefore, Liu E’s political, social, and moral philosophy in *Travels* requires attention with regard to his biographical circumstances and the Taigu School of Thought. This research takes Wong’s argument further: to consider the historical and biographical factors that influenced Liu E’s treatment of characters and plotlines in his novel.

For skeptics who treat the novel as strictly a work of fiction, Liu E’s commentary suggests what can be considered fact in *Travels*. Liu E’s commentary on Chapter 13 explains the relationship between fictional characters and their real counterparts in *Travels*:

Unofficial history complements standard history. While the names may be invented out of the blue, the contents must be patterned after actualities . . . [the] courtesans in the north are described without a single bit of fabrication. By extension, you can see that it is equally so for other parts of the narrative.³⁴

There are questions as to whether or not the novel’s commentary was all from the same hand,³⁵ for commentary to *xiaoshuo* was sometimes written by people other than its authors. According to the testimony of Liu E’s son Liu Dashen 劉大紳 and grandson Liu Houze 劉厚澤, however, Liu E wrote the commentary attached to the original manuscript of *Travels*.³⁶ We can be quite sure he wrote them based on this testimony and because of historical precedent: *pingdian* 評點 commentary to poetry and classical prose began at least in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), which led later “fiction authors [to write] their commentaries so as to add another layer of discourse to

³³ Timothy C. Wong, “Liu E in the Fang-shih Tradition,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 2 (1992): 306.

³⁴ Translated by Wong, “Facts of Fiction,” 166; cf. *ZL*, 77.

³⁵ See Zhang Yaquan 張亞權, “*Lao Can youji yuanping kaosuo*” 老殘遊記原評考索 [Thoughts on the Original Commentary to *The Travels of Lao Can*], *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 (1988): 122-23.

³⁶ See Wei Shaochang 魏紹昌, comp., *Lao Can youji ziliao* 老殘遊記資料 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 59, 95.

their texts.”³⁷ Liu E wrote knowing his novel would not be considered elite, serious literature, but the commentary implies *Travels* can also be read to complement official history, for his use of plotlines and treatment of characters indicate a relationship to real accounts of events and real people in his life.

In this paper, I will pay attention to characters in *Travels* and focus my discussion on their relationship to the author's life and thinking. My reasoning is that, as Wong points out, Liu E in his treatment of characters and plotlines “draws heavily on actual events and persons,” to finally “pull them together into the realm of fiction.”³⁸ My reading of the characters in *Travels* essentially expands on this line of interpretation, but for the sake of clarity, I leave out Liu E's treatment of landscapes and technology in the novel. First, I examine the two officials in *Travels*, Yu Xian and Gang Bi, to explore Liu E's attention to Chinese statecraft; second, I direct attention to the mountain recluse Liu Renfu and discuss Liu E's awareness of military affairs and other specialized knowledge; third, I examine the protagonist Lao Can and Governor Zhuang to explore Liu E's Daoist thinking and his involvement on the Yellow River; and finally, I look at the religio-philosophical characters Maiden Yu and Yellow Dragon in relation to the doctrine and members of the Taigu School. Liu E is at once a historian and a storyteller who writes *xiaoshuo* to “historicize” (*lun qi shi* 論其世), drawing inspiration from the people and environment around him in the portrayal of these characters, and therefore I suggest Liu E's thinking and treatment of characters in the novel reflect actual teachings and real people in his environment. After examining the relationship between the novel's characters and people in Liu

³⁷ David L. Rolston, introduction to *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2, 6.

³⁸ Wong, “Facts of Fiction,” 166.

E's environment who inspired them, I explore the historical and biographical factors that shape the author's ideas towards politics, society, and philosophy in *Travels*: to argue that Liu E, in crafting the novel's characters, blends fact and fiction to voice his distress at the dilapidated state of China and to establish his spiritual self.

Arousing the Boxer Faction: Two Types of Officials in *Travels*

Although government officials recognized Liu E's abilities in river management, his business ventures with foreigners provoked the antagonism of his enemies in the Qing bureaucracy. Liu E's "insults and failings he [had] been suffering in his own life"³⁹ may have led him to write veiled criticisms of government officials in *Travels*. It would be assuming too much to say Liu E conveys his complete political philosophy in the novel, but his treatment of the character prefect Yu Xian sheds light on the author's thinking towards the late Qing bureaucracy: specifically the role and ambitions of the "honest official" (*qingguan* 清官). This term describes an uncorrupt official who may refuse bribes, but on the other hand, he oppresses the common people with his strict statecraft.

Lao Can first hears of prefect Yu Xian during a feast. The minor officials recognize Yu Xian as "very efficient, but much too cruel," and question if his actions are justified: "In less than a year he has choked to death more than two thousand people in his cages. Do you suppose none of these were unjustly treated?" Another guest said, "There certainly have been cases of injustice . . . What nobody knows is the proportion of those not unjustly condemned."⁴⁰

Although Yu Xian is a capable official, these quiet conversations show his methods of punishment and sense of judgment are points of anxiety among minor officials. Lao Can is

³⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁰ *TL* 1, 35.

determined to gather information about Yu Xian who, in his drive for ambition and status, “[wounds] heaven and [destroys] all principles of justice.”⁴¹ Yu Xian’s cruel acts against the common people arouses Lao Can’s anger, who may have no intentions of “leaving the mountains and entering official life,”⁴² but nonetheless, he consults both locals and officials to stop Yu Xian’s mistreatment of commoners.

Lu Xun wrote that Liu E’s portrayal of Yu Xian “[reveals] the damage done by strict officials.”⁴³ The author’s description of Yu Xian’s actions reflect this point, but it is also worth asking how previous works and real people influence Liu E’s treatment of the honest, cruel official “incapable” of corruption in *Travels*. Liu E’s commentary on Chapter 3 explains the relationship between minor officials and Yu Xian:

[In] the conversations at the North Pillar Restaurant, everyone is dissatisfied with Yu Xian. They praise him with the well-known phrase “items on the path not picked up,” no one daring enough to bring up [his] treachery. From [Jinan] to Caozhou is quite far, and no one is able to find reliable information.⁴⁴

In this commentary, Liu E explains that minor officials fear Yu Xian and cannot clearly determine how many commoners Yu Xian unjustly condemned; other officials praise Yu Xian with the term “items on the path not picked up” (*lu bu shi yi* 路不拾遺),⁴⁵ unaware of Yu Xian’s despotic activities as prefect of Caozhou *fu*. In this portrayal of Yu Xian, Liu E draws inspiration

⁴¹ *TL* 1, 71.

⁴² *TL* 1, 44.

⁴³ See note 5.

⁴⁴ *ZL*, 75.

⁴⁵ This term comes from the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 which literally means “the item not picked on the roadside.” It describes a society that is ruled by a just, but strict and Legalist government.

from Sima Qian's thinking from the *Shiji*. In Sima Qian's *Biography of Strict Officials* (*Kuli liezhuan* 酷吏列傳), the Grand Historian's comments:

The virtues of these ten men can be considered examples, their defects as a warning.

Their measures and instructions were designed to curb evil and, taken in the aggregate, were of significance as regards both their civil and military aspects . . . When it comes to officials such as [Feng Dang], the governor of Shu, who savagely oppressed people; [Li Zhen], the governor of [Guanghan], who made mincemeat of men . . . [Luo Bi], the governor of [Dianshui], who tortured people until they confessed . . . [they were all] as ruthless as vipers and vultures.⁴⁶

The line of transmission from Sima Qian to Liu E relates to statecraft and the role of strict officials in Chinese government. Although Sima Qian praises efficient, strict officials in his biography, he is uninterested in recording the biography of more oppressive officials such as Li Zhen, instead commenting how strict officials can lose sight of the common people's interests. In contrast, Liu E acts as an unofficial historian in *Travels*, focusing on the biography of Yu Xian as told through commoners and minor officials. After hearing of Yu Xian's excessive use of standing cages (*zhanlong* 站籠), Lao Can consults a local named Lao Dong 老董 who explains how Yu Xian falsely accused the Yu 于 family of banditry: “[Yu Xian:] ‘All lies! What honest people would dare to buy firearms; your family are certainly bandits!’”⁴⁷ Yu Xian is unable to capture actual bandits and instead condemns the Yu family on false evidence. As a consequence,

⁴⁶ Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, selected by Po-Hsiang Wang, translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Taipei: Wenxin Chubanshe, 1975), 922. Hereafter, changes from Wade-Giles Romanization to Hanyu Pinyin Romanization will appear in brackets.

⁴⁷ *TL* 1, 47.

Mrs. Wu commits suicide, and the Yu family is left derelict. Liu at the end of Chapter 5 comments:

Yu Xian is ruthless, Mrs. Wu pure and chaste . . . Chen Renmei praised Mrs. Wu's dedication and chastity because of her human feeling and virtue, which Yu Xian is completely opposite. Yu Xian treats this case with argument and debate, the punishment undeserving of the crimes. This is a tragedy for the victims who met with disaster and misfortune. In the standing cages are ghosts who were choked to death; this is especially distressing.⁴⁸

Liu E shares Sima Qian's thinking that strict officials have an important place in Chinese government. Yet, Liu E criticizes figures like Yu Xian who has ability in statecraft, but lack human feeling (*renxin* 人心) and humaneness (*rendao* 人道). Political power blinds Yu Xian and he fails to capture major bandits. For this reason, he becomes "the bandits' tool" and punishes "honest people, while half-a-tenth are minor bandits."⁴⁹ The death of the Yu family worries him, for Yu Xian fears his "position will be endangered,"⁵⁰ showing that underneath the honest official persona, he desires wealth and status. These details reveal Yu Xian's lack of compassion for the people of Caozhou *fu*: his sense of justice becomes polluted just as his abilities are misplaced, unable to capture actual bandits or recognize the innocence of wrongly condemned citizens. Liu E's treatment of Yu Xian criticizes the honest, but cruel officials in Qing bureaucracy, for his portrayal of Yu Xian demonstrates how they precipitated China's fallen state in government and society.

⁴⁸ *ZL*, 75-76.

⁴⁹ *TL* 1, 45, 74.

⁵⁰ *TL* 1, 53.

Liu E denounces the ambitious, career-driven official in *Travels*, but in the Chapter 5 commentary, he criticizes an actual official in the Qing bureaucracy through his subtle treatment of Yu Xian's name.⁵¹ Liu E identifies him using the surnames Yu 玉 and Yu 毓: the latter referring to the Manchu official Yu Xian毓賢 (d. 1901). Liu E's portrayal of the character Yu Xian in *Travels* and the pun on the two surnames indicate the historical Yu Xian was the inspiration for his fictional counterpart. Liu E's comment on Chapter 4 gives the reader a glimpse into the real Yu Xian's activities:

When he was governor of Shanxi, nearly everyone knew that Yu Xian perpetrated various evil deeds, [such as] mistreating Christian missionaries and ordering his soldiers to rape their women. When he was prefect of Caozhou, he became known as an able and worthy man. Most people did not know what he did at the time. Fortunately, his misdeeds can be made known by this book. In the future, perhaps the standard histories can be said to have made use of materials from *xiaoshuo*.⁵²

Liu E elaborates that the real Yu Xian lacked compassion for the common people and, by extension, he failed to uphold the "Father and Mother Official" (*fumu guan* 父母官) ideal. After becoming governor of Shanxi in 1900, Yu Xian supported the Boxer Rebellion and their movement to "aid the Qing and exterminate foreigners" (*fu qing mie yang* 扶清滅洋). Yu Xian directly ordered his subordinates to ignore the demands and complaints of the missionaries and

⁵¹ For Liu E's Chapter 5 commentary and his use of the surnames Yu 玉 and Yu 毓, see *ZL*, 75-76.

⁵² *ZL*, 75; cf. translation by Wong, "Facts of Fiction," 167.

their converts.⁵³ He later commanded the Boxers to kill missionaries and several Chinese Christians in the Shanxi capital, Taiyuan.⁵⁴ Liu E's treatment of Yu Xian in both novel and commentary expresses the author's political philosophy: aggression will not strengthen China against foreign encroachment, when questionable, "honest" Manchu officials like Yu Xian support anti-foreign sentiment.

Liu E's portrayal of the fictional Yu Xian demonstrates the author knew of the real Yu Xian's political alliance with the Boxers in 1900. Foreign encroachment on Chinese territory and other mistreatments of the Chinese people fueled the Boxer faction's animosity towards foreign nations. Their aggression was only political in part, for social hardship and poor living conditions in years prior to the rebellion aroused the formation of Boxer factions. From 1895-1898, the people of Shandong suffered from agricultural, economic, and natural catastrophes—leading to severe famine and diminished support of the Qing regime.⁵⁵ When he was governor of Shandong in 1899, Yu Xian came in contact with two Boxer leaders: Yang Zhaoshun 楊照順 (d. 1899) and Zhu Hongdeng 朱紅燈 (1850-1899). Yang Zhaoshun was a monk before joining the Boxers, while Zhu Hongdeng led the Boxers to oppose Christianity and foreign encroachment on China. Before the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, they trained the masses in martial arts and later dealt heavy casualties to the Qing military force. Their activities ended after Yu Xian captured and executed

⁵³ Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Late Ch'ing foreign relations, 1866-1905," in *The Cambridge History of China Vol II: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911 Part 2*, ed. by John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 119.

⁵⁴ Hsia, "Art and Meaning," 261, n. 28. His source is the *Ch'ing-shih kao lieh-chüan*, 252.

⁵⁵ Marianne Bastid-Bruguere, "Currents of social change," in *The Cambridge History of China Vol II: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911 Part 2*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 597.

them.⁵⁶ Yu Xian's aggressive acts toward the Boxer leaders in 1899 indicate Liu E's commentary on the historical Yu Xian's may be considered fact: for Yu Xian's sympathizing with the Boxers in 1900 suggest undocumented motivations such as greater wealth and status encouraged this alliance.

Liu E's involvement with the Taigu School explains why he gives close attention to the misdeeds of officials and the suffering of commoners in *Travels*, for he developed a renewed sense of compassion after becoming a Taigu disciple. He first glimpsed into the harsh realities of North China's common people during his assignment to chart the course of the Yellow River within the borders of Henan, Hebei, and Shandong in 1889.⁵⁷ Liu E resolved to help the Yellow River's flood victims, using principles of Western technology and Chinese knowledge of river control to engineer solutions. He recognized the peoples' distressing conditions and the worsening effects of political and social unrest that began in the mid-19th century, which led to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

At the height of the rebellion, Liu E was in Beijing where he witnessed people in the streets suffering from starvation. He discovered the Russian forces were about to burn the rice of an imperial granary, for which they had no use. Determined to help the people, Liu E used his foreign connections to purchase rice from the Russian-controlled imperial granary, and in a humanistic act, he distributed the rice by selling it at a small price, preventing the starvation and death of many.⁵⁸ Just as his father sympathized with Henan's flood victims, aiding them after the

⁵⁶ See Jiang Chunyun 姜春雲, ed., *Shandong sheng qing* 山東省情 (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 978 for their biographies.

⁵⁷ For Liu E's 1889 report on his river management project in North China, see *Hegong binggao* 河工稟稿 [Report on River Conservancy] collected in *ZL*, 105-17; cf. Kwong, "Self and Society," 363.

⁵⁸ *ZL*, 12.

devastation of the Taiping Rebellion a few decades ago,⁵⁹ Liu E maintained a sense of compassion and duty to victims of the Boxers. He understood officials like Yu Xian lost sight of the people's welfare and therefore weakened the stability of Chinese society. Liu E could not address this problem safely from a distance like his protagonist Lao Can, but rather, Liu E dedicated himself to strengthen his country through industrial development, serving the people through his abilities in river management and flood prevention. He could not write openly to address China's social and political instability, for in his endeavors to strengthen Chinese industry and technology, he gained many powerful enemies in the government. Instead, Liu E pointed to his country's internal problems by writing *xiaoshuo*: revealing the corrupt power dynamics in scholar-official circles and how the people suffered as a result.

Liu E's treatment of the honest, but inhumane official in *Travels* reveals his thinking towards the historical Yu Xian and Liu E's close attention to Yu Xian's involvement in the violent political activities of the Boxer Rebellion. Other passages in the novel also draw a connection characters, people in Liu E's immediate environment, and historical events. In his portrayal of the character Gang Bi, Liu E juxtaposes honest officials with corrupt officials (*zangguan* 贓官) to comment on the rampant top to bottom corruption in the Qing bureaucracy.

In Chapter 15, the author describes the official Gang Bi as "utterly incorruptible," but oppressive in his dealings with commoners.⁶⁰ Liu E draws attention to the problem of ambitious officials through Lao Can's words: "The really bad thing is when men of ability want to be officials . . . The greater the official position man holds, the greater the harm he will do. If he

⁵⁹ See note 8.

⁶⁰ *TL* 1, 171.

controls a prefecture, then a prefecture suffers.”⁶¹ Lao Can’s thoughts describe a man of talent driven by status and wealth, who can harm the livelihood of the prefecture’s citizens after becoming a high official in the government. Accordingly, Liu E emphasizes an important issue in Chinese statecraft: officials with ability and learning who want a government position may not always be pure-minded. Gang Bi later speaks in the hall of justice and uses the issue of bribery to gather evidence for the murder case:

“I said to [*Ju-Ren Hu*], ‘go and tell their major-domo that for killing thirteen people it is one thousand ounces each, so he must pay thirteen thousand ounces.’ [*Ju-Ren Hu*] said, ‘I’m afraid they can’t make as much as that in a short time’ . . . [*Gang Bi*:] ‘I’ll halve it and say five hundred each. That will make sixty-five hundred ounces. I can’t take less’ . . . I was afraid [*Ju-Ren Hu*] was making a wild promise, so I insisted that he go with this offer of a half-rate to explain to your major-domo that . . . he should send me a promissory note and that a delay in the payment didn’t matter.”⁶²

Liu E uses this passage to reveal Gang Bi’s questionable motives, for the reader may speculate, if given the opportunity, would he have accepted thirteen thousand ounces of silver? In other words, Gang Bi is a resourceful official blinded by self-interest, using his position to manipulate the murder case to his own advantage. He creates evidence to produce the illusion of justice: his goal, to gain greater status in the yamen. Gang Bi voices his ambition, stating he is “an official of the Imperial House” and that “the governor has specially deputed [him] . . . in hearing [the case],” claiming that accepting the bribe will only lessen his status in the eyes of the governor.⁶³

Although the victims plead against the accusations, Gang Bi orders attendants to apply torture in

⁶¹ *TL* 1, 70.

⁶² *TL* 1, 176.

⁶³ *TL* 1, 176.

order to force their confession; he has no qualms about ruining a family's livelihood to protect his rank and wealth.

Liu E's depiction of Gang Bi expresses the author's political view towards Qing officials—honest or corrupt—and how their approaches to statecraft harm the country and people. He writes in his commentary at the end of Chapter 16:

Everyone knows corrupt officials are bad, but the honest official is even more at fault, and not many know this. [At least] the corrupt official knows himself to be diseased and does not dare openly commit faults; the honest official thinks he is free to do as he likes because he does not want wealth: how can this be? Gang Bi in his stubbornness murders people on the small scale and endangers the nation on a great scale!⁶⁴

In this commentary, instead of writing Gang Bi's name in its standard form (剛弼), Liu E mocks him using the word *gangbi* (剛愎), meaning headstrong or stubborn. This passage implies Liu E believes the worst kind of corruption exists in officials who claim to be honest and pure-minded officials, for this persona is a tactic: in gaining reputation there is promotion, and in attaining higher positions, bribes are readily available.

Liu E's portrayal of Gang Bi points to another historical figure responsible for the Boxer Rebellion: the Manchu Official Gang Yi 鋼毅 (d. 1900). The author draws attention to Gang Yi through the description of Gang Yi's alter-ego in *Travels* and the pun of Gang Yi's name in the commentary. As Grand Secretary, Gang Yi had once spoken to the Boxers: "When the legations

⁶⁴ ZL, 78. my Translation. Lu Xun's partial quotation from this comment has been translated in Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trans., *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), 382-83.

are taken, the barbarians will have no more roots. The country will then have peace.”⁶⁵ In an act against foreign powers, the Boxers banded together to destroy railways and telegraph lines. Gang Yi later commanded the Boxer faction in Beijing to attack the foreign legations—including guards, civilians, and over two thousand Chinese Christians.⁶⁶ These acts of violence conflict with Liu E’s philosophy: that political aggression only sharpens the increasing conflict between China and foreign countries.

In addition to Gang Yi’s support of the Boxers, he also contributed to China’s military weakness. In the 1880s, China needed to strengthen its naval power in South China near Guangdong Province, since defenses along the coast were particularly weak. Former Anhui Army Commander Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909) created the Guangdong Naval and Military Officers’ Academy (*shuilu shi xuetang* 水陸師學堂) to address this issue, but later, Gang Yi cancelled the program during his office as governor of Guangdong in 1892-1894.⁶⁷ In time of such need to develop Chinese technology and strengthen the Chinese military, one can only suppose desire for political control determined Gang Yi’s actions in the government: to gain wealth, status, and to curb the power of his enemies.

These enemies may have been figures in the Qing bureaucracy who thought as Liu E did and supported China’s “self-strengthening” (*zhiqiang* 自強), for China needed to update technology and industry to defend itself against foreign aggression. After Liu E’s involvement

⁶⁵ Hsu, “foreign relations,” 122.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 119, 122.

⁶⁷ Kwang-ching Liu, “The military challenge: the north-west and the coast,” in *The Cambridge History of China Vol II: Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911 Part 2*, edited by John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 257-58.

with the Peking Syndicate, the scholar gentry no longer recognized him as a man of Dantu (Liu E's birthplace). Gang Yi later accused Liu E of betraying China to foreigners, requesting that the Liu E's family be punished based on his crimes (*ming zheng dian xing* 明正典刑).⁶⁸ Liu E's conflicts with those in power explain why he chose to satirize Gang Yi in *Travels*. The novel reflects the hopes and concerns of the author who was distressed at the events he witnessed; the corruption within the bureaucracy; and his enemies who not only abandoned Confucian principles of statecraft, but also did not support the development China's technology and infrastructure. These biographical and historical elements can therefore be considered points of inspiration for Liu E's treatment of Qing officials in *Travels*.

The novel's commentary also mentions other Boxer supporters and suggests Liu E's portrayal of the character Gang Bi reflects more than one person. It may also include two other people in Liu E's environment: Xu Tong 徐桐 (1819-1900), and Li Bingheng 李秉衡 (1830-1900). Liu E writes in his commentary on Chapter 16:

Consider Xu Tong and Li Pingheng, whose activities were evident of what the *Four Histories* meant by no success over injustice. The author suffers from a bitter heart and hopes the world's honest officials will not obstinately use the fact that they do not take bribes to be an excuse for willful, reckless acts.

Liu E's mentioning of these officials implies a connection between his novel and the political situation of his time. After addressing the character Gang Bi in this commentary (by extension, the Manchu official Gang Yi), Liu E criticizes the ultra-conservative officials Xu Tong and Li

⁶⁸ Yan Weiqing 嚴薇青, introduction to *Lao Can Youji*; or, *Lao Can Youji*, by Liu E (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 1981), 4-5.

Bingheng for their involvement in the Boxer Rebellion. As part of the anti-foreign movement, which included the Empress Dowager, Prince Tuan and Gang Yi,⁶⁹ Xu Tong support of the Boxers; after all, he “preferred the destruction of his country to reform”⁷⁰ and shared a similar animosity towards foreigners. Liu E had been aware of his country’s social and economic problems that precipitated the creation of Boxer factions. He had worked for governor of Shandong Zhang Yao until the governor’s death in 1891.⁷¹ When Li Bingheng succeeded Zhang Yao as governor of Shandong in 1894-1897, he secretly supported the Boxer faction known as the “Big Sword Society” (*da dao hui* 大刀會).⁷² Li Bingheng was responsible for advising the throne to disregard developing China’s industry through the use of Western technology, which included railroads, mines, and factories.⁷³ The treatment of Qing officials in the novel and commentary indicate Xu Tong and Li Bingheng were disguised honest, strict officials. Xu Tong did not mind seeing his country destroyed if he acquired greater status and wealth as a result, while Li Bingheng gained favor in the government by rejecting Western technology and gathered more political power in his support of the Boxer faction. No matter what their political views were, it may at least be suggested Xu Tong and Li Bingheng’s approach to statecraft conflicted with Liu E’s thinking: to make the people’s welfare a priority and to update Chinese industry, technology, and infrastructure.

⁶⁹ See Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Late Ch’ing Period* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 407.

⁷⁰ Yen-p’ing Hao and Erh-min Wang, “Changing Chinese views of Western relations, 1850-95” in *The Cambridge History of China Vol II: Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911 Part 2*, ed. by John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 178.

⁷¹ *ZL*, 9.

⁷² Hao and Wang, “Changing Chinese views,” 186.

⁷³ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 407.

To conclude, Liu E's treatment of Qing officials in both *Travels* and the commentary reflects his close attention to the political situation and events leading up to the Boxer Rebellion. Liu E's Chapter 6 commentary on Yu Xian complements the biography found in official histories, for the author's description of Yu Xian's misdeeds in novel and commentary can be considered a storyteller or historian's unofficial biography of the real Manchu official. Liu E's portrayal of Gang Bi criticizes the other Boxer supporters Gang Yi, Xu Tong, and Li Bingheng, whose ambitions drove them to support the Boxer Rebellion. Liu E's attention to real figures involved in the Boxer Rebellion, his portrayal of officials in *Travels*, and the puns on their names unquestionably indicate a relationship between fact and fiction. His treatment of actual historical figures in *Travels* and the novel commentary suggests three points: Liu E knew clearly who supported the Boxer factions and questioned their motives as strict officials; Gang Yi deemed Liu E a traitor and requested Liu E's family be punished, making Gang Yi Liu E's personal enemy; and Liu E opposed acts of political hostility, later became distressed at the devastating political and social effects of the Boxer Rebellion. He was not only critical of Boxer supporters in the Qing bureaucracy, but also felt officials in their pursuit of power and status harmed the country and common people—when the country greatly needed developments in technology and industry, institutional change, and stable Confucian statecraft to face the challenges of a transitioning China.

Between History and Biography: Martial Arts and Military Affairs

In 1894, Liu returned to Huai'an where he and Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866-1940) predicted the outcome of the First Sino-Japanese War.⁷⁴ This successful prediction shows Liu E's knowledge of Chinese military affairs. Liu E's contact with people involved in martial arts, military learning, and the Qing army are factors in his treatment of the characters Liu Renfu and the anonymous monk of Mt. Emei (*Emei shan* 峨嵋山). Liu E also grounds Liu Renfu in historical events by referencing the Taiping Rebellion. Thus, the character Liu Renfu may say more about Liu E's concern for China's lack of development and weakness to foreign powers: specifically, his thinking compared to supporters of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

Before discussing who may have inspired the character Liu Renfu, it is important to first consider Liu E's description of Liu Renfu's background. In Chapter 7, Lao Can recommends the help of his old acquaintance to solve the problem of Yu Xian's tyranny:

“This man's name is Liu Renfu, and he belongs to Pingyin *xian* [平陰縣]. His current home is the Peach Blossom Mountain southwest of this region. As a boy of age fourteen or fifteen, he studied martial arts at the Shaolin Temple on Mt Song [嵩山 *Song shan*].

After studying for some time, he felt that place had an undeserved reputation and was in no way exceptional, thereupon he left for some nearby rivers and lakes. After ten years, he met a monk on Mt. Emei of Sichuan whose skill in boxing had no comparison.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Liu Delong 劉德隆, Zhu Xi 朱禧, and Liu Deping 劉德平, *Liu E xiaozhuan* 劉鶚小傳 [A Short Biography of Liu E] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1987), 106. Hereafter, this will be referred to as XZ; cf. Shadick, “a Social Novel,” 47.

⁷⁵ Liu E, *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記, ed. Yan Weiqing 嚴薇青 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1988), 79. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as TL 2 and include my translations from Chinese to English.

As a writer of *xiaoshuo*, Liu E uses certain facts collected from actual environments and people to describe the character Liu Renfu. The reference to Pingyin *xian* and the mythical Peach Blossom Mountains in the southwest may refer to mountains well known to locals, such as Mt. Cuiping (*Cuiping shan* 翠屏山). Liu E traces the travels of Liu Renfu, from his beginnings on Mt. Song to some rivers and lakes (*jiang hu* 江湖)⁷⁶ where he presumably contacts bandits, and finally to Mt. Emei where Liu Renfu meets a monk and becomes his disciple. Lao Can continues: “[Liu Renfu] asked the monk about the origins of his method . . . The monk said: ‘It is the Shaolin Temple’s method of boxing, but I did not learn it at the Shaolin Temple. Their true boxing methods were lost a long time ago. The ‘Taizu’ [太祖] style of boxing you have learned from me was handed down from the Dharma. The ‘Shaozu’ [少祖] style of boxing was handed down from Shen Guang.’”⁷⁷ Liu E’s treatment of martial arts in this passage leaves readers with a few questions: why does the author describe the Shaolin Temple’s style of boxing with disapproval, instead emphasizing the the origin and methods of *Taizu* and *Shaozu* boxing?

Liu E’s motivations for his description of these obscure martial arts in *Travels* are not clear, but the reader may consider where Liu Renfu and the monk are conversing: on Mt. Emei in

⁷⁶ This term refers to a bandit, but in this case, Liu Renfu is only contacting bandits (*zou jianghu* 走江湖) rather than becoming a bandit (*shang jianghu* 上江湖).

⁷⁷ See *TL* 2, 79-80, 90; *TL* 1, 248 n. 4-5. During the Liang Dynasty (502-557), Dharma (known as Bodhidharma 菩提達摩) was an Indian Buddhist monk who lived in the Shaolin temple. He is credited for being one of China’s earliest promoters of Buddhism, and therefore he is referred to as *Taizu* 太祖. Shen Guang 神光 was from Luoyang of the Northern Wei kingdom. It is said when Dharma was at the Shaolin Temple, Shen Guang visited during a snowy night and cut off his left arm to show Dharma his sincerity in becoming a disciple. Shen Guang’s name was then changed to *Huike* 慧可. Later, he inherited Dharma’s mantle and alms bowl, becoming the second leader (*Erzu* 二祖) of the Chan Buddhist sect, and thus he is referred to as *Shaozu* 少祖.

Sichuan. Various Emperors of China's dynastic past have commemorated this mountain; furthermore, famous poets such as Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036-1101) have visited Mt. Emei.⁷⁸ Liu E was at least aware of the history surrounding Mt. Emei, which influenced him to make it the setting for Liu Renfu and the anonymous monk's discussion of obscure martial arts forms. Liu E's commentary on Chapter 7 provides a few lines concerning martial arts, but compared to his other commentary, it obscures the line between fact and fiction: "This method of boxing . . . there are those in this world who still practice it . . . [The author] is unsure who will be able to seek it out."⁷⁹ The mystery of what exactly these boxing methods are and their origin continue to elude the reader, but Liu E's treatment of the anonymous monk may refer to one of the founders of the Emei School of Thought (*Emei xuepai* 峨嵋學派), Master Danran 澹然 (dates unknown), fabled to have been a military man before becoming a monk. The author's blending of martial arts and mountainous locations in *Travels* suggest the anonymous monk character was not influenced by one source or person, but rather, Liu E's treatment of the anonymous monk came from a mixture of folklore and legend he either collected in his travels or heard from acquaintances.

Aside from discussing Liu Renfu's background and the origin of his master's martial arts style, Liu E writes in detail of Liu Renfu's relationship with the major bandits, his activities with Lao Can, and his involvement in military affairs. The author draws a connection between actual events and the character Liu Renfu: "[Lao Can:] '[At] the time of the disturbances caused by the

⁷⁸ See Jiang Chao 蔣超, *Emei shan zhi* 峨嵋山誌 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guju chuban she, 2002). The Original text can be found in the Beijing library, records of the Kangxi Emperor.

⁷⁹ ZL, 76.

[Yue] robbers . . . [Liu Renfu] knocked about in the camps of the [Xiang] and Huai armies for some time.”⁸⁰ The reference to the Xiang and Huai armies suggests the portrayal of the character Liu Renfu may reflect a military man in Liu E’s environment the author knew intimately. Liu E not only draws inspiration from real people in his creation of Liu Renfu, but also references the Taiping Rebellion (Yue robbers), which had widespread negative economic, social, and political effects on the country. Lao Can later describes Liu Renfu’s rare appearances with officials and his relationship with major bandits:

“The insurance offices in the capital have several times invited him to join them but he would never go, because he would rather hide himself and be a farmer . . . [but] he will sit around in the teashops . . . and will know at a glance which of the passersby are his bandit friends. He will then pay the teashop keepers to give them food and drink . . . Before ten days or half a month are gone, all the big bandit chiefs will know about it and will immediately issue an order that no man may make a disturbance in such and such a person’s territory . . . As for the lesser bandits . . . When a robbery occurs near the city, someone will make a secret report . . . [and Liu Renfu’s] men will have captured the thieves.”⁸¹

It is unclear why Liu Renfu refuses to help officials in the capital; instead, Liu Renfu hides his identity (*maiming yinxing* 埋名隱姓) and supposedly leads a simple life as a farmer. Yet, he is actually a mountain recluse: officials hold him in high esteem and seek him out for advice, while major bandits are loyal to Liu Renfu, stopping criminal activities upon hearing his message. Liu

⁸⁰ *TL* 1, 73-4.

⁸¹ *TL* 1, 75.

Renfu's influence even reaches the minor bandits, showing that people of all classes respect him for his prowess in martial arts, involvement in military affairs, and wisdom.

Liu E's close attention to the background of Liu Renfu suggests the author must have known someone similar to this character in his own life. Liu Delong et. al suggest Liu Renfu is a portrait of Liu E's close friend, Wang Zhengyi 王正誼, also known as *Dadao* Wang Wu 大刀王五 (d. 1900).⁸² Between 1898 and 1900, Wang lived in Beijing next door to Liu E. He was a traveler escort (*biaoke* 鏢客) and bodyguard; unofficial histories report he controlled the bandits of Hebei and Shandong. Wang was versed in military strategy, martial arts, and known by locals as a knight-errant, described to be like Wu Song 武松 of *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*). When European military forces entered Beijing in 1900, Wang protested against their encroachment and was killed in battle. Upon discovering Wang's death, Liu E was stricken with grief and later buried him.⁸³ Wang's death may explain the reason behind Liu E's portrayal of officials responsible for the Boxer Rebellion in *Travels*. Furthermore, Liu E's contact with Wang indicates Liu Renfu is a portrait of Wang, for the details about Liu Renfu's involvement in martial arts, military affairs, and bandits originate from Liu E's close friend. Liu E did not forget his memories of Wang Zhengyi; his life and abilities became points of *xiaoshuo* material in Liu E's portrayal of Liu Renfu.

⁸² XZ, 110.

⁸³ XZ, 110-13.

Although, Liu E uses his recollections of Wang Zhengyi to recreate a sketch of him in *Travels*, the author also paid great attention to military affairs during his lifetime, blending his military concerns and autobiographical details in describing Lao Can and Liu Renfu's past:

“When Liu Jen-fu was in [Henan], he was my intimate friend. We swore to each other that if a time came when the country could use men like us we would all come forward and work together. At the time our group included experts on geography, military surveying, arsenals, military exercises, and this man Liu was our chief expert on military exercises. Later we all realized that the government of the empire needed another kind of ability and that the subjects we had been discussing and studying were quite useless. For this we all turned to practical professions by which to make some sort of living . . . But in spite of this, the friendship and idealism of that time can never be destroyed.”⁸⁴

The person who inspired the character Liu Renfu unquestionably includes Wang Zhengyi, but Lao Can's intellectual group also factors into Liu E's writing process. Lao Can's description of military learning sheds light on an important part of Liu E's educational development. In his young adulthood, he formed a club of intellectuals called the “Jingli Youth” (*Jingli shaonian* 井裏少年) that studied and discussed subjects such as mathematics, economics, and military science: all with the goal of addressing the current problems of China.⁸⁵ Lao Can's dedication to aiding his country reflects the author's concerns for his nation and people when the government's deficient military allowed two rebellions in one decade, in addition to increased foreign encroachment and aggression. Liu E's witnessing of these events suggests he was quite

⁸⁴ *TL* 1, 76.

⁸⁵ *ZL*, 6; cf. Shadick, “a Social Novel,” 44. The information about Liu E's club of young intellectuals comes from Liu E's son, Liu Dashen.

aware of China's military and infrastructural weaknesses: that the country lacked industrial and technological development needed to strengthen the Chinese military and defend itself against both internal and external political hostility.

Liu E's attention to military affairs during his own life and *Travels* reflects his strong support of the Self-Strengthening Movement. The author's contact with people of military and political background influenced his depiction of Liu Renfu's background as a figure versed in military affairs and ex-member of the Anhui military forces. Liu E writes of receiving a letter from Pang Zhige 龐芝閣 (d. unknown) who participated in the trials of Taiping General Li Xiucheng 李秀成 (1823-1864).⁸⁶ In another account, Liu E meets with Li Jingmai 李經邁 (1876-1938) who worked with Liu E in his coal refining and steel making businesses, located in Zhuzhou, Hunan. Li Jingmai was the third son of Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), commander of the Anhui Army.⁸⁷ Li Hongzhang was one of the first supporters of China's Self-Strengthening Movement and a key advocate of the Tongzhi Restoration.⁸⁸ Li Hongzhang encouraged the reform (*bianfa* 變法) of Chinese institutions to compete with the industrial and technological strength of foreign nations. These ideas of change led Li Hongzhang's reform of the military academy in 1887, which not only required military men to learn Chinese history and

⁸⁶ *ZL*, 144, 207n. 6.

⁸⁷ *ZL*, 212, 274n. 4.

⁸⁸ Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 15.

Confucian Classics, but gunnery, military drill, fortifications, arithmetic, geography, and others.⁸⁹

Liu E shared the military thinking of Li Hongzhang, for the author was also swept up in the Self-Strengthening Movement; this suggests current events influenced Liu E's description of Liu Renfu's background. He describes Liu Renfu as an expert in military affairs—particularly military surveying, arsenals, and military exercises. Liu E was involved in the changing events of his generation, when the nation's revitalization of Chinese spirit became necessary after Taiping forces had weakened government stability and damaged the population's morale. Liu E's relationship to figures of military and social standing such as Pang Zhige and Li Jingmai (by extension his father)⁹⁰ demonstrates his undeniable attention to military, intellectual, and political changes during China's state of vulnerability. This explains why Liu Renfu's background is filled with ideas about the martial spirit: Chinese boxing, military affairs, experiences in the Xiang and Huai armies, and a connection to suppression efforts against the Taiping Rebellion.

Liu E's biographical circumstances explain why he combines these ideas in his portrayal of Liu Renfu, since his concern for China's weakened military and political state began very early on. After Li Hongzhang put down the Taiping Rebellion, Liu E's father was transferred from his post in Beijing to Henan, ordered to follow Li Hongzhang in the rebellion's aftermath.⁹¹ In 1869-1871 of the Tongzhi Restoration, Liu E (age 11 to 13) followed his father Liu Chengzhong to Henan; Liu E's father was responsible for implementing methods of river control, providing disaster relief, and suppressing peasant revolts. During this time, Liu Chengzhong was

⁸⁹ Liu, "The military challenge," 268.

⁹⁰ See XZ, 70 for the discussion of Liu E's relationship with Li Hongzhang.

⁹¹ ZL, 5.

also studying Western technology.⁹² The life of Liu E's father suggests Liu Chengzhong was in favor of the Self-Strengthening Movement, applying Western learning to improve Chinese industry and technology: to prevent future aggressors and foreign powers from destabilizing the recovering Confucian government. Liu E shared the similar values and concerns of his father as reflected through Liu E's path as a scholar, river engineer, industrial entrepreneur, and writer.

Liu E saw in his father an ideal: the Confucian "superior man" (*junzi* 君子) who understood

Western technology was more than just "strange skill and perverted cleverness" (*qiji yinqiao* 奇

技淫巧), nor did he deny the power of developing technology, in which previous Chinese

dynasties had always emphasized before the advent of more groundbreaking Western technology in the late 18th century.

To summarize, Liu E's description of Liu Renfu's background in martial arts and military affairs originate from events and people in Liu E's environment; this includes his close friend Wang Zhengyi and the two rebellions Liu E witnessed in his lifetime. Liu E's friendship with Wang may answer why the author chose to write veiled attacks on the Manchu officials who supported it. There is still the question of who the anonymous monk is in Liu E's environment; the monk's background suggests Liu E's inspiration for this character may have been someone familiar with the traditions and folklore of Mt. Emei, the Shaolin Temple of Mt. Song, and obscure traditions of martial arts. In addition to Wang Zhengyi, Liu E's experience in Henan with his father, contact with supporters of the Self-Strengthening Movement, and his own witnessing of the traumatic historical events influenced his portrayal of the character Liu Renfu.

⁹² For Liu Chengzhong's collecting of writings, *Chui tai sui bi* 吹臺隨筆 [*Informal Jottings of the Windy Terrace*] (written from 1864-1869) which documents this experience, see ZL, 326-43; cf. Kwong, "Self and Society," 367-68.

His suggestion in *Travels* that the government “needed another kind of ability”⁹³ reflects his own thinking and solutions to the nation’s problems: China needed to strengthen its military, industry, and infrastructure. Yet in considering the audience of *xiaoshuo*, Liu E does not explain Lao Can’s pursuit of other “practical professions,” and only describes Lao Can as an itinerant doctor, while Liu Renfu becomes a recluse on the mythical Peach Blossom Mountain. These characters have both, in different ways, left society to maintain their Confucian beliefs. Therefore, they reflect the author’s own understanding of a key Confucian principle: the choice between service (*shi* 仕) and retreat (*yin* 隱).

Activating the Way: The Itinerant Doctor and Benevolent Governor

The blending of fact and fiction is what makes *Travels* not only a work of social satire, but also part of the larger *xiaoshuo* tradition. Liu E’s versatility as a writer may shed light on the novel’s “unity of feeling”⁹⁴ when read with other traditions of Chinese literature in mind. *Travels* may be considered a transitional work of Chinese literature, “a lyrical novel steeped in politics”⁹⁵ and at once “the last classic Chinese novel,”⁹⁶ with influences from both traditional Chinese travel writing⁹⁷ and Chinese unofficial history.

The title of *Travels* denotes the novel as Lao Can’s travel records, which suggest readers visualize Shandong’s environment and its people through the eyes of the protagonist, Lao Can. Lao Can is an autobiographical sketch of the author himself, in which Liu E expresses his philosophical thinking and social concerns. This includes Lao Can’s presence as a traveling

⁹³ *TL* 1, 76.

⁹⁴ Shadick, “a Social Novel,” 68.

⁹⁵ Hsia, “Art and Meaning,” 268.

⁹⁶ Shuen-fu Lin, “The Last Classic Chinese Novel: Vision and Design in the Travels of Laocan,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 564.

⁹⁷ For an exploration of *Travels* as a work of traditional Chinese travel writing, see Daniel Y. Hou, “A Landscape of Mind: Liu E’s Treatment of Time and Space in *The Travels of Lao Ts’an*,” *Tamkang Review* 36, no. 4 (2006): 35-82.

doctor of the Way, his knowledge of river management and the Yellow River, compassion towards the common people, and his relationship with the character Governor Zhuang (*Zhuang gongbao* 莊宮保). These details have biographical precedent and shows why Liu E felt the conflict between service and retreat, finding safety in the Taigu School and later writing *Travels* to express his thinking, beliefs, and concerns.

In Chapter 1, the reader glimpses into Lao Can's dream where he meets his friends Wen Zhangbo 文章伯 (leader in literary composition) and De Huisheng 德慧生 (student of virtue of wisdom) at the Penglai Pavilion 蓬萊閣. When the names are read in parallel, it becomes clear Lao Can's two friends reflect in allegory⁹⁸ the path of the typical Qing scholar Lao Can refuses to become. He is not the career-driven scholar who feels it necessary to learn and compose the eight-legged essay (literary composition), nor is he a high-minded Confucian strictly concerned with cultivating morality (virtue and wisdom). In contrast, the author depicts Lao Can traveling (and presumably keeping a record) to contemplate man's relationship to nature, feeling a connection to "Heavenly winds and ocean waters [*tianfeng haishui* 天風海水]." ⁹⁹ Lao Can appears in a Daoist light, his robes "flowing like that of an Immortal [*piaopiao yu xian zhizhi* 飄飄欲仙之致]." ¹⁰⁰ He admires the ancient Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi 莊子 (4th c. BC), carrying a wood-block edition of *Zhuangzi* during his travels. ¹⁰¹ Lao Can prefers simple cotton clothing to

⁹⁸ Holoch, "Allegorical Narrative," 131.

⁹⁹ *TL* 2, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *TL* 2, 69.

¹⁰¹ *TL* 2, 32.

the official's cap and belt; he is not seeking office (*touxiao* 投效) nor does he desire merit and fame (*gongming* 功名).¹⁰² Instead, he is a traveling doctor who “activates the Way” (*xingdao* 行道), healing the country one person at a time.

Liu E's description of Lao Can has biographical precedent, for the portrayal of Lao Can reflects the author's career path and philosophy. Liu E's text on Chinese medicine have survived (*Yao yao fen liu pu zheng* 要藥分劉樸正), and in 1885, Liu E arrived in Yangzhou where he practiced traditional Chinese medicine, but he was later forced to pursue other professions.¹⁰³ Like his protagonist, Liu E did not follow the traditional path of the scholar-official and was unwilling to prepare for the civil service examinations. Instead, he turned to other ventures with the goal of assisting China during a time of need. After becoming a Taigu disciple, Zhuangzi influenced much of Liu E's thinking, shaping his portrayal of the character Lao Can. Liu E alludes to Zhuangzi in the preface of the sequel to *Travels*: “Life is like a dream. How could it be? Could this be the Old Man of Meng's point? I cannot be sure. All butterflies come and go, and this [cycle] cannot stop.”¹⁰⁴ This preface suggests Liu E's thinking was never very far from the philosophy of Zhuangzi, even during his time as a writer; this is especially clear in his treatment of Lao Can as the wandering Daoist figure. Furthermore, Liu E's commentary to *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* 老子 has survived, which provides a look into his thinking towards statecraft and

¹⁰² *TL* 2, 32-33.

¹⁰³ *ZL*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *ZL*, 80-1.

philosophy.¹⁰⁵ These factors suggest Liu E's interest in Daoist thought greatly influenced his depiction of the character Lao Can. The author himself must have traveled through Shandong during his years in river management taking note of the vast landscape, and contemplating the relationship between humanity and nature. Liu E appreciated the natural spirit of China's past poets such as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) and Su Shi, for the author's extant poetry and poetry in *Travels* reflects a man akin to nature who paid close attention to natural surroundings and changes in weather.

Liu E's Daoist thinking and experience as a doctor of Chinese medicine shaped the portrayal of Lao Can, but the novel also focuses on the Yellow River and its flood victims. This worry is prominent in Liu E's thinking, and thus the author expresses this concern through several plot lines. In Chapter 2, Lao Can visits his patient Mr. Huang Ruihe 黃瑞和, who Lao Can tells, "The weather is now getting colder. Your honorable lord is no longer ill, and your sickness will not break out again. Next year if your honor needs advice, your humble servant [Lao Can] will come and assist you."¹⁰⁶ The author's use of language provides an extra layer of meaning in this passage. First, Mr. Huang (黃 meaning yellow) symbolizes the Yellow River; second, Lao Can meets Mr. Huang between late Autumn and early Winter, the term "break out again" (*zai fa* 再發) subtly referring to the breaking of dikes and flood activity, third, Mr. Huang's sickness (the Yellow River's flooding) will not occur until the following year. Lao Can's

¹⁰⁵ See *Liu E yuedu Laozi shouji* 劉鶚閱讀老子手記; *Liu E pizhu, xiaokan Zhuangzi* 劉鶚批注, 校勘莊子; and Zhu Songling 朱松齡, *Liu E pizhu Zhuangzi qianxi* 劉鶚批注莊子淺析, collected in Liu Delong, ed., *Liu E Ji* 劉鶚集 (Jilin: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2006), 621-32.

¹⁰⁶ *TL* 2, 13.

knowledge of river conservancy eventually reaches Governor Zhuang, who seeks his advice on managing the Yellow River:

The Governor said, “. . . In [Henan] the river is very wide; but here it is very narrow.”

[Lao Can] said, “The important thing is not that when the river is narrow there is no room for the water, for this only happens during the month or so when the river is in flood. The

rest of the time, the current being weak, the silt is easily deposited . . . [Wang Jing’s 王景]

method of river control was derived in a direct line from that of the Great [Yu]. He

emphasized the ‘curbing’ which is referred to in the expression ‘[Yu] curbed the flood

waters [*Dayu yi hongshui*大禹抑洪水].”¹⁰⁷

Lao Can’s knowledge of river conservancy hints at his experience prior to becoming an itinerant doctor and establishes his acute understanding of North China’s Yellow River: a river that both provides and takes away life. Lao Can later expresses his sympathy for flood victims, such as the Cui sisters: “Who could have foreseen that when they grow up, either because of famine or because the father was fond of gambling, or smoked opium . . . their parents would be driven to an extremity would sell their daughters . . . to be casually treated by a procuress and to live a indescribable life.”¹⁰⁸ Not only does Lao Can pity the Cui sisters, but he also traces their problems to the lack of support from the local administration that should ideally support the common people, and a father whose destructive habits harm the livelihood of his family. Lao Can feels compassion for oppressed citizens and flood victims; he discovers the Cui sisters were

¹⁰⁷ *TL* 1, 38-9.

¹⁰⁸ *TL* 1, 146.

forced to become courtesans after surviving a great flood brought on by the Yellow River. They discuss Governor Zhuang's involvement in this disaster:

“[He] worried to death about this, and they say a certain official, a famous southerner of great literary ability, brought some sort of book and gave it to him to read. The book said that the trouble was that the river was too narrow, that unless it was widened there would be no room for the water, that the people's dikes must be destroyed and they must again use the main dikes.”¹⁰⁹

In hearing the hardships of the common people, Lao Can criticizes evil officials “prompted by self-interest” who abandon Confucian ethics and sacrifice the people's welfare for wealth and rank.¹¹⁰ The passage above also poses a few questions, however: whom does the scholar of the south reflect in Liu E's environment, and what is the text that Governor Zhuang read?

The author's treatment of the Yellow River in *Travels* is not without precedent. The symbolism of Mr. Huang, Lao Can's discussion of the Yellow River with Governor Zhuang, and Governor Zhuang's involvement in the Yellow River's flooding all point towards Liu E's past: his projects and journey along the Yellow River, knowledge of river control conservancy, and partnership with governor of Shandong Zhang Yao (known as Zhuang Qinguo 莊勤果).¹¹¹ The character Mr. Huang refers to Liu E's work on the Yellow River from 1888-1893. Liu E spoke with flood victims in 1889, which he documented in his report on the Yellow River that year; he understood the struggle of “the common people, who loathed the slandering local authorities, who upon becoming officials blame everything on the will of Heaven [*xia min ze yuan du guan*

¹⁰⁹ *TL* 1, 149.

¹¹⁰ *TL* 1, 157.

¹¹¹ See note 12.

fu, shang guan ze gui zui tian xin 下民則怨讎官府, 上官則歸罪天心].”¹¹² Liu E faced

challenges in dealing with these types of officials, specifically advisors who objected to Liu E’s suggestion of deepening the river. His close friend Luo Zhenyu in a biography of Liu E documents this issue:

In 1888 . . . floods had reached the province of Shandong . . . [and] governor of Shandong Zhuang Qinguo requested the help of many learned scholars, but none of them really had knowledge in river management. They all agreed with Jia Rang’s [賈讓] idea of not struggling with the river for land and wanted to use up the land near the river to profit from it. Shanghai’s prominent scholar Shi Shaoqing [施少卿] agreed with this and planned to transfer the country’s disaster relief funds to assist officials in purchasing the peoples’ lands. When Liu E arrived, he argued against this and instead emphasized the need to control the waters. He then wrote the *Seven Methods of River Management* [*Zhihe qishuo* 治河七說].¹¹³

To answer the previous question, the flood control text mentioned in *Travels* must refer to Jia Rang’s *Three Methods* (*san ce* 三策),¹¹⁴ which argues to not struggle with the river for land and instead allow the river to widen. If we accept Liu E’s tendency to historicize in *Travels*, the famous scholar of the south the Cui sisters mention refers to Shi Shaoqing, for his methods of river control conflicted with Liu E’s approaches to river management. Liu E’s knowledge of

¹¹² ZL, 106.

¹¹³ Found in Hu Shi’s “Preface to the *Travels of Lao Can*,” collected in ZL 367-89.

¹¹⁴ TL 1, 38.

river conservancy was not limited to just text-based learning, however. Unlike typical scholars, he also took responsibility into his own hands to assist common people. Liu E engineered solutions to control the Yellow River, and when needed, he willingly performed the same laborious duties of common workers.

His method of deepening the river came from the Great Yu, one of China's earliest heroes of flood control; this was passed down to a certain Wang Jing of the Eastern Han period (25-220).¹¹⁵ According to Liu E, Wang Jing's methods were later transmitted to Pan Jixun 潘季馴 (dates unknown) of the Ming dynasty and Jin Wenxiang 靳文襄 (1633-1692). Pan Jixun was an expert on river surveying who built dikes and wrote several texts on flood control. In the same manner, Jin Wenxiang applied Wang Jing's method of deepening the riverbed and using dikes to prevent floods.¹¹⁶ Lao Can's understanding of the Yellow River in *Travels* reflects Liu E's specialized knowledge in river control. Moreover, floods described in the novel were real accounts the author witnessed during his charting of the Yellow River. His experience surveying the Yellow River shaped his treatment of plotlines and portrayal of the characters Lao Can, the Cui sisters, and Governor Zhuang.

Compared to his description of other characters, Liu E writes in great detail of Governor Zhuang and his discussion with Lao Can concerning the Yellow River, flooding, and river control methods. The character Governor Zhuang holds partial responsibility for the flood that occurred in Qidong *xian* 齊東縣. Lao Can hears of the flood and its devastating outcome from

¹¹⁵ XZ, 7.

¹¹⁶ TL 1, 38-39, 244 n. 31-32.

Cui Hua: “[Cui Huan] belonged to our town, [Qidong *xian*]. Her family was called [Tian 田] . . . Most of the land on the banks of our [Daqing River 大清河] is cotton-growing land . . . [In less than] three days . . . the [houses were] destroyed and the people dead.”¹¹⁷ Possessing no knowledge of flood control himself, Governor Zhuang has no choice but to follow the counsel of his advisors, who argue the Yellow River needs to be widened; they suggest destroying the dikes under the reasoning, “if the small do not suffer, then the great scheme is thwarted [*xiao buren ze luan damou* 小不忍則亂大謀].”¹¹⁸ Although Governor Zhuang worries over the livelihood of the several hundred thousand families, he is forced to carry out the plan of his advisors, failing to warn the people before destroying the dikes. Liu E depicts Governor Zhuang as an ideal benevolent official, for Governor Zhuang—contrary to the counsel of his advisors—wants to “move the people out of harm’s way” (*yi qi min* 移其民). He sheds tears over the lives that will be lost and later sends commissioned boats to distribute bread to disaster victims.¹¹⁹

Liu E’s depiction of Governor Zhuang suggests he is a biographical portrait of Liu E’s former employer and friend: Governor Zhang Yao, for the character Governor Zhuang mirrors the concerns and temperament the actual governor of Shandong. Zhang Yao was a native of Zhenya, Henan Province who spent time in Henan suppressing rebellions in the 1860s, where he met Liu E’s father, Liu Chengzhong.¹²⁰ Liu E then served under Zhang Yao as advisor on river

¹¹⁷ *TL* 1, 149.

¹¹⁸ *TL* 1, 155; *TL* 2, 174.

¹¹⁹ *TL* 1, 156.

¹²⁰ *XZ*, 9.

management from 1889-1891. These two factors shed light on why Liu E praises Zhang Yao in his Chapter 13 commentary:

Zhuang Qinguo [Zhang Yao] was kind and easy going. Even now, the people of Shandong think of him. It is only in flood control that was unavoidably a disaster; the people below the bank of Jiyang were abandoned and the levees were given up, even more a travesty the famine that ensued. One could not help but hear of this tragedy, let alone witness it. From this, the author's tears fell.¹²¹

The commentary refers to the flood of Jiyang in 1889 when Liu E was surveying the Yellow River.¹²² During this project, he witnessed over a thousand villages immersed in water.

According to Liu E's commentary, he provided disaster relief by purchasing and distributing fifty catties of steamed bread.¹²³ During this time, Liu E also visited Qidong *xian* to gather

information on the Daqing River, where he discovered the aftermath of a flood in the town of Ting'an 延安. These facts come from his 1889 report on the Yellow River, which was given to

Zhang Yao upon completion of Liu E's surveying project.¹²⁴ Liu E's commentary indicates his description of character Governor Zhuang in the novel is a biographical account. According to

the imperial records of the Guangxu Emperor, Zhang Yao was involved in flood control and disaster relief throughout his whole term as governor.¹²⁵ Liu E's portrayal of the character

Governor Zhuang represents the actual governor of Shandong: the ideal "father and mother official" who never neglected his responsibility to support and aid the people.

¹²¹ ZL, 77.

¹²² ZL, 78; cf. Wong, "Facts of Fiction," 165-6.

¹²³ ZL, 78.

¹²⁴ See note 57.

¹²⁵ See entries from the *Dezong shilu* 德宗實錄, 1886-1890 (The 12th to the 16th year of the Guangxu Emperor) selected in *Qing shilu Shandong shiliao xuan* 清實錄山東史料選 (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 1984), 1846-863.

To sum up, Liu E pulls events from his life and people in his environment into the realm of fiction. It can therefore be suggested Lao Can represents Liu E's Daoist thinking and the author's knowledge of river conservancy, while the character Governor Zhuang is Liu E's portrait of the governor of Shandong, Zhang Yao. In addition, the Cui Sisters depicted in the novel were actual flood in Liu E's environment as stated in his commentary.¹²⁶ Liu E was part of a generation concerned with the revival of Confucian ideals, to "secure the lives of the people" (*an minsheng* 安民生) and to "secure the hearts of the people" (*gu minxin* 固民心).¹²⁷ These principles are inherent in the author's autobiographical protagonist Lao Can, who dedicates himself to rescuing people from injustice, and the character Governor Zhuang, who made his best attempt to prevent flood disaster and provide disaster relief. Mary C. Wright asserts the Tongzhi Restoration was dedicated to "preventing the perennial rages of the Huai and Yellow Rivers," which led to the development of solutions throughout the 1860s; however, funding was lost and relocated to strengthen China's military¹²⁸ to protect China from further foreign encroachment and to prevent future rebellions. Liu E's father's activities along the Yellow River and the author's research of the Yellow River influenced his Liu E's portrayal of Lao Can. Liu E felt he inherited his father's avid interest in river conservancy and concern for flood victims, as Liu Chengzhong was active helping disaster victims in Henan during the great flood of 1867-68:¹²⁹ in charge of the same responsibilities Liu E would have two decades later. During this time, Liu Chengzhong wrote *Hefang chuyi* 河防芻議 (*My Humble Opinion on Flood*

¹²⁶ ZL, 77.

¹²⁷ ZL, 162-63.

¹²⁸ Wright, *Last Stand*, 63.

¹²⁹ ZL, 134. See note 92 for Liu Chengzhong's records of his experience in Henan, written from 1864-1869.

Prevention), in which he emphasized “building dikes to control waters [and] controlling the waters to attack the silt [*zhu ti shu shui shu shui gong sha* 築堤束水束水攻沙].”¹³⁰ These ideas are inherent in Liu E’s thinking towards river control, specifically the controlling of silt (not widening the river) and building dikes to control the water. Like his father, Liu E kept travel records, recording his successes and tracking the development of his river projects in several works during his career in river conservancy. Amidst the plains of North China, Liu E pondered the future of Chinese civilization. In a similar spirit to the *fang shi* 方士 of China’s past,¹³¹ he combined both traditional and unconventional learning to address the problems of a country in dire straits. Liu E admired Governor Zhang Yao for his acts of kindness towards victims of flood and famine, inspiring Liu E to render a portrayal of his friend and employer in *Travels*. In recent times, Zhang Yao has been given the title “Great Ruler of the Yellow River” (*Huanghe dawang* 黃河大王) in memory of his collaboration with Liu E and their success in curbing the Yellow River’s floods.¹³²

Otherworldly Figures: The Origin and Doctrine of the Taigu School of Thought

Liu E’s philosophical thinking in *Travels* appears most prominently in Chapter 9-11, which takes place on the mythical Peach Blossom Mountain. The author’s portrayal of the characters Maiden Yu and Yellow Dragon represents the Taigu School on several levels: their

¹³⁰ XZ, 5.

¹³¹ Wong, “*Fang-shih* Tradition,” 306.

¹³² Zhao Qi 趙琪, ed., “Governor of Shandong Zhang Yao is deemed the Great Ruler of the Yellow River; the author of the *Travels of Lao Can* Liu E was his assistant” [*Shandong xunfu Zhang Yao bei chengwei Huanghe dawang, Laocan youji de zuozhe Liu E shi ta de zhushou* 山東巡撫張曜被稱為黃河大王, 《老殘遊記》的作者劉鶚是他的助手], *Shenghuo ribao* 生活日報 (Jinan, Shandong), July 7, 2010, 14.

syncretic doctrine, which includes Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought; Taigu founder, Zhou Taigu 周太谷; Taigu spiritual leader, Li Longchuan; and Taigu disciple, Huang Baonian.

Liu Houze suggests “researching Liu E’s thinking and his motivations requires special attention to his relationship to the Taigu School.”¹³³ In contrast, Liu E’s treatment of the novel’s content suggest the author blends actual teachings and real people in his portrayal of characters in *Travels*. Many passages that include Maiden Yu and Yellow Dragon resonate with Confucian rationalism, which deterred people from relying on deities, rites, or the supernatural. Their discussions with Shen Ziping provides a connection to the larger arena of the Three Teachings (*Sanjiao Heyi* 三教合一).¹³⁴ Although no evidence has surfaced of direct transmission, Judith A. Berling draws a comparison between Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩 (1517-1598) and the Taigu School on many levels: their similarities in Confucian rationalism, moral cultivation, and embracing of the Three Teachings.¹³⁵ With this in mind, a thorough examination is needed: to explore Liu E’s motivations for the creation of characters Maiden Yu and Yellow Dragon in connection to the origin and doctrine of the Taigu School.

After arriving on the Peach Blossom Mountain, the young official Shen Ziping begins engaging in a series of discussions with Maiden Yu and Yellow Dragon. Shen Ziping sees three poems and notes their Daoist and Buddhist overtones:

[Shen Ziping] asked, “Who composed the poems on this set of scrolls . . . is he a Buddhist monk or a Taoist priest? Why does he put his poems in a sort of Taoistic

¹³³ ZL, 7.

¹³⁴ The Three Teachings refers to Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Later generations combined these traditions of thought as one, syncretic teaching.

¹³⁵ Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 229-30.

language? And isn't there also a lot of Buddhist lore?" [Maiden Yu] said, "He is neither a Taoist priest or a Buddhist monk . . . He always says, 'the three schools – Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism – are like the signboards hung outside three shops. In reality they are all sellers of mixed provisions . . . All teachings have two layers: one can be called the surface teaching, one the inner teaching' . . . for this reason Mr. Yellow Dragon doesn't hold to any one teaching, but freely chants them all."¹³⁶

The character Yellow Dragon and his teachings reflects the Taigu School and Liu E's philosophical thinking on several levels: first, Yellow Dragon's poetry expresses the author's knowledge of Buddhist and Daoist thought; second, in a similar light to the Taigu School, Yellow Dragon embraces qualities from all three teachings and believes surface teachings of Daoism and Buddhism are only different in human perception;¹³⁷ finally, after Yellow Dragon appears, he discusses the changing brightness and darkness of the moon, comparing it to human nature's tendency towards both good and bad. Aside from Yellow Dragon's expounding of human nature and perception, this character emphasizes the inner teachings of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thought, which encourages man to cultivate morality.

In several passages of *Travels*, Liu E's portrayal of Yellow Dragon draws a clear connection to the syncretic nature of the Taigu doctrine. According to Yan Weiqing, the Taigu School has been called several different names, including the Taizhou School (*Taizhou jiao* 泰州教), the Great Perfection School (*Da cheng jiao* 大成教), and the Yellow Cliff School (*Huang*

¹³⁶ *TL* 1, 97-98.

¹³⁷ See *TL* 1, 98. In Chinese philosophy, the term *yan er bi she* 眼耳鼻舌 (sight, hearing, smell, and taste) is commonly used to describe human perception.

ya jiao 黃崖教.¹³⁸ Their fortress was located on Mt. Yellow Cliff between Changqing and Feicheng in Shandong Province. The Taigu School attracted many disciples, but some members were opposed to the Qing government. In 1866, governor of Shandong, Yan Jingming 閻敬銘 (1817-1892) commanded the military to burn down their fortress and eliminate the followers: on the pretense that the Taigu School was a perverse religious sect (*xiejiao* 邪教) that opposed the Qing government.¹³⁹ Yet, the Taigu School's political position towards the Qing regime still remains unclear. If there was any opposition toward the Qing government, one might ask how early it started, for political resistance is often quiet and rooted in local objections and dissatisfaction.

Although Liu E alludes to the Taigu School in the dialogue between Shen Ziping, Maiden Yu, and Yellow Dragon, two central questions remain: who created the Taigu School, and how deeply was Liu E involved with this school of thought? As a member of the Taigu School, their founder's teachings undoubtedly influenced Liu E's thinking and writing. The Taigu doctrine can be traced to Zhou Taigu, who was active between the *Daoguang* 道光 and *Xianfeng* 咸豐 periods (1821-1851). In Yangzhou, he advised his disciples: "One's learning should pay respect to *liangzhi* [良知] and praise *shi xing* [實行], to learn closer the ways of Lu Jiuyuan [陸九淵 1139-1192] and Wang Yangming [王陽明 1472-1529], and to also understand Buddhist and

¹³⁸ ZL, 635.

¹³⁹ ZL, 635-67.

Daoist teachings.”¹⁴⁰ Zhou Taigu encourages his disciples to cultivate knowledge from Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought. The term *liangzhi* can be translated as the innate ability to distinguish right, wrong (*shi, fei* 是非) and good, evil (*shan, e* 善惡),¹⁴¹ while the second term *shixing* means to practical action. He mentions these two principles to encourage his disciples to cultivate a pure mind, morality, and to take action without dishonest or harmful intentions. Similar to Zhou Taigu, the Yellow Dragon supports the cultivation of morality and embracing of the Three Teachings. In this light, Liu E’s knowledge of Zhou Taigu and his teachings strongly influenced his portrayal of Yellow Dragon in *Travels* as the prophetic, spiritual figure of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist wisdom.

Although the Taigu School supported Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, Liu E’s portrayal of Maiden Yu suggests their doctrine favored Confucian teachings. She continues her discussion of the Three Teachings with Shen Ziping:

“Their similarity consists in ‘encouraging man to be good, leading man to be disinterested.’ If all men were disinterested, the Empire would have peace. If all men scheme for private advantage, then the Empire is in chaos. Only Confucianism is thoroughly disinterested . . . [Confucius] said, ‘To attack heterodoxy, this is truly injurious.’ Now the Buddhists and Taoists indeed were narrow-minded. They feared lest later generations should not honor their teachings, so they talked a lot about heaven and hell in order to frighten people.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ ZL, 635.

¹⁴¹ See Lu Erkui 陸爾奎, *Ciyuan* 辭源 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2006), 2609. This term was first mentioned in *Mengzi* 孟子.

¹⁴² TL 1, 98.

Although Maiden Yu argues all three teachings encourage man to be moral and disinterested—for example, having fewer desires and reducing one’s ambitions—she argues Buddhist and Daoist teachings have been distorted: that ultimately Confucian thought is the most “disinterested.” She reasons that compared to Buddhists and Daoists, Confucians do not encourage superstition or beliefs to convince people to honor Confucian teachings. Her discourse refers to Confucian rationalism, but more specifically, Confucian principles of morality, righteousness (*ren yi* 仁 義), and the fact that Confucian thought only dealt with human affairs (e.g. “the Five Relationships” or *wulun* 五倫) prior to developments of metaphysically charged schools of Confucian thought in the late Tang and Song periods.

Although Liu E portrays Maiden Yu as a supporter of Confucianism, there is still the question of how the Taigu School was similar or diverged from earlier Confucian philosophy. Maiden Yu later attacks the Song Neo-Confucians for distorting the original meaning of Confucian teachings. She states they “made many mistakes [but] were right in some places,” concluding that their “various deceptions . . . are too many to be recounted.”¹⁴³ Particularly, she disagrees with Zhu Xi’s absolute division of human desire (*renyu* 人欲) and heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理), arguing that Confucius’ selection of poems in the *Book of Odes* clearly express these two principles do not conflict once a person combines feeling (*qing* 情) with right behavior (*li* 禮).¹⁴⁴ These passages suggest two points: the Taigu School may not have fully supported

¹⁴³ *TL* 1, 101.

¹⁴⁴ *TL* 1, 101.

Zhu Xi's philosophy, and/or Liu E's Confucian philosophy may have differed from the Taigu doctrine. Nevertheless, Liu E understood the conflict between these competing Neo-Confucian schools during the Song dynasty as shown in his portrayal of Maiden Yu, who discusses the conflict between Zhu Xi, who led the School of Principle (*Lixue* 理學), and Lu Jiuyuan, who led the School of Mind (*Xinxue* 心學).¹⁴⁵

As a member of the Taigu School, Liu E must have studied these two branches of Neo-Confucian thought, for the Taigu doctrine had, at least, some similarities with their philosophies. The relationship between Liu E's thinking and Taigu philosophy becomes clearer in his portrayal of the Yellow Dragon in *Travels*, who predicts several events: the Boxer Rebellion, the uprising of the Southern revolutionaries, but also the future of China when "the introduction of new culture from Europe will revivify [the] ancient culture of the Three Rulers and Five Emperors . . . [and] achieve a universal culture."¹⁴⁶ Yellow shows a deep understanding of the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經 or *Zhou yi* 周易), referring to himself as the "field dragon" (*tianli de long* 田裏的龍), which alludes to the first hexagram (*qian* 乾) associated with the "hidden dragon" (*qian long* 潛龍).¹⁴⁷ Yet, it would be assuming too much to say these details reflects Liu E's

complete philosophical or spiritual thinking. Liu E was unquestionably aware of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings as a member of the Taigu School; however, one cannot be sure,

¹⁴⁵ *TL* 1, 100.

¹⁴⁶ *TL* 1, 120.

¹⁴⁷ *TL* 1, 116. For information on the hexagram, see Richard Wilhelm, trans. into English by Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-10.

he truly believed in reproducing an ideal past, for he was concerned with the current times and how to better China's troubled situation.

Liu Dashen's explanation of Yellow Dragon's poems are a clear indication of how members of the Taigu School—spiritual leader Li Longchuan, and disciple Huang Baonian— influenced Liu E's treatment of the character Yellow Dragon.¹⁴⁸ In the same manner, Liu E's portrayal of Yellow Dragon as a prophetic, spiritual figure indicates this character closely resembles Zhou Taigu. The commentary to Zhou Taigu's writings supports this argument, for Liu E himself wrote this commentary in 1893: "Master Zhou Taigu was talented in many ways, skilled in Chinese medicine and in understanding the meaning of the *Book of Changes*."¹⁴⁹ In this entry, Liu E refers to himself at the end as Lao Can, indicating a connection between the protagonist in his future novel and Zhou Taigu; furthermore, Liu E's comment suggests Yellow Dragon's knowledge of the *Book of Changes* in *Travels* comes from Liu E's familiarity with Zhou Taigu's ability in divination. As a member of the Taigu School, Liu E was encouraged to "establish merit and writing [*ligong* 立功 and *liyan* 立言] . . . when in dire straits, moralize the self [*qiong ze du shan qi shen* 窮則獨善其身]; and when successful, aid the world [*qiong ze du shan qi shen* 窮則獨善其身]."¹⁵⁰ Zhou Taigu encouraged his disciples to learn from Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming, showing he supported the School of the Mind.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, Yan Weiqing argues that outside of some similarities in spirit, there is no evidence of transmission

¹⁴⁸ *TL* 1, 251 n. 4.

¹⁴⁹ See Liu Delong, *Liu E Sanlun* 劉鵬散論 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1998), 213-219.

¹⁵⁰ *ZL*, 641.

¹⁵¹ See note 140.

between the thinkers of School of Mind and the Taigu School.¹⁵² Yan is correct in arguing the lack of clear, direct transmission of teachings, but perhaps lines of transmission are not always visible, nor are these connections often documented in writing.¹⁵³

Liu E at least studied, if not influenced, the teachings of Wang Yangming. In his preface, Liu E refers to himself as *Hongdu bai lian sheng* 洪都百鍊生, or “The Scholar of Hundred Temperings from Hongdu.” It is still unclear why he deliberately changes the initial character from 洪 to the homophonous 鴻 as his original manuscript provides the former character.¹⁵⁴ His preface suggests, however, the pseudonym may have additional meanings:

We people of this age have stirred feelings about ourselves and the world, our families and country, our society, and about the various teachings. The deeper the feelings, the more bitter the weeping: this is why The Hundred Times Tempered Scholar of Hongdu writes this book, *The Travels of Lao Can*.¹⁵⁵

The use of the word “temperings” in his pseudonym may refer to several different events in his life: his experience as a Taigu disciple; efforts in flood control and river conservancy; various attempts to industrialize China; and his enemies’ accusations of being an expert in foreign affairs (*yangwu* 洋務) and a traitor to the Qing Empire.

¹⁵² See ZL, 635; Shadick, “a Social Novel,” 413 n. 13. Liu E’s son Liu Dashen believed the Taigu doctrine originated from the teachings of Wang Yangming.

¹⁵³ For a study of Wang Yangming and Lu Jiuyuan’s influence on his thinking, see Carson Chang, *Wang Yang-ming: Idealist Philosopher of Sixteenth-century China* (New York: St. John’s University Press, 1962).

¹⁵⁴ See Wong in “Liu E’s Fiction,” 104n. 9, and in “Fang-shih Tradition,” 302-3. He discusses this change, which appears in the early publication of the sequel in the Tianjin newspaper *Riri Xinwen* 日日新聞, and again mentions the use of Liu E’s pseudonym in the Fragment text (*waipian* 外篇) that was discovered in 1929.

¹⁵⁵ TL 2, 2.

Liu E's use of Hongdu 洪都 (modern day Nanchang 南昌) and later pun on this name in his pseudonym suggests Liu E studied Wang Yangming's philosophy during his lifetime, for Liu E's reference to Hongdu may hint at the esteem he held for Wang Yangming. Wang Yangming spent time in Hongdu according his official biography: his marriage at age 17, his return to Hongdu as governor of Jiangxi, and the funeral procession for his death in this same location.¹⁵⁶ His disciple Chen Jiuchuan 陳酒川 (1474-1555) writes in conversation records that Wang Yangming was in Hongdu "busy with military affairs," but was still active engaging his disciples.¹⁵⁷ Wang Yangming created the idea of "unity of knowledge and action" (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一) and believed hardships gave people an opportunity for spiritual practice; in his exile to Longchang 龍場 (modern Guizhou), he lived among barbarians where he "stimulated his mind" (*dongxin* 動心) and "hardened his nature" (*renxing* 忍性).¹⁵⁸ In this light, Wang Yangming's experience shows similarities to the "hundred temperings" Liu E experienced, for he faced several challenges in his life: failed entrepreneurial ventures, accusations by powerful enemies in the government, the labor and hardships of river management, and dealing with the current events of foreign hostility and violent rebellions during his lifetime.

¹⁵⁶ Wang Yangming, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*, trans. Frederick Henke (New York: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1916), 6, 24, 39.

¹⁵⁷ Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York; Columbia University Press, 1963), 189.

¹⁵⁸ See Chan, *Neo-Confucian Writings*, 265; Lu, *Ciyuan*, 1101. The term *dongxin renxing* 動心忍性 comes from *Mengzi* in Mengzi's dialogue with Gaozi.

Liu E began his Confucian education at an early age. In his youth, he studied the Song philosophers with his father, later studying poetry, medicine, and astronomy.¹⁵⁹ Liu E's Confucian learning must have included key ideas such as “unity of knowledge and action,” “investigation of things” (*gewu* 格物), and “acquisition of knowledge” (*zhizhi* 致知). His educational background explains why he depicts Maiden Yu attacking schools of thought that distorted the original meaning of Confucian teachings. Wang Yangming also makes a similar point, criticizing the followers of Zhu Xi¹⁶⁰ in his denouncements:

Confucians of later generations . . . have lost the truth and drifted into the four schools of memorization and recitation, composition, success and profit, and textual criticism, and thus at the bottom are no different from the heterodox schools . . . They seem to compare unfavorably with the Buddhists and Taoists, whose minds are pure, whose desires are few, and who are free from the worldly bondage of fame and profit.¹⁶¹

Liu E cultivated not only Western learning, but also traditional Chinese learning. One might suggest he shared Wang Yangming's opinion that Confucians of later generations were learned, but lacked principle due to their obsession with text-based knowledge and preparation for the civil service examinations. To Liu E, their ambitions for wealth and fame could not solve China's political and social problems. Compared to scholars of his generation on the path toward officialdom, Liu E turned to philosophical inquiry as a Taigu disciple and began investigating “true knowledge” (真理), a term first used by Huigao 慧皎 (497-554) to describe the purest type

¹⁵⁹ ZL, 6; cf. Shadick, “a Social Novel,” 44.

¹⁶⁰ See Chan, *Neo-Confucian Writings*, 263-67 for Wang Yangming's “preface to Zhu Xi's Final Conclusions Arrived at Late in Life.”

¹⁶¹ Chan, *Neo-Confucian Writings*, 41.

of understanding.¹⁶² Liu E rigorously studied Confucian Classics, Buddhist Scriptures, and the 100 Schools of Thought: his philosophy taking a syncretic shape as he cultivated knowledge and principles of Confucian morality.¹⁶³

The content in *Travels*, Liu E's biography, and the teachings of Zhou Taigu establish Liu E's treatment of Chinese philosophy in Chapters 9-11 reflects his understanding and relationship with the Taigu School. Liu E's 1902 letter to fellow Taigu disciple Huang Baonian clearly shows the author's dedication to the Taigu School throughout his life:

Your letter said you will exert yourself inside [the organization] and that I should exert myself outside [in the world]: “We are both the descendants of Kongtong [Zhou Taigu], and both cultivate the ancient and modern tradition of the Way, united in body and destiny. Even if the sea dries up and the stones rot, there will be no disloyalty between us, because we are not restricted by outside appearance nor do we harbor doubts because of differing goals” . . . In the end, I make the world my responsibility. The ordinary man also has responsibility in the safety and danger of the world. The sickness of our country today is in the people's loss of support . . . When people are in trouble their thoughts are confused . . . The great principles of sagely merit lie in nothing other than the two paths of teaching and cultivation. You take as your responsibility to teach the world, I take as my responsibility to nourish the world. We do [our tasks], each of us exerting the utmost strength of our minds and support each other.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Lu, *Ciyuan*, 2209-10.

¹⁶³ ZL, 6.

¹⁶⁴ ZL, 299-300; cf. Stuart H. Sargent, “Lao-Ts'an and Fictive Thinking,” *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 12 (1977): 215-16.

Aside from their association with the Taigu School, the letter reveals Liu E and Huang Baonian clearly took different paths in their later lives. The following year in 1903, Huang Baonian (*zi*: Xipeng 錫朋) attained his *jinshi* degree¹⁶⁵ to “teach the world;” at the same time, Liu E began writing *Travels*, assisting his country in need as an entrepreneur, river engineer, and writer to “nourish the world.” Compared to his friend Huang Baonian, Liu E refused to undergo the training for the eight-legged essay; instead, he turned to more practical professions to address China’s technological and industrial, eventually entering the realm of *xiaoshuo* writing. His letter reflects a man caught in the social and political turbulence of a struggling nation and unstable government, his concern: the common people and the future of Chinese civilization.

To conclude, it can be suggested Taigu founder Zhou Taigu is one of the main influences in Liu E’s treatment of the characters Yellow Dragon and Maiden Yu in *Travels*, particularly Yellow Dragon’s similarities to the Taigu founder’s teachings: to cultivate morality and take true action; to embrace Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism; and to investigate the writings of Liu Jiuyuan, Wang Yangming, and texts such as the *Book of Changes*. Liu E’s education from his youth to his entrance into the Taigu School suggests he had unique philosophical and spiritual views; however, there has been little evidence of what Liu E’s true philosophical thinking was outside of the Taigu doctrine. If his philosophy included the *nourishment* of the world to help the Chinese people in a time of need, one finds his drive to *investigate* Western technology and industry are tied closely with his Confucian thinking. Liu E combine traditional learning with his knowledge of technology; in the similar spirit of Wang Yangming’s “unity of knowledge and

¹⁶⁵ Jiang Qingbai 江慶柏, ed., *Qingchao jinshi timing lu* 清朝進士題名錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1316.

action,” Liu E applied his knowledge to river management, industrial development, and writing *xiaoshuo* to support his country in a time of need.

Conclusion

Liu E’s treatment of characters and plotlines in *Travels* draws influence from actual events and persons. For this reason, the author’s portrayal of several characters parallels actual people: Prefect Yu, the counterpart of Yu Xian (d. 1900); the official Gang Bi, a satire of Gang Yi (d. 1899), Xu Tong (d. 1900), and Li Bingheng (d. 1900); Liu Renfu, the portrait of Liu E’s friend Wang Zhengyi (d. 1900); Lao Can, an autobiographical sketch of the author; Governor Zhuang, the portrayal of Lao Can’s employer and friend governor of Shandong, Zhang Yao (1832-1891); and the intelligent Maiden Yu and spiritual figure Yellow Dragon, characters inspired by both the Taigu School and its founder, Zhou Taigu. Liu E’s involvement in the Self-Strengthening Movement and witnessing of the devastating rebellions during his lifetime undoubtedly influenced his treatment of various plotlines and details in *Travels*. He is both a storyteller and an historian who writes in the *xiaoshuo* medium to express his political, social, and philosophical thinking, combining fact and fiction in *Travels* to state his concerns for China’s fallen state and to establish his spiritual self.

Considering the research conducted regarding Liu E’s biography and his novel, there are still many questions left for reflection: if we consider *Travels* an incomplete work of literature unfinished by its author, how should one define the elements that unify the novel in theme and feeling? Scholars have explained the novel’s autobiographical nature, as well as its underlying social, political and philosophical stance. Why Liu E felt compelled to write the novel in the first place still remains unresolved. The answer could be very simple: to help his struggling friend Lian Mengqing, author of *Words from the Girl Next Door* (*Linnu yu* 鄰女語). Yet, Liu E’s novel

is not simply the fiction of social criticism (*qianze xiaoshuo* 譴責小說) that Lu Xun has led us to believe, nor is it a work of literature completely critical of the Qing bureaucracy like Li Boyuan's novel. *Travels* is a combination of many genres, showing influence from several Chinese traditions of writing. It can be considered one of the earliest novels of late Imperial China to borrow elements from Western traditions of fiction—making it not only a political, social, and philosophical work of literature, but also a Chinese novel of transition.

This idea of *Travels* as a precursor to modern Chinese literature poses questions about Liu E's treatment of the commentary to *Travels*. He creates a realm of fiction and reality between novel and commentary; thus, present scholars may ask in what ways the commentary adheres to traditional commentary of past Chinese literature and how Liu E's commentary shows influence from Western traditions of writing during this transitional period. Questions aside, the novel is presumably a kind of travel record that traces the journey of Liu E's alter-ego, Lao Can. Furthermore, the author adopts the pseudonym "Scholar of a Hundred Temperings from Hongdu," perhaps to protect himself from his enemies and those in power. He also adds a third person: a commentator. Through this third identity, Liu E writes from the tradition of *xiaoshuo*, revealing certain aspects of his life to place fact over fiction: his acquaintances, locations he visited, and current events of his lifetime. It is worth asking who he was writing to—for consumers of *xiaoshuo* of course, but possibly also for writers or writers to be as well. Nonetheless, a more thorough examination is needed to understand the relationship between Liu E, the commentary to *Travels*, and the protagonist Lao Can.

Liu E draws inspiration from several events and people in his treatment of plotlines and characters in *Travels*, and therefore attention should be paid to Liu E's acquaintances, such as figures recorded in official histories and less known people in his environment. He was at least

aware of intellectuals Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), yet their relationship with Liu E has not been discussed, nor is there research comparing Liu E and their thinking, written works and biographies. In contrast, less famous people in Liu E's environment with at least local reputation may answer who inspired Liu E to write of certain characters, such as the drum singer Little Jade Wang (*Wang Xiaoyu* 王小玉, Lao Can's friend Huang Renrui, and the mountain recluse Green Dragon.

There may be precedent regarding Liu E's treatment landscapes as well: specifically his attention to the various locations of Shandong, the Yellow River, and his treatment of mountains such as Mt. Song, Mt. Emei, and Spirit Cliff Mountain (*Lingyan shan* 靈岩山). Liu E's attention to landscape reflects his awareness of more specialized learning, as well as local histories and folklore; these kinds of knowledge suggest he may have visited several locations during his mission to chart the Yellow River in Shandong, where he conversed with people of many classes. Liu E's treatment of these locations in *Travels* may tell us more about his thinking and his own travels, and therefore more qualitative research is needed to discuss Liu E's biographical circumstances.

Liu E's biographical circumstances inform readers why he chose to blend elements of his life, figures he knew, and his concerns in *Travels*. What can be considered fact in his novel is better perceived when read with his commentary. Liu E's thinking unquestionably includes the use of technology, and the frequent references to it in *Travels* shows he was more overt with his support of Western ideas and technology than other intellectuals of his time. In contrast, as evidenced in his preface, Liu E as a scholar and writer paid great attention to several different Chinese literary traditions: the unofficial history, traditional Chinese travel literature, China's

tradition of historiography, vernacular literature, and China's tradition of poetry. The issue is, however, not much is known about Liu E's training as a novelist. We know he immersed himself in traditional Chinese learning and Western learning: that his experience as a Taigu disciple led him to seek wisdom in the esoteric traditions of the Chinese past, swept up in China's self-strengthening and the revitalization of Confucian principles. Liu E *unified* his new knowledge and took moral action through his unswerving dedication to develop Chinese industry and manage the Yellow River. For his actions, he was deemed a traitor by his enemies when he was in *service*, causing him to *retreat* and fictionalize. Liu E's writings provide a glimpse into the life of a Chinese entrepreneur, scholar, and writer who he felt the tensions of Chinese tradition and Western influence as the Qing Dynasty approached a closing. What awaits scholarly attention is the comparison of Liu E's literature to other, less known writers of his time—for his contemporaries can be said to share a similar concern for China, struggling to maintain its Confucian order.

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