The Pig and the Prostitute: The Cult of Zhu Bajie in Modern Taiwan

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THE PIG AND THE PROSTITUTE:
THE CULT OF ZHU BAJIE IN MODERN TAIWAN

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Before the publication of the famous Chinese novel The Journey to the West, the central characters of the narrative—the Tang Monk, the monkey Sun Wukong, the pig Zhu Bajie, and the monk Sha—were venerated as deities. These same figures continue to be invoked today in a range of rituals throughout the Chinese world. This article focuses on the cult of Zhu Bajie in modern Taiwan. As a “licentious” spirit known for his voracious appetite and irrepressible libido, Zhu Bajie has attracted devotees from among Taiwan’s “special professions,” namely masseuses, hostesses, and sex workers. Unable to turn to conventional, ethically demanding deities for assistance, purveyors of illicit goods and services make offerings to spirits like Zhu Bajie who they hope will be more sympathetic to their needs. In this way, Zhu Bajie, a figure familiar from children’s books, cartoons, and blockbuster movies, has also become a patron saint of prostitutes.

KEYWORDS: Zhu Bajie 豬八戒, Journey to the West 西遊記, prostitution, Taiwan, popular religion

INTRODUCTION

Around dusk in the red-light districts of Taiwan’s major cities, women step outside their places of business to burn wads of paper money in small, metal braziers. These bills, unlike government-issued money, are often golden or gilded. Known as gold paper (jinzhi 金紙) or spirit money (lingqian 灵钱), the notes are burned in front of makeshift altars outside shops and stores, usually on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month. The offering of spirit money is also standard practice at temples—many of which have huge, blazing furnaces set up to consume the cash —and at funerals, where all manner of paper objects, from iPhones to miniature luxury homes, are burned for the benefit of the dead. Like a preternatural postal service, these sacrificial fires deliver money and goods from humans to ancestors, ghosts, and gods. In lieu of a physical address, spirit money is often printed with the name and image of its intended recipient. Anxious students burn money for Wenchang 文昌, the patron saint of scholars. Prudent shop owners offer bills bearing the image of the Lord of the Earth (Tudi gong 土地公), a protector of local businesses. Some of the money burned outside of brothels is printed with a seated pig wearing a cap and dressed in an embroidered, open shirt, pants, and
boots. The deity is flanked by gold ingots and talismans testifying to his ability to attract wealth from all directions. A nude woman, draped across his lap, reaches up to embrace him. This is Zhu Bajie 豬八戒, patron saint of prostitutes.

Zhu Bajie is what is known as a dark or licentious (yin 陰/淫) spirit. He has a reputation for responding to requests that other, more orthodox deities, would find improper. The image printed on spirit money is modeled on icons that sit in small shrines in some massage parlors, hostess bars, brothels, and other places associated with the sex trade in Taiwan. Just as money is burned for Zhu Bajie in braziers outside, cigarettes, liquor, fruit, and flowers are offered on his altar inside. (Only one offering is prohibited and that, of course, is pork.) Zhu Bajie’s unusual iconography pays tribute to his legendary libido, and in recent years several Taiwanese newspapers have published articles describing how workers in the so-called “special professions” (tezhong hangye 特種行業) attempt to ingratiate themselves to Zhu Bajie by stripping before his image. The more these women reveal, devotees explain, the more paying customers Zhu Bajie will send their way. Because of the peculiar nature of this deity and his unorthodox offerings, Zhu Bajie’s shrine is often situated in side rooms, where he can receive his alms in private (Figure 1). His image is also sometimes placed beneath the altar or reception counter, where he is afforded an unobstructed view up the skirts of female employees.

Zhu Bajie belongs to a shadowy pantheon of marginal, morally ambivalent spirits. These deities of the demimonde drew the attention of Meir Shahar and Robert Weller in the 1990s with their studies of the apotheosized eccentric Buddhist monk Jigong 淨公 (a.k.a. Crazy Ji) and the Eighteen Lords (Shiba wanggong 十八王公), respectively. Shahar and Weller went on to co-edit Unruly Gods, a volume that brought together leading scholars of Chinese religion to challenge the standard bureaucratic model of the Chinese popular pantheon—gods as officials—focusing instead on the unconventional and rebellious deities that thrived on the margins of Chinese society—gods as gamblers, seducers, and gangsters. Richard von Glahn, in his study of the demonic wealth god Wutong 五通, built on Weller’s

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1 Zhu Bajie reportedly does not care to receive offerings from men. According to one account, when the male owner of a brothel makes offerings to Zhu Bajie, he does so while showing the deity pictures of nude women from an adult magazine. Hong Chenhong 洪臣宏 and Sun Yifang 孫義方, “Baiguo Zhuge ye keren hui pengchang 拜過諸葛爺客人會捧場,” Ziyou shibao 自由時報, February 19, 2007.

2 One newspaper article reported that a particular brothel used to enshrine a statue of the prominent guardian deity Guandi to keep wandering ghosts and other unwanted spirits from entering the premises. But since Guandi does not approve of prostitution, employees had to keep moving his image so that he would not observe them at work. This was troublesome so they eventually enshrined Zhu Bajie instead. “Ye zhi nü bai Zhu Bajie zhao ke 夜之女拜豬八戒招客,” Pingguo ribao 蘋果日報, December 31, 2003.


observations of the close correlation between the rise and spread of cults to wayward wealth gods and periods of rapid socio-economic change. Weller studied Taiwan during the 1970s and 1980s, while von Glahn examined the effects of the new money economy that emerged in China during the sixteenth-century, but both noted the development of illicit, amoral cults during periods when newly burgeoning economies went largely unregulated by the state. The deviant nature of some wealth gods paralleled the popular perception that money was obtained through unpredictable or corrupt means. Morally ambiguous wealth gods, according to von Glahn, reflect “a pervasive sense of anxiety about money: how to get it, and, especially, how to keep it. In the popular mind, wealth was not produced by living virtuously, }

or through prudent investment and planning. Instead, money was believed to be under the control of malicious and notoriously unreliable supernatural forces.  

The evolution of Zhu Bajie’s cult in twentieth-century Taiwan confirms Weller’s and von Glahn’s insights into the relationship between amoral cults and socio-economic instability. Zhu Bajie, moreover, shares many of the same qualities as other deities associated with sex and money. Like Jigong, with whom he is occasionally paired, Zhu Bajie has a reputation for overindulging in both food and alcohol. Zhu Bajie is also sometimes depicted wearing a cap with the character “buddha” (fo 佛) emblazoned on the front—a standard feature of Jigong’s iconography (see Figure 5). Both Jigong and Zhu Bajie are portrayed as rather unkempt Buddhist monks with their loose robes falling open to reveal bare chests, but while Jigong is a depicted as a skinny man, Zhu Bajie, in contrast, has a corpulent human body and the head of a pig. This human-animal hybridity evokes Zhu Bajie’s animal appetites and associates him with other transgressive non-human deities such as the Eighteen Lords (the most revered of whom is a dog), mountain goblins (precursors to Wutong wealth gods), Master Tiger (Huye 虎爺), and fox spirits famed for their powers of sexual enchantment.


Fig. 2. Zhu Bajie holding a nude woman. Shengming Temple, Taiwan (author’s photo, 2014).
These and other animal deities cater to devotees’ baser instincts. As Michel Strickmann once observed, the distinction between human and animal is fundamental to notions of civilization. One is defined in opposition to the other. People worship gods in animal form, employ otherworldly animals, or transform themselves into animals in order to achieve objectives well outside the ordinary social norm—possibly as a means to transcendence, but no doubt even more often to attain what are essentially asocial or even antisocial ends.\(^7\)

More recently, Xiaofei Kang has likewise noted that people living in twentieth-century China viewed human-like deities enshrined in temples as devoted to the public good, while animal-like deities kept in small shrines were associated with the private needs of individuals.\(^8\) Zhu Bajie, a pig spirit specializing in the acquisition of sex and wealth, belongs to this latter group, which is more attuned to the instinctual, animalistic desires of their human followers.

In contrast to most other transgressive deities, Zhu Bajie is both a deviant spirit and a popular cultural icon. In his capacity as patron saint of prostitutes, Zhu Bajie is known by many other names—Brother Pig Spirit (Zhuge shen 豬哥神), Father Pig (Zhuge ye 豬哥爺), Father Hunter (Shoushou ye 狩狩爺), or Marshal of Heavenly Reeds (Tianpeng Yuanshuai 天蓬元帥)—but his identity as one of the five protagonists of the wildly popular *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) narrative is apparent to most of those who encounter him. Set in seventh-century China, this famous story recounts the epic adventures of the Buddhist monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (600?–664) and his four divine companions—the monkey Sun Wukong 孫悟空, a demon–turned–monk named Sha 沙, a dragon-horse, and the pig Zhu Bajie—as they travel through dangerous, demon-infested lands on their quest to acquire a cache of Buddhist scriptures in India. The lengthiest, most elaborate version of the *Journey to the West* story comes from the hundred-chapter novel that was published anonymously in China during the late sixteenth century, but most people are more familiar with the many abridgements, literary spin-offs, theatrical productions, and, more recently, movies, cartoons, television series, and video games that the novel has inspired. In one form or another, virtually everyone in East Asia knows the broad contours of the plot and the main characters of the story. Zhu Bajie, often referred to simply as “Idiot” in the hundred-chapter novel, is beloved as a bumbling glutton, a comic foil to the more clever, more martial monkey Sun Wukong. Whether in the anime and board games marketed to children or the blockbuster movies aimed at broader audiences, Zhu Bajie is consistently portrayed as an inept, unthreatening member of the band of misfit pilgrims. And yet, in Taiwan, this pig spirit has come to be worshiped as the guardian deity of prostitutes and his cult is promoted by shady, self-proclaimed ritual masters specializing in black magic and bedchamber arts. How did this pot-bellied, clownish character come to occupy such a perverse place in Taiwan’s popular pantheon?


THE BIRTH OF ZHU BAJIE

Perceptions of Zhu Bajie as a light-hearted and lazy sidekick are derived, often indirectly, from the sixteenth-century novel, but they tend to emphasize only certain aspects of his character while eliding others. In the novel, Zhu Bajie is initially presented as a demonic and dangerous figure. He is described as a “monster of most ferocious appearance,” with “lips curled and twisted like dried lotus leaves; ears like rush-leaf fans and hard, gleaming eyes; gaping teeth as sharp as a fine steel file’s; a long mouth wide open like a fire pot.” Zhu Bajie’s hideous appearance and violent nature are legacies of past transgressions. A divine immortal in his previous incarnation, he had served in the celestial bureaucracy as the Marshal of Heavenly Reeds. For the crime of getting drunk and forcing himself on the Goddess of the Moon, the Jade Emperor had Zhu Bajie beaten two thousand times with a mallet and banished to the human realm. He was subsequently reborn from the womb of an old sow, whom he killed along with the rest of her litter. Thereafter, Zhu Bajie feasted on human flesh. Serving out his exile on earth, he is later convinced, both by reason and by force, to accompany and protect the pious monk Xuanzang on his pilgrimage to India. Once his atonement is complete, Zhu Bajie will be allowed to return to Heaven. It is Xuanzang who gives him the name Bajie, which means “eight precepts” and refers to the Buddhist vow to abstain from the five pungent plants (scallions, leeks, onions, garlic, and ginger) and three types of meat (goose, dog, and turtle). Zhu Bajie, however, makes no vow to abstain from alcohol or sex, which he pursues with vigor throughout his earthly existence.

At the conclusion of the novel, after the sacred texts have been conveyed to the capital of China, the Buddha rewards all five pilgrims for their heroic efforts. Xuanzang is named the Buddha of Candana Merit. Sun Wukong is made the Buddha of Victorious Strife. To his dismay, Zhu Bajie is appointed only to the lowly position of Janitor of the Altars. “They have all become Buddhas!” he protests. “Why am I alone made Janitor of the Altars?” “Because you are still talkative and lazy,” the Buddha responds, “and you retain an enormous appetite.” Zhu Bajie, who never manages to reign in his restless desires, eventually becomes a god but a minor one, responsible for cleaning up the stale food and wilted flowers left behind on Buddhist altars.

As Glen Dudbridge and many other scholars have shown, the Journey to the West novel that was published in the late sixteenth century is based on earlier narratives that had been circulating in various forms—poetry, prose, theater, and art—for well over four-hundred years. In the earliest literary and artistic depictions of this

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10 XYJ, chap. 19: 218; JTTW, vol. I: 386. These dietary prohibitions should not be confused with the more traditional list of eight Buddhist precepts.
mythical journey, Xuanzang is accompanied only by a monkey attendant and a horse. Zhu Bajie does not enter the story until sometime during the late Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), long after the foundations of the narrative had been laid. The earliest known visual representations of a pig among Xuanzang’s party come from a ten-storied marble stupa, carved in the capital of the Korean Koryo dynasty in 1368. Twenty scenes from the Journey to the West narrative are depicted on the second level of the stupa’s base, and Zhu Bajie is shown with the robed body of a human but with the big-eared, long-snouted head of a pig. A ceramic pillow and an incense burner produced in China during roughly this same period also show a very similar pig-headed figure among the group of pilgrims. Textual accounts of Zhu Bajie come somewhat later. The Pak tongsa onhae朴通事詮解, a primer for colloquial Chinese published in 1480 in Korea, recounts several scenes from a now lost edition of the Journey to the West narrative. The main text of the primer makes no mention of Zhu Bajie, but annotations made in the early sixteenth century refer to the “black pig spirit named Zhu Bajie” who accompanied Xuanzang on his journey and was appointed Janitor of Altars at the Flower Fruit Assembly. Zhu Bajie was thus clearly a late-comer to the narrative, but once he arrived on the scene he was there to stay. From the fourteenth century to the present-day, Zhu Bajie has remained an integral character in the many variations of the Journey to the West story.

In the earliest sources, Zhu Bajie simply appears; there is no explanation of why he has been introduced to the narrative or where he has come from. Was he the object of an existing cult that was subsequently incorporated into older versions of the Journey story? Isobe Akira, the foremost scholar of the Journey to the West, has speculated that the figure of Zhu Bajie must have emerged gradually out of a complex of pig-deity myths and traditions in China. Certainly, China’s crowded spirit bestiary does not lack for pigs. Carvings and paintings of pigs have been found in Chinese tombs since Neolithic times, and Han-dynasty texts like the Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhai jing 山海経) and the Master of Huainan (Huainanzi 淮南子) describe strange human-pig hybrids that dwell at the margins of the civilized world. In contrast to these wild creatures, domesticated pigs have generally been accompanied by a monkey attendant and a horse.
represented wealth and prosperity, which is why the little clay banks used by children in China and other parts of the world are traditionally shaped like pigs. Their short gestation periods and large litter sizes have also made pigs symbols of fertility, while their voracious and indiscriminate appetites have earned them reputations for gluttony.

Pigs epitomize abundance and indulgence, and Zhu Bajie, a fat, appetitive pig with an irrepressible libido, would seem to be the embodiment of these qualities. The audiences who encountered Zhu Bajie in early theatrical productions or in the hundred-chapter novel, however, were informed that Zhu Bajie was not simply a personification of popular pig lore; he was, in fact, a powerful deity with a long and storied history. The oldest surviving theatrical script for a Journey to the West play is a musical drama (zaü 雜劇) in twenty-four scenes, portions of which may date back as far as the fourteenth century. Zhu Bajie is introduced in this script as an Indian emigré. In his opening monologue, Zhu Bajie identifies himself as the mount of the Buddhist goddess Mārīcī (Ch. Molizhi 摩利支). Mārīcī originated as a solar deity in ancient India, and as a source of light, she specialized in warding off dark, demonic spirits. Iconographically, her martial prowess was indicated by her fearsome appearance and by her chariot yoked to seven wild boars. As David Hall has noted, Mārīcī was absorbed into the Buddhist pantheon of northern India beginning in the late fifth century, and shortly thereafter narrative accounts of her impressive abilities were translated into Chinese. One of the earliest of these translations, a text titled The Buddha Teaches the Dharani of the Goddess Mārīcī, introduced Chinese readers to Mārīcī’s formidable powers—she cannot be seen, captured, deceived, bound, or robbed—and promised devotees protection if they simply recited and copied her dhāraṇī. Mārīcī’s cult was ascendant in China during the Tang dynasty when the court-cleric and esoteric Buddhist master Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong 不空; 705–774) recommended her image, rituals, and spell to the emperor. By the tenth century, she was occupying the center of esoteric manḍalas astride the back of a wild boar. Her six arms held a

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18 Cai Tieying, ed., Xiyou ji ziliao, vol. 1: 391. The entire script is reproduced in the same volume on pages 348–426. Dudbridge discusses this source and gives a synopsis of its content in The Hsi-yu Chi, 76–89 and 193–200. The play was initially identified as the lost work of the thirteenth-century playwright Wu Changling 吳昌齡 but was later attributed to Yang Jingxian 楊景賢 (ca. fourteenth century). An analysis of the text by Howard Goldblatt, however, suggests that while the script likely contains material from the Yuan dynasty that could plausibly be traced to Yang Jingxian, the received edition also uses theatrical conventions that are characteristic of the Ming dynasty. The script thus appears to be a compilation of previously independent plays that were edited together into their present form sometime before the early seventeenth century. Howard Goldblatt, “The Hsi-yu chi Play: A Critical Look at its Discovery, Authorship, and Content,” Asian Pacific Quarterly 5, no. 1 (1973): 31–46. The portion of the play that centers on Zhu Bajie, the fourth act, circulated as a separate piece from as early as 1633. See “Er Lang shou Zhu Bajie 二郎收豬八戒,” in Xinjian gujin ming ju liuzhi ji 新鑄古今名劇柳枝集, ed. Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜, in Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書 1763 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 398–407.


bow, an arrow, a branch from the tree of no sorrow, a needle, thread, and a vajra scepter, and at least one of her three scowling, three-eyed heads was in boar form. Like other wrathful deities of the Indian esoteric pantheon, Ma was possessed of the very qualities she was invoked to protect against violence, fear, delusion. The boar imagery in her iconography indicated her wild, aggressive, animal-like nature which, now tamed, could be turned against the forces of ignorance and disorder. By the Song dynasty (960–1279), Ma’s growing reputation as a powerful guardian deity had spread beyond the Buddhist clergy and their patrons. In Daoist circles, she became known as Mother of the Dipper (Doumu 斗母). As her name suggests, she is credited with giving birth to the emperor of the Southern Dipper, in charge of human births, and the emperor of the Northern Dipper, overseer of deaths.

The playwright of the first-known *Journey to the West* drama implies that Zhu Bajie emerged from beneath Ma’s feet to bear the baggage of Xuanzang on his pilgrimage to India. There are other explanations of Zhu Bajie’s origins, however, suggesting that the pig character entered the story first and efforts to fill in its backstory came only later. In the hundred-chapter novel, Zhu Bajie is given a more prestigious—and more Chinese—pedigree. The author of the novel identifies him as the former celestial deity Marshal of Heavenly Reeds, who, as we have seen, was expelled from heaven for his misdeeds and now lives in disgrace on earth. At the time the novel was published in the late sixteenth century, Heavenly Reeds was a prominent martial deity with a flourishing cult. Like Ma’s Daoist doppelgänger, the Mother of the Dipper, Heavenly Reeds is associated with the constellation known in the West as Ursa Major or the Northern Dipper. Since the fifth century, Heavenly Reeds has served as one of four generals under the command of the emperor of the Northern Dipper, lord of the underworld. As Marshal to the Northern Dipper, Heavenly Reeds is tasked with pacifying dark, *yin* spirits, and his spell has long been promoted as an effective means of eradicating—butchering, de-veining, and de-boning—ghosts and demons. According to the *Corpus of Daoist Ritual* (*Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元), a massive compendium of Daoist ritual manuals and other materials compiled in the mid-fifteenth century, Heavenly Reeds is as powerful as he is terrifying to behold. His three heads have gaping mouths filled with green teeth and blue tongues. His six arms hold weapons of war: a battle-ax, a sword, a rope, a cup, his seal, and the seven-starred seal of the

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22 *Yuqing wushang lingbao ziran beidou bensheng zhenjing* 玉清無上靈寶自然北斗本生真經, Zhengtong Daozang 正統道藏 (hereafter abbreviated as DZ), no. 45 (Taipei: Yiwenyin shuguan, 1962), 2a–b; and *Taishang xuanling doumu dasheng yuanjun benming yansheng xinjing* 太上玄靈斗姆大聖元君本命延生心經, DZ, no. 621, 2b.
23 Early inconsistencies in the writing of Zhu Bajie’s name suggest that he belonged to an oral tradition before his story was committed to writing. His name is variously written as 朱八戒, 豬八戒, and 豬八戒.
Northern Dipper. He commands a spirit army of 360,000 mounted soldiers as well as the thunder god, the lightning goddess, the wind god, the rain master, immortal boys, and jade maidens. When summoned, Heavenly Reeds and his troops mount a black wind and descend to the altars of devotees.25

The pudgy, blundering pig portrayed in popular books and movies would not seem to have much in common with either Māricī or Heavenly Reeds, both of whom are fearsome, exorcistic astral deities who guard against demons, ghosts, epidemics, and other agents of death and decay. And yet, in the hundred-chapter novel, Zhu Bajie is in fact described as a ferocious monster whose violent tendencies are harnessed for the protection of a Buddhist monk. The demon Zhu Bajie, once subjugated, becomes an exorcist, using his deadly strength and divine weapon to convert or destroy the many ghosts and demons that threaten to either devour or deflower Xuanzang. The apotropaic qualities of Zhu Bajie are occasionally made explicit in the novel, where he is twice likened to a Road Opening Spirit (Kailu shen 開路神), the chief exorcistic deity presiding over communal rites of purification (nuo儺).26 To this day, Zhu Bajie, together with Xuanzang, Sun Wukong, Sha Monk, and the dragon-horse, are invoked during large-scale public purificatory ceremonies and smaller private exorcistic rites performed throughout China, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora communities in Southeast Asia.27 In these ritual reenactments of the Journey to the West story, the parallels between Zhu Bajie and his precursors Māricī and Heavenly Reeds are easier to recognize.

The Journey to the West concludes with the apotheosis of its protagonists, and the novel itself can be read as a sophisticated elaboration and systematization of the sacred histories of established cult figures.28 The publication of the novel during the late-Ming dynasty amplified the reputations of these figures as exorcists and spirit guides, roles they had already assumed in local ritual traditions. In the centuries following the novel’s publication, the five pilgrims continued to be summoned and embodied during communal exorcisms, mortuary rites, sectarian liturgies, and the initiation rites of secret societies.29 The deification of Zhu Bajie, therefore, is not an example of the sacralization of a secular character. He and other figures from the Journey to the West have always been more than just characters in a work of popular fiction. For many people today, Zhu Bajie remains an accessible

25 Daofa huiyuan 道法會元, DZ, no. 1120, j. 217, 5b–6a.
27 There is a growing body of ethnographic work documenting the ritual functions of Journey to the West narratives in China. See for example Ye Mingsheng 葉明生, Fujian sheng Shaowu shi Dafulang xiang Heyuan cu de “tiao fan seng” ye “tiao ba man” 福建省邵武市大阜鄉河源村的“跳番僧”與“跳八蠻” (Taipei: Shi He Zheng minshu wenhua jijinhui, 1993); and Jiang Yan 姜燕, Xianghuo xi kao 香火戲考 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2007).
28 Mark Meulenbeld has argued convincingly that several Ming-dynasty novels function as “collections of local, sacred histories” that “synthesize the diversity of Chinese religions and present them as a unity.” See his Demonic Warfare: Daoism, Territorial Networks, and the History of a Ming Novel (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013), 10.
29 In what may be the most (in)famous example, Zhu Bajie and his companions were channeled by the Boxer rebels at the turn of the twentieth century so that the pilgrims’ divine powers could be brought to bear against the Christian “demons” that were invading China. See Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Yuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院近代史研究所 and Jindaishi Ziliao Bianjizu 近代史資料編輯組, eds., Yibetuan shiliao 義和團史料 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 505.
deity who deploys his martial powers for the protection of threatened communities. In the past, however, Zhu Bajie was almost always venerated as a member of a distinct group of deities: the five pilgrims of the *Journey to the West* (see Figure 3). Unlike his companion Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie never seems to have developed a significant independent cult of his own in China. In some rural areas in Jiangsu province, Zhu Bajie is venerated by pig farmers as a protector of the pigsty, but to my knowledge, he has never been associated with the sex trade in mainland China. It was only after his journey to the East and arrival in Taiwan that Zhu Bajie assumed this new set of responsibilities.

Fig. 3. One of a series of popular prints depicting the characters from the *Journey to the West* collected by Henri Doré in Fujian in the early twentieth century. *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, vol. VIII, part 2 (Shanghai: T’usewei Printing Press, 1926), 565 (verso).

ZHU BAJIE IN BROTHELS

Nearly every traditional profession in Taiwan claims one or more guardian deities. Carpenters make offerings to Lu Ban 魯班, a legendary craftsman. Hairdressers venerate the Daoist patriarch Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓. Embroiderers enshrine the immortal Hai Chan 海蟾. Even the artisans who carve statues of patron saints have a patron saint: Ding Lan 丁蘭, the legendary Han-dynasty filial exemplar. These deities are distinct from the ancestral spirits venerated by families, but they similarly serve to foster a sense of shared identity and strengthen communal bonds—a particularly important task on an island nation populated mostly by immigrants. A host of different deities have been called to look after the needs of prostitutes in China and Taiwan. Guan Zhong 管仲, a deified prime minister from the ancient Chinese state of Qi, and the Spirit with White Eyebrows (Baimei shen 白眉神) are two of the oldest and best-known, but there are more than a dozen others. In mid-nineteenth century Fuzhou, for example, prostitutes burned talismans inscribed with dog heads to better their business prospects. In early twentieth-century Shanghai, courtesans made offerings to the Pissing Bodhisattva (Sanjiao pusa 撒尿菩薩)—so named because its shrine was located next to a public urinal where the stench of the toilet and the smoke of the incense blended “mistily.” Some of the deities associated with prostitution in China can also be found in Taiwan, but Zhu Bajie’s cult does not seem to have come from the mainland. Although shrines to Zhu Bajie can now also be found in some of the red-light districts of Chinese diaspora communities in Southeast Asia, the evidence at hand suggests that his association with the sex trade originated in Taiwan during the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century.

The details surrounding the early development of the cult are sketchy, but textual and material sources suggest that it emerged gradually from a confluence of several loosely related ritual traditions. One of these centered on a now largely forgotten regional deity known as Father Sailor.

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33 Justus Doolittle, Social Life of the Chinese: With Some Account of Their Religious, Governmental, Educational and Business Customs and Opinions; with Special but Not Exclusive Reference to Fuhchau (New York: Harper and Bros, 1867), 821.
36 Shuishou ye 水手爺 (Father Sailor) is also known by the homophonous name of Shuishou ye 水守爺 (Father Water Guardian) and Shoushoushun ye 狐狩爺 (Father Hunter).
Sailor functioned as a sort of supranatural marriage counselor. If a wife was not getting along with her husband or suspected that he was having an affair with another woman, she could go to Chongqing Temple in the city of Tainan, where Father Sailor was enshrined. The wife would then mix some of her hair into the jar of vinegar—a classic symbol of jealousy—set in front of Father Sailor’s statue. She could also secretly rub some of the lamp oil from the altar on her husband’s head and his fondness for her would miraculously return.37

The neighborhood in Tainan where Chongqing Temple was located served as the city’s red-light district during the Japanese colonial period, from 1895 to 1945. Somewhat ironically, Father Sailor, with his power to compel husbands to reconcile with their wives, was also venerated by prostitutes seeking to lure men—many of them sailors—into their brothels. As an apparent projection of brothel patrons, Father Sailor was rendered in human form, but the men who paid for sex were also sometimes referred to as pigs. An account written in 1929 describes, with evident disdain, one of the rituals performed in the brothels of Tainan:

Every day at dusk, pimps and madams must burn incense and pray: “Father Sailor, with skinny legs and twisted face, protect the big pigs that enter the pigsty. Vacantly they come, gasping they go, clutching their money bag. They dare to go down dark roads, disregarding their friends’ advice and brushing off their parents’ curses. If children speak up, they are boxed in the ears.”38

The employees and proprietors of Tainan’s brothels apparently thought of their customers as swine, bloated with indulgence, drunk with desire, and made offerings of incense and incantations to lead these pigs into their pigsties. The objective of sex workers’ prayers—a gluttonous, heedless, wealthy customer—seems to have eventually become conflated with the intended recipient of their requests—a powerful, protective pig spirit. Over time, images of pigs came to replace those of sailors on brothel altars.

The association between pigs and prostitution in Taiwan also likely stemmed from traditional pig breeding practices. The service of providing a boar stud to mate with sows was known as “Leading Brother Pig” (qian zhuge 牽豬哥), a name that echoes Zhu Bajie’s popular nickname—Brother Pig—as well as his charge to steer male customers into brothels.39 In a short story published in 1941, the Taiwanese author and

37 The earliest sources for this temple report that the jar was placed before an image of the Buddha. Liu Jiamou 劉家謀 (1814–1853), “Hai yin shi 海音詩,” in Taiwan xianxian ji 台灣先賢集, vol. 3 (Taipei: Zhonghua, 1971), 1261. Later sources claim that the jar was associated with Father Sailor. At the current incarnation of the temple, rebuilt in 1956, the jar of vinegar is kept before the deity Subao si 速報司. See Zheng Daocong 鄭道聰, Wenhua jiequ daolan: bashiliu nian du quanguo wenyi ji 文化街區導覽：八十六年度全國文藝季 (Tainan: Tainan shili wenhua zhongxin, 1997), 17.

38 Lian Heng 鄭登, Ya yan 雅言 (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1963), 37. 鴇兒每夕必焚香而祝曰: 「水手爺, 腳跳跳, 面繞繞, 保庇大豬來進窩。來空空, 去噌噌, 腰肚軟院裏, 躲路著敢行。朋友勸勿聼, 父母罵忽驚, 某因加謹食懐嚼」. Translation tentative.

statesman Zhang Wenhuan 張文環 (1909–1978) recounts the trials of a young woman named Cai Yun who was sold into prostitution by her mother. The owner of the brothel where Cai Yun works in Taipei installs images of Brother Pig in the rooms of all his female employees and instructs them to bow before the image and chant, “Spirit! Today please help me bring in good customers: those with lots of money, who come in staggering, who leave hobbling, and who do not realize what has been fished out of their pockets.” These lines resemble the chant to Father Sailor, but now it is Brother Pig who is asked to entrance wayward men. The narrator in the story goes on to explain that just as a boar stud is aroused into a drooling stupor when he encounters sows in heat, Brother Pig has the power to bewitch brothel patrons. Under this deity’s spell, men will give anything to get what they desire.

The physical appearance of the icon enshrined in Cai Yun’s room is not described in the story, but pig statues dating from this same period have been identified as Brother Pig (see Figure 4). The anatomically realistic form of these icons contrasts with depictions of Zhu Bajie, who is almost always rendered in hybrid form, with a human body and a pig head. The earliest accounts and images of Brother Pig thus portray a pig deity who was initially independent from the Journey to the West character. Eventually, however, Brother Pig merged with the much more famous Zhu Bajie, resulting in a deity with a single identity but multiple histories.

It is difficult to know precisely when the cult of Brother Pig first began to fuse with that of Zhu Bajie. There is a statue of Zhu Bajie on a side altar in the Xiahai City God Temple 霞海城隍廟 in Taipei that was reportedly commissioned during the late Qing dynasty (1644–1912). According to the caretakers of the temple, the women who worked at the bars, brothels, and other so-called “special professions” in Taipei’s thriving business district of Dadaocheng wanted their patron deity enshrined in the City God Temple, and Zhu Bajie has remained at his post ever since. The statue shows Zhu Bajie seated, his rotund belly spilling out of his open robe. He wears a hat with the word “buddha” written on the front and holds his iconic weapon, a magical muck rake, in his right hand (Figure 5). If this icon does indeed date to the early twentieth century, it is one of the oldest examples of Zhu Bajie in his role as guardian spirit of sex workers.

There is nothing explicitly sexual about the statue on the City God Temple’s altar, and similar images in other temples and shrines throughout Taiwan show Zhu Bajie in the same pose. Some have him holding a gold ingot in his other hand,

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41 See also the photograph reproduced in Ke Ruiming, Taiwan fengyue, 109.
42 This altar, located in a side hall, is dedicated to the wife of the City God. Its array of male and female deities known to protect women is particularly popular with female devotees. Other City God temples in Taiwan also enshrine Zhu Bajie. In a brief notice in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch, Keith Stevens reproduced a photograph of a statue of Zhu Bajie kept in the City God Temple in the Taiwanese city of Jiayi. “Patron Saint of Prostitutes: Zhu Bajie,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch 40 (2000): 195–196.
44 One exception to the asexual nature of this group of icons is an undated statue in the collection of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts. The icon depicts a figure with a black pig head and a pink human body. Its robe is open to reveal a bare chest and what appear to be two swollen
highlighting his role as a god of wealth, bulging with abundance and raking in cash for his devotees. The other common depiction of Zhu Bajie, showing him seated with a nude (or sometimes clothed) woman draped across his lap, is far less subtle. This iconography appears to be a later development, dating perhaps to the 1980s or 1990s. While not rare, these statues are in high demand. One, kept in a small public shrine in the Taiwanese village of Dacun, was stolen five times before it was finally secured within a locked iron cage. Thefts of Zhu Bajie’s statue point to the clandestine nature of his cult and his shrine in Dacun is,


45 The Li 李 family, who own Longshan Foju 龍山佛具, a store selling Buddhist paraphernalia near Longshan Temple in Taipei, claim to have created this iconographic form specifically for sex workers in their neighborhood. “Foxiang shijia: Longshan foju dian 佛像世家龙山佛具店,” Mingri fengshang 明日风尚 6 (2010), 54–55.

according to newspaper reports, frequented by prostitutes and gamblers who come seeking his favor. Taiwanese police are aware of the company Zhu Bajie keeps. A recent police raid on a “temple” that enshrined Zhu Bajie in the city of Hualian revealed a warren of bedrooms behind the front hall.47

Small, unlicensed brothels like the one raided in Hualian are widespread in Taiwan. Prostitution, the “oldest profession in the world,” has not changed much over the centuries, but its legal status has frequently fluctuated in Taiwan. “Illicit sexual intercourse,” a category that included prostitution, was outlawed by the Qing emperor in 1723.48 That law remained in effect until the Japanese occupation, when a system of state-sanctioned brothels was put in place.49 Licensed brothels were segregated by ethnicity; one group of women was available only for Japanese men, another served the Taiwanese population. After WWII, when Taiwan came

Fig. 5. Zhu Bajie on the altar of Xiahai City God Temple (Xiahai chenghuang miao 霞海城隍廟) in Taipei (author’s photo, 2014).


48 Matthew H. Sommer, Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), chap. 7.
under the control of the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-Shek, the sex trade was briefly banned before the registration and licensing of prostitutes and brothels resumed in 1956.\footnote{For an overview of prostitution in Taiwan, see Mei-Hua Chen, “Selling Bodies/Selling Pleasure: The Social Organization of Sex Work in Taiwan,” in \textit{International Approaches to Prostitution: Law and Policy in Europe and Asia}, ed. Geetanjali Gangoli and Nicole Westmarland (Bristol: Policy Press, 2006), 165–184.} In addition to licensed brothels, prostitution also flourished in dance halls, bars, tea rooms, cafes, massage parlors, karaoke halls, beauty salons, and saunas—the so-called eight special professions. Although commercial sex was officially forbidden in these establishments, the law was rarely enforced. Urban red-light districts served both the rapidly expanding population of Taiwanese men relocating to cities from the countryside and foreign tourists. A popular saying recommended “shopping in Hong Kong, gambling in Macau, and whoring in Taiwan.”\footnote{An exception was made for government-sanctioned brothels established to serve Taiwan’s military personnel, a system known as “Military Paradise” (\textit{junzhong leyuan 军中乐园}). Hans Tao-Ming Huang, “State Power, Prostitution and Sexual Order in Taiwan: Towards a Genealogical Critique of ‘Virtuous Custom’,” \textit{Inter-Asia Cultural Studies} 5, no. 2 (2004): 240.} Concerns about eroding social mores and revelations concerning the forced prostitution of Taiwan’s indigenous women led to a ban on new brothels in 1974. This was followed by the complete criminalization of prostitution in 1997. Exceptions were made for women and businesses previously licensed by the government. As of 2011, only eleven legal brothels and forty-nine licensed sex workers remained. The licenses held by these women, many of whom are now in their 50s and 60s, are non-transferable, though younger, unlicensed women work openly in both legal and illegal brothels.\footnote{Chen, “Selling Bodies/Selling Pleasure,” 169. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of these sex tourists were American G.I.s on “rest and relaxation” leave from Vietnam. Huang, “State Power, Prostitution and Sexual Order in Taiwan,” 243.} A movement to expand legal prostitution in Taiwan—to essentially legitimize and regulate an industry that is unofficially tolerated but officially outlawed—has been gathering support in recent years but has yet to be taken up by the Legislative Yuan.

The ambiguous legal status of prostitution in Taiwan has left sex workers in a precarious position. Because the vast majority of prostitutes are technically engaging in illegal activity, many are compelled to ally with criminal organizations, sacrificing their autonomy to secure a degree of protection from both clients and police. Moreover, Article 80 of Taiwan’s Social Order Maintenance Act (Shehui zhixu weihu fa 社会秩序維護法) criminalizes the selling of sex but does not penalize those who pay for sexual services. The law, in short, punishes prostitutes rather than the men who employ them. Women who work in the sex trade, most of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are thus acutely susceptible to abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking. Some of these women, like the character Cai Yun in Zhang Wenhuan’s short story, were sold to brothels at a young age by their parents and have subsequently become the primary source of income for their families.\footnote{“Quan Tai 11 gong changguan ke yuan di yingye 全台11公娼館 可原地營業,” \textit{Pingguo ribao}, July 15, 2011, accessed July 9, 2018, http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20110715/33529810/. At least one of these legal brothels, “Heavenly Pleasure” (Tiantian le 天天樂) in the city of Taoyuan, maintains a shrine to Zhu Bajie.} These women live under the persistent threat of arrest, violence, and
economic ruin, but they have no legal protection and few systems of support. News stories that sensationalize the veneration of Zhu Bajie by workers in the “special professions” tend to emphasize his role as a god of wealth, helping to steer a steady stream of customers to brothels and massage parlors. Given the extremely vulnerable position of women who work in the sex trade, however, it may also be that their supplication to Zhu Bajie, a formidable exorcistic deity known for his apotropaic powers, is also an attempt at self-preservation. In the absence of legal safeguards or community support, women involved in the sex trade might understandably turn to a guardian deity for some sense of security.

ZHU BAJIE IN TEMPLES

In the late 1960s, Zhu Bajie began to emerge from behind brothel doors to offer his services to those simply seeking to increase their fortunes. One of the earliest examples that I am aware of dates to 1967 when a former soldier named Zheng Ximing 鄭錫銘 decided to fulfill a vow made to his late father and build a temple. After a year of searching for a suitable site, Zheng had grown frustrated by his lack of success. Then he had a dream where he saw a pig spirit dwelling inside an ancient tree. It took Zheng another six months to locate the tree from his dream, which he found growing on a remote mountainside on Taiwan’s north coast. A portion of the old banyan’s gnarled trunk resembled a pig’s head, and Zheng was convinced that the tree contained the spirit of the Marshal of Heavenly Reeds in his earthly incarnation as Zhu Bajie. This spirit, according to Zheng, had been imprisoned in the tree by the Jade Emperor and would be released only after he had served time for transgressions committed in Heaven. The banyan tree became the focal point of Zheng’s new temple, Shengming gong 聖明宮 (Palace of Sagely Illumination). When I visited the sprawling complex in the spring of 2014, a small altar and incense brazier had been set up at the base of the tree (Figure 6), and a statue of Zhu Bajie with a nude woman draped across his lap sat on the altar in an adjacent shrine to the Lord of the Earth. Offerings of coins (“mother money,” muqian 母錢, which are expected to produce many offspring) were left in a dish on the tree’s altar and a stack of business cards was arranged in front of the statue in the shrine. Zheng’s son, who guided me around the site, explained that although many workers from the “special professions” come to make offerings to the sacred tree, Zhu Bajie is currently doing penance and therefore cannot engage in any immoral activity. He is forbidden from directly helping prostitutes obtain customers, but he can serve as a more general god of wealth and a promoter of harmonious relations between men and women. The temple that day was relatively quiet, with only a few people trickling in to bow and offer incense. On the tenth day of the tenth month, by contrast, hundreds of people were expected to help Zhu Bajie celebrate his birthday, making offerings they hoped would one day be repaid with interest.

The Zheng family is well-aware of Zhu Bajie’s role as guardian spirit of sex workers—the temple’s first statue of Zhu Bajie was in fact donated by a local prostitute—but they emphasize his identity as a broadly accessible god of wealth.

Anyone can secure Zhu Bajie’s blessings at Shengming Temple, not just those involved in the sex trade. The unusual position of Zhu Bajie within a sacred tree also associates his cult with that of nature spirits. In Taiwan, deities that dwell in unusual stones and trees, typically understood as manifestations of regional earth gods, have traditionally been tasked with protecting local communities, especially children. Since the Song dynasty, many of the spirits that dwelled in trees or stones were also known to have a more mischievous, demonic power (yaotong 妖通).55 Those qualities appear to have endured in Taiwan where, beginning in the 1970s, people began turning to stone and tree spirits for help choosing winning lottery numbers.56 Like foxes, dogs, toads, and other animal spirits with whom they are often associated, the spirits of trees and stones are venerated not because they have led exemplary lives but because they

have acquired reputations for uncritical efficacy. They are thus not averse to illegal or amoral requests. It is surely no coincidence that Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie’s rebellious companion from the *Journey to the West* and a deity that is held in high regard by gamblers, has also manifested in tree form in China, Taiwan, and Singapore.\(^{57}\) Tree spirits, like animal deities, have few qualms about helping people acquire wealth through unconventional means.

Attempts to increase Zhu Bajie’s appeal are not limited to Shengming Temple. At Eight Roads Wealth God Temple (Balu caishen miao 八路財神廟), situated among the farmlands of western Taoyuan country, Zhu Bajie is similarly extolled as a deity who, when properly propitiated, will send his army of spirit troops to drum up customers for his devotees in the service industries. The “service industry” (*fuwu ye* 服務業) is, in part, a euphemism for the sex trade. The founder of the temple, Zeng Chunrong 曾春榮, once told a reporter that when the temple opens its doors in the early morning hours, there are usually seven or eight prostitutes waiting to get in. After entering, these women strip before the altar of Zhu Bajie as a means of “repaying their vow.” The deity had brought them business and kept them safe through the night, Zeng explained, and was therefore rewarded with an offering of their “sleek, beautiful bodies.”\(^{58}\) When I visited the temple in the summer of 2017, however, the caretakers were quick to point out that Zhu Bajie responds to the requests of all devotees, not just prostitutes. As a university professor, and thus a member of a “service” industry, I was encouraged to offer three sticks of incense at the deity’s altar. I was hardly the first to do so. The hundreds of business cards that plaster his statue and the wall behind his altar testify the high demand for the god’s attention.

The transformation of Zhu Bajie from tutelary deity of a particular trade to god of wealth accessible to a wide range of individuals tracks with recent changes in Taiwanese society. Over the last forty years, there has been a marked increase in sites like Shengming and Eight Roads Wealth God Temple, which traffic in the private and often morally ambiguous petitions of devotees. As Robert Weller has pointed out, the economic boom that followed industrialization and privatization in the post-war period resulted in a spate of new temple construction, with the number of temples and shrines more than doubling between 1956 and 1980.\(^{59}\) Many of these new temples mirror the values inherent in Taiwan’s new capitalist, consumer economy. Temples that promised to improve the fortunes of individual devotees outnumbered traditional, family- and community-oriented sites. People seeking help with illicit or illegal activities turned to deities that specialized in the acquisition of so-called fraudulent wealth (*piancai* 騙財) or “fraudulent sex” (*pianse* 騙色).


Such deities, Weller notes, tend to be marginal members of the popular pantheon—animal spirits, bandits, drunks, or ghosts. The members of this pantheon often specialize in specific services. Some, like Song Jiang 宋江, the famous Song-dynasty outlaw immortalized in the novel *Water Margin*, and Bodhidharma, the cantankerous Indian monk credited with introducing Chan Buddhism to China, provide protection for thieves. Others, like the Eighteen Lords, Jigong, or Sun Wukong, are known for helping gamblers. Although Zhu Bajie’s services are occasionally sought by gamblers, his primary area of expertise, of course, is seduction. A reputation both for increasing cash-flow and for compelling people to enter into sexual relationships has recently earned Zhu Bajie a new constituency. Among his devotees, he now counts not only sex workers and business owners but also abandoned wives and jilted girlfriends.

ZHOU BAJIE AND BLACK MAGIC

In March of 2011, a man named Liu Changming 劉昌明 was arrested in New Taipei City on charges of fraud and sexual assault. The thirty-eight-year-old Liu had a junior-high school education but claimed to have studied the esoteric arts of Maoshan Daoism since the age of thirteen. Calling himself Master Mingzong 明宗老, he set up a website offering his services to paying customers seeking to better their fortunes. Liu’s specialty was reconciling couples after a breakup. According to police reports, at least three of the women who sought Liu’s help were subsequently molested by him. In exchange for a fee of about US$325, Liu would first write talismans and perform simple rituals. When those proved ineffective, Liu turned to his most radical technique, the one that ultimately led to his arrest. He explained to his female clients that the cause of their misfortune might be impregnation by the spirit of Zhu Bajie. Liu then performed a physical “exam” to determine whether or not they were carrying “ghost fetuses.” Liu also claimed to channel the spirits of women’s estranged boyfriends, who the women were then instructed to sleep with. After ritually reuniting with their lost loves (in Liu’s body), the women were assured that their ex-boyfriends would return within the week.61

The lurid and disturbing nature of Liu’s crimes made headlines, but the scam itself was not new. Between 2001 and 2011, Taiwanese newspapers reported on a total of eighty-eight cases of sexual assault carried out by so-called spiritual charlatans (shengun 神棍).62 Under the pretext of altering a person’s fate or exorcizing harmful spirits, self-proclaimed ritual specialists preyed on women seeking greater

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60 On gambling deities in Taiwan, including Sun Wukong and Zhu Bajie, see Hu Taili 胡台麗, “Shen, gui yu dutu: Dajia le duxi fanying zhi minshu xinyang 神、鬼與賭徒—大家樂賭戲反映之民俗信仰,” in *Di’er jie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwen ji 第二屆國際漢學會議論文集* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), 401–424.


62 Huang, “Taiwan diqu jin shi nian lai liyong zongjiao de xing fanzui chutan,” 26–35.
satisfaction in their personal relationships or greater success in their business ventures. In exchange for money and sex, these women received promises of divine intervention.

Attempts to coerce reluctant lovers through secret, magical means are hardly a modern phenomenon, and there is a long history of concocting aphrodisiacs and love potions in China. Texts found in the second-century BCE Mawangdui 马王堆 tombs, for instance, contain recipes for compounding philters that purport to influence the emotional state and erotic inclinations of those to whom they are applied. Many of these ancient recipes involve animal parts—the claw of a dove, soil from the paw of a dog, the withered heart of a mandarin duck—and appear to operate on the principle of sympathetic magic. Consuming or coming into contact with potions made from parts of animals associated with love, loyalty, or sexual desire were thought to stimulate an involuntary sense of attraction and fidelity in otherwise uninterested people. Similar recipes, based on related theories but couched in different theological contexts, can be found in both Buddhist and Daoist texts. The incorporation of Zhu Bajie into these rituals of seduction is thus a new variation on a very old theme.

The search for an elixir for unrequited affection may be timeless, but the recent emergence of Zhu Bajie as an ally of spurned lovers is the product of a particular historical moment. Over the last twenty years, an increased reliance on international investment and entrepreneurial ventures has compelled many Taiwanese businessmen to spend long periods working away from their wives and families. Time spent away from home, coupled with a culture of conducting informal business negotiations at hostess bars, has led to what some news outlets have called an “epidemic” of extra-marital affairs among Taiwanese men. This new phenomenon has generated a new vocabulary, and the term “little third” (xiao san 小三) has been coined to refer to women in relationships with married men. Little thirds are often financially dependent on their lovers; if a man returns to his wife or takes up with another woman, his mistress risks losing her source of financial support. For their part, many wives are anxious that their husbands will eventually divorce them to marry someone else. In response to this distress, websites, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, and temples all offer icons, amulets, and charms that are advertised as divinely empowered to bind couples together. Bookstores sell

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65 An historical overview and analysis of this material is provided in Dominic Steavu, “Buddhism, Medicine, and the Affairs of the Heart: Potency Therapy (Vājīkarana) and the Reappraisal of Aphrodisiacs and Love Philters in Medieval Chinese Sources,” East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine 45 (2017): 9–48.


compendiums of talismans geared specifically toward the so-called “peach blossom” arts. The charms collected in these books feature Zhu Bajie together with several other spirits that specialize in enchantment and seduction. Users are instructed to wear Zhu Bajie’s talisman on their body, paste it on their bed, or burn it so that its ashes can be mixed with water and drunk (see Figure 7). Stores that sell religious icons are also doing a brisk business in Zhu Bajie images. These statues, which were once primarily intended for brothels, are now being bought by the girlfriends of married men. Rather than directing customers into brothels, Zhu Bajie is asked to compel men to divorce their wives and marry their mistresses. This reputation for beguiling sexual partners has spread as far as Thailand, where amulets with Zhu Bajie’s image (sometimes depicted in explicit sexual acts) include magically potent substances like corpse oil or the soil from graveyards and are marketed to people seeking to bolster their sexual appeal. For those who purchase these charms or commission these rituals, Zhu Bajie is a savior of the vulnerable, desperate, and loveless. For the unsuspecting women and men whom these rites aim to affect, however, Zhu Bajie must seem a darker, predatory kind of deity.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Zhu Bajie has wavered between menacing threat and heroic savior for centuries. In the sixteenth-century novel, he is depicted as a demon who has been converted into a demon-slayer. As a reluctantly reformed delinquent, however, the threat of relapse remains ever-present. In modern Taiwan, Zhu Bajie retains some of his character’s original ambiguity. The version of Zhu Bajie that is venerated in brothels and shrines has some continuity with the character from the Journey to the West, but his cult in Taiwan has no single point of origin. The pig spirit invoked by prostitutes and spurned lovers is heir to the traits and traditions associated with Father Sailor, Brother Pig, and a motley array of other deities related to sexual relations and ill-gotten wealth. The composite, constantly evolving nature of Zhu Bajie’s identity accounts for the great disparity between mass-market representations of him as a

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68 The talismans in these books are very similar to those that were confiscated in the police raid of Liu Changming’s “temple.” In fact, the author of one such compendium, a self-proclaimed specialist in Zhu Bajie talismans and mudras named Lin Jicheng 林吉成, maintains a small temple just down the street from Liu’s former residence. For examples of Zhu Bajie talismans, spells, and instructions on their use, see Lin Jicheng’s Taohua ganqing hehe jingdian 桃花感情和合經典 (Taipei: Yulin chuban), 2009, 120, 271–292; and Zhuge Ling 諸葛綾 and Zixian 紫閒, Maoshan fuju茅山符訣 (Tainan: Wenguo, 2012), 35, 57–61, 136. This phenomenon appears to date to 2010, after the broadcast of the popular Taiwanese drama “Xili renqi” 犀利人妻 (The Fierce Wife), which portrayed a woman whose husband has an affair. The show apparently prompted nervous “other women” to seek divine protection and, after learning that there was no deity specializing in safeguarding the mistresses of married men, they adopted Zhu Bajie as their tutelary deity. See Zhang Chaoxin 張朝欣, “Zhuazhu qingfu 小三搶拜豬八戒,” Zhongguo shibao 中國時報, March 6, 2011.

70 On Thai amulets, see Justin McDaniel, The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). The introduction of Zhu Bajie into the popular Buddhist pantheon of Thailand and the use of corpse oil and Thai deities like Brahma (a.k.a. the Four-faced Buddha) by some Taiwanese ritual “masters” point to unexplored links between the sub-cultures of lay magicians in Taiwan and Thailand.
harmless, uncouth sidekick and ritual traditions that venerate him as a powerful and occasionally unscrupulous spirit. Opposing forms of Zhu Bajie have thus evolved along separate historical trajectories, absorbing and merging with diverse cultural traditions, and are now enmeshed in wholly different webs of associations.\(^7\)

Most of the temples and shrines that house Zhu Bajie are located in Taiwan’s poorer rural areas far from major urban centers and many of the purveyors and

\(^7\) If Zhu Bajie has a parallel in the Christian pantheon, it may be Santa Claus. The jolly old man in the red suit who brings presents to children on Christmas day also once served as a patron saint of prostitutes. Like popular representations of Zhu Bajie, elements of Saint Nick’s story have been selectively forgotten and elided in the stories, sermons, and songs that transmit cultural knowledge. On the development of the cult of Saint Nicholas, see Adam C. English, *The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).
the devotees of his cult occupy the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Since the 1970s, the process of urbanization has emptied out many rural areas, weakening local economies. Those men and women who relocate to cities are often employed in trades that are both physically demanding and economically unstable. Neoliberalism privileges profit over people, and as businesses and factories close or move across borders, individual workers and entire communities have been left to fend for themselves. Denied access to legitimate avenues of employment and achievement, some men and women have turned to illegal or quasi-legal means of support. It can seem counterintuitive that those who engage in amoral or criminal behavior also faithfully observe traditional religious practices, but it is not uncommon for those on the social and economic margins to cultivate identities and cultures that are firmly rooted in myth and ritual. Members of criminal organizations, from the Mafia to the Yakuza to the Triads, famously maintain rich ritual traditions and pious devotion to their tutelary deities, and the ties between secret societies, organized crime, and ritual traditions remain strong in Taiwan. The shadowy nature of Zhu Bajie’s cult is thus not necessarily a corruption of traditional religious values but can be seen instead as another iteration of the age-old relationship between ritual, community, and culture.

Zhu Bajie’s cult is a uniquely modern phenomenon. It emerged in the context of colonialism, mass migration, and new forms of political, economic, and social organization. At the same time, the cult draws on fundamental elements of Chinese “popular” religious traditions. Patron saints, wealth gods, love philters, talismans, tree spirits, demonic possession, and exorcisms have been around for a very long time. The details of specific rituals and the identities of presiding deities may change over time and space, but the underlying structures and functions of rites often remain the same. This is in part because the problems many rituals aim to solve—poverty, illness, insecurity, loss—are so intractable. The enduring appeal of many rituals is the promise of easily obtained wealth, stability, and satisfaction. That ritual traditions like those associated with Zhu Bajie continue to surface and evolve in a modern, democratic, capitalist country like Taiwan is a testament to both the abiding anxieties of human experience and the inability of modern universities, hospitals, and corporations to fully displace temples, guilds, and gods.

In the Journey to the West, Zhu Bajie is exiled to earth for crimes of drunkenness and lust. To regain his place in heaven, he must control his passions and protect the vulnerable from rapacious ghouls and demons. He does his best, but sometimes the demons—especially those disguised as beautiful women—get the better of him. Zhu Bajie’s shortcomings are such that he often creates the very problems he is supposed to resolve. He lies, he steals, and he sleeps on the job. But in the end, he usually does the right thing. Zhu Bajie keeps his companions safe, carries their baggage, and clears the road of obstacles. At one point, when the pilgrims arrive at a mountain path clogged with miles of excrement, Zhu Bajie labors day and night to shovel a path through the shit. “Don’t tease me!” he says as he sets to work. “Watch old Hog achieve this stinky merit!”

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ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>DZ</td>
<td>Zhengtong Daozang  正統道藏</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTTW</td>
<td>The Journey to the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō  大正新脩大藏經</td>
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<tr>
<td>XJY</td>
<td>Xiyou ji</td>
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Fo shuo Molizhi tian tuoluoni zhou jing 佛說摩利支天陀羅尼咒經. T 21, no. 1256.
Taishang xuanling doumu dasheng yuanjun benming yansheng xinjing 太上玄靈斗姆大聖元君本命延生心經. DZ, no. 621.
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