“Good Wood on Crowdpleasers”: Humour Publications in the Ming Wanli Period



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Abstract

Joke and humour publications are a severely understudied area of the world of late-Ming book culture. Taking imprints from the Wanli reign period (1573–1620) as a starting point, this dissertation undertakes a preliminary investigation into late-Ming humour compilations. It looks at the publication of humour as a historical phenomenon, rather than from a literary standpoint, to see how this group of books fitted into the publishing and intellectual scene of their day. Towards this aim, the dissertation leans mostly upon the paratextual materials of humour publications, such as prefaces, titles and annotations. These were spaces in which compilers and publishers communed with their faceless, anticipated readership, and as such can be used to yield information about how these compilations were viewed on both sides. Experimenting by temporarily putting aside modern notions of "the joke" in favour of contemporaneous terms used by the publications themselves, the dissertation sketches the boundaries around a broader genre of 'humour compilations', thereby reconstructing a genre of publications that were connected in the eyes of Ming publishers and readers, yet has been obscured by subsequent systems of categorisation. It spotlights the ambivalence that surrounded humour as an appropriate topic for publication and the measures taken by compilers and publishers to counter such attitudes. The dissertation also sheds light upon how this group of texts identified with and drew upon precedents from previous dynasties and developed its own set of traditions through an in-depth look at the Ming sequels to the Aizi ("Master Ai") tradition of Warring States-themed humour, which originated in the Song period. A preliminary discussion on the 'Dongpo vogue' in late-Ming publishing reveals the omnipresence of Song dynasty literatus Su Shi in Ming humour publications while simultaneously demonstrating how this group of texts reflected and interacted with the fashions and concerns of the times.

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At the time I finished writing this dissertation in early August, I had not seen many of these people for a year or more. My writing-up period coincided precisely with the UK waves of a global pandemic and a series of national lockdowns of varying strictness. With a fraught and uncertain world outside our walls, I was very fortunate to have spent those days in comfort with Karwin in our little home in Edinburgh. He has kept me supported, well-fed and on track, which was no small task.

The last word goes to the Ming compilers of humour. In leaving their vivid personality and sense of humour on the page for others to enjoy and me to decipher, they could be said to have enabled the existence of this particular dissertation in a more fundamental sense than any of the above names and organisations. The below 240+ pages are a form of paratextual engagement they perhaps could not have anticipated, but I like to think they would at least be pleased to know their productions not only survived, but were still being read, so many centuries into the future. I do hope I have not misrepresented them excessively.

ESR, Leiden, November 2021

Introduction

This dissertation will borrow its opening remarks from those to a late-Ming humour compilation:

> Opening remarks to *Appraisals of Laughs*
>
> In that which is chronicled in the written tradition and appears before our eyes, there is no shortage of things to laugh about. The laughs and banter passed around in society are merely reflections of this fact. They spring to mind from time to time and make me laugh. Recently this has been of assistance to me while living on my own, free of bothers.[1]
>
> But they can also be used as means to become conversant in the names and principles and thoroughly comprehend the ways of the world. By wetting one's brush and spreading out the ink one can decode and understand them; the assistance they provide to one's conversational wit is by no means paltry.
>
> I indiscriminately recorded seventy-two entries, wrote an appraisal for each, and titled the work "Appraisals of Laughs".
>
> 《笑贊》題詞。書傳之所紀，目前之所見，不乏可笑者，世所傳笑談乃其影子耳。時或憶及，為之解頤，此孤居無悶之一助也。然亦可以談名理，可以通世故，染翰舒文者能知其解，其為機鋒之助良非淺鮮。漫錄七十二則，各為之贊，名《笑贊》云。

The above passage is the preface to *Appraisals of Laughs* (*Xiaozan* 笑贊), a jokebook compiled by Ming scholar-official Zhao Nanxing 趙南星 (1550–1628).[2] This was a space which had been allotted to Zhao, as the work's compiler, by convention and tradition, and he used it to confess to his readers his own private enjoyment of jokes and humour, noting the role they have played in assuaging his boredom and loneliness. One

[1] Specifically, those bothers that came along with office-holding. The Lu Qian 盧前 edition has this as "*wuliao* 無聊" (lit: "bored/with nothing to do"). See Lu Qian, ed., *Qingdu sanke erzhong*, 3.

[2] For the text itself, see Zhao Nanxing, "Xiaozan", *Ming-Qing xiaohua sizhong*, 11–46. In English, there is Lutz Bieg, "Laughter in China during the Ming and Qing Era: Preliminary Comments on Zhao Nanxing's *Xiao Zan*", but I would advise readers do not use this as their sole reference. For a Japanese translation, see Matsueda Shigeo, *Rekidai shōwasen*, 110–41.

might think that this alone would be worthy enough of a recommendation to others. However, Zhao does not stop there, and instead goes on to provide further justification, inviting readers to see how these "laughs" can moreover be used for somewhat grander purposes: as a window onto the "names and principles", that is, Confucianist ethical teachings, along with "the ways of the world". And as self-proclaimed appraiser of these laughs, Zhao volunteers himself as hermeneutical guide, equipping his readers with a commentary for each entry so that they, too, may "decode and understand them".

The commentarial tradition was a time-honoured and exalted practice throughout most of Chinese history. Certainly, those more familiar with pre-Ming texts may be feeling a sense of incongruity, or perhaps even amusement, to see these practices applied to something like a jokebook. In fact, Zhao Nanxing was himself no stranger to writing commentaries and annotations,[3] and in *Appraisals of Laughs* he takes up this role with comparable earnestness. In this compilation, seventy-two humorous entries find themselves paired with seventy-two appraisals, each headed by the announcement of "Appraised as follows…" (*Zan yue* 贊曰). His appraisals mostly take the form of broad observations of the workings of people and society based on the scenario described in the joke, as well as general wisdom and pointers for the reader's own dealings. Often, the joke being appraised has evidently brought to mind another joke with a similar theme or message, and the dutiful Zhao records these further jokes in the comments for the reader's benefit.

[3] For example, Zhao compiled *A Corrective Explanation of the "Great Learning" and "Doctrine of the Mean"* (*Xue Yong zhengshuo* 學庸正說) and several primers for children.

Appraisals of Laughs was most likely compiled a few years after the death of the Wanli emperor, as Zhao languished in exile at the northern frontier of an already shrinking empire, or "while living on my own, free of bothers", as he prefers to think of it. The compilation was published soon after his death in 1628 by his son, Zhao Qingheng 趙清衡, upon which it joined the large number of humour compilations which preceded it, and would continue to circulate among the great many that were yet to grace the marketplace. Not all of these texts have survived, but from the amount that have, it is clear that jokes and humour were a major feature in the late-Ming publishing world. Sometimes they appeared as part of the dialogue in a novel or play, or as part of a single section of a publication which dealt with all kinds of information, but there were also works and compilations which dedicated their entirety, or large sections, wholly to humorous material. The focus of this dissertation falls upon the latter variety.

We have already met one contribution to this wide and diverse group of texts, which was most likely compiled between 1625 and 1628, a few years after the end of the Wanli reign period which is the focus of this dissertation. *Appraisals of Laughs* can therefore offer us a vantage point from which to look backwards and survey the textual and publishing context from which this collection sprung. When Zhao speaks of "the jokes and banter passed around by society… [that] spring to mind from time to time and make me laugh",[4] he is talking on a general level, but as this dissertation will make clear, this general level was by that point inundated with publications which devoted themselves to

[4] 世所傳笑談…時或憶及，為之解頤.

collating this very kind of material. By the time that Zhao Nanxing "wet [his] brush and spread out the ink", the collation of humorous material was no longer always a direct process of sourcing humorous incidents from the "written tradition"[5] and "before one's eyes" straight onto the page, but could be an indirect one which involved picking out a selection from pre-existing humour compilations published by others. Certainly, it is reasonable to assume that Zhao first came across some of the laughs he has "indiscriminately recorded" (*manlu* 漫錄) in one of the many dedicated Wanli collections of jokes, perhaps even the ones covered in this dissertation.[6] The commentarial premise of Zhao's compilation, however tongue-in-cheek, remains a contemporaneous acknowledgment of jokes and humour as a corpus of texts as worthy of discussion and deeper consideration.

This is to say, on the back of the publishing boom that took place towards the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), there had emerged a new mode in the age-old practices of humour circulation and transmission. That represents a landmark in the history of Chinese literature which has until now been overlooked and underexplored. By introducing and demarcating the idea of the 'humour compilation' and taking the vibrant and diverse corpus of Wanli humour compilations as its case in point, this dissertation hopes to supply a preliminary investigation into this phenomenon. On the way, we will

[5] The implication of "the written tradition" (*shuchuan* 書傳, "what is transmitted by books") is older texts, and probably does not refer to Ming publications. Although the parallel here makes it less likely as a reading, this could also be read *shuzhuan* "the classics and histories". Either way, the point stands that Zhao is excluding more recent publications.

[6] Indeed, Matsueda Shigeo suggests some possible sources alongside several entries in his *Appraisals* translation. *Rekidai shōwasen*, 110–41.

trace how the experimentation entailed by this process sparked ambivalence among readerships and anxiety in the compilers; how humour compilers grasped at humorous historical precedent in support of their endeavour but also engaged with it in creative and novel ways; and how the corpus of humour publications were influenced by, but also exerted their own influence upon, outside fashions, prejudices and ideological currents. First, though, some historical background.

A Note on Style

Since humour compilations are an understudied field, the Introduction and Chapter 1 contain a great deal of essential groundwork. Towards this end, in these two chapters some of the major works and figures studied later in the dissertation appear briefly as examples to illustrate a point or to prepare readers for what is to come. In these cases, I have broken with the convention of providing characters and dates at first mention, instead opting to point the reader in the direction of the relevant chapter or section, where they will be able to find not only characters and dates but a rich selection of biographical and historical information. Outside of these instances I have adhered to conventional provisions.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Also, in order to avoid ambiguity I have reserved "…" (smart quotes) for direct quotations, including direct quotations in translation. By the same rationale, "…" is also used to denote terms that are in wide use outside of this study. For internal terms and expressions coined and defined in

this study, I have used '…' (smart single quotes). Smart single quotes are also used to indicate when I have opted to apply an authorial emphasis or particular tone, and when my deployment of the English language has veered into the overly idiosyncratic.

0.1. Historical Background: The Wanli Publishing Scene

Zhao Nanxing's adult life spanned the entirety of the 47-year-long Wanli period (1573–1620). He obtained his *jinshi* degree, the highest level of the civil service examinations, at the young age of 24 in the second year of the Wanli emperor's reign, and after two long decades navigating—and for the most part staying afloat of—the factional strife and court intrigue which defined the political culture of the day, in 1593 he found himself not only stripped of his official position, but also of his social rank, which tumbled to "commoner" (*min* 民). For all his erudition, experience and evident ability to give as good as he got, Zhao found himself barred from re-entry to political service, ostensibly forevermore.[7]

Only in his mid-forties by this point, Zhao left the capital behind to begin the next chapter in his life. Not one to sit idle, he took advantage of the fame and reputation he had

[7] Chaoying Fang and Lee Hwa-chou "Chao Nan-hsing", *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 128–32. For Zhao Nanxing's *History of Ming* 明史 biography, see Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi*, fascicle 243, 6297–301. He was eventually recalled to service twenty-seven years later following to the Wanli emperor's death in 1620, after which he played a fairly powerful role for a few years before being demoted to a garrison town as part of a purge of the Donglin faction. On his role in those years, see John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China*, 62–4, 67–70.

accumulated during his political career and focused his talents elsewhere: in the fields of scholarship and literary production. The figure of the righteous scholar, unappreciated and jilted by his state, forced back to his native place to endure eternal frustration over his wasted talents was a perennial feature in dynastic China to which no specific period lays particular claim. However, at least one feature of Zhao Nanxing's forced retirement came by virtue of its setting being the Ming Wanli reign (1573–1620), and that was his sideline in the publishing field. By this time, that had become a natural inclusion to the age-old set of scholarly pursuits. From his native place of the northern town of Gaoyi 高邑, Zhao composed prefatory material for books by commission, while writing his own commentaries and primers for the education of boys and girls and compiling publications on gardening and medicine, all of which were bestselling topics for books of the day.

Zhao Nanxing was not a full-time writer-publisher, nor was he financially reliant on publishing activities. But in this, he was in good company. Zhao's career track may be described as an unusually circuitous route to join the ranks of the "disenfranchised elite", the term which has been widely adopted to refer to the many thousands of late-Ming men from the exam-taking classes who spent most of their lives repeating failed attempts against ludicrously inflated odds while climbing the civil service examinations ladder towards an official position. By the time Zhao was stripped of his rank, the publishing industry, which had been building momentum since the Jiajing period (1521–1567), was now a deeply embedded institution. The "sea of books" that gushed therefrom did not just offer these men examination aids to support their mission and entertaining distractions from the frustrations of life-long study, but for many, an alternative career opportunity, be

that freelance, temporary, or more permanent. Indeed, as living off one's writings or publications became ever more attractive, lucrative and prestigious, many disillusioned young men would opt to side-step the examinations altogether.

Thanks to ever-quickening transport and communication, well-connected supply chains, mobile merchants and "boat bookshops",[8] by the Wanli reign books had become much more readily available throughout the empire. The scale of publishing activity itself, on the other hand, was not evenly distributed across the land. Publishing and printing was centred around "Jiangnan" hubs: cities such as the modern-day Nanjing and Hangzhou, Suzhou, Wuxi, as well as Jianyang in Fujian and areas in Anhui, each developing its own character and niches with regard to the materials it churned out. While the capital, Beijing, remained the centre of state-run printing and publishing, it was far from the biggest producer of books. In fact, the inflated prices of labour and raw materials in the capital left Beijing imprints undercut elsewhere,[9] so many Beijing book dealers preferred source their wares at the large book markets of Hangzhou and Nanjing, including the famous Sanshan Street (Sanshan jie 三山街), the bustling centre of the latter's book trade.[10]

While scholarship has rightly emphasised the role of these hub cities, we should not lose sight of the fact that publishing activity was not limited to these centres. Printing could indeed be conducted 'in-house', by large publishing houses which employed full-

[8] Tina Lu, "The Literary Culture of the Late Ming", 63.
[9] Ibid., 71.
[10] For a reconstruction of the Sanshan Street bookselling scene, see Lucille Chia, "Of Three Mountains Street".

time block-carvers, printing staff, even illustrators, but could equally take the form of an outsourced enterprise. Theoretically, anyone could self-publish their own books or the writings of their ancestors, even if circulation was not on the scale of those bigger, better-connected players. All one needed was the means to hire a block-carver and printer and pay for the raw materials involved. By virtue of the very mechanisms of communication and transport that allowed books to radiate outward from these urban centres, then, those living outside the publishing centres could also participate, by providing commissioned writings, compilations or entire books. After all, during his twenty-seven-year demotion Zhao Nanxing was able to dabble in publishing from his hometown of Gaoyi in today's Hebei province, a long way from any of the aforementioned hubs. His famous name helped, but names could be built.

So, what kind of book-hungry market was sustaining this vast industry? Although the consumer base must have been much larger than the group of publishers feeding them with reading material, this question is harder to answer. The rise of the simple Song 宋 font had enabled low-paid carvers to produce books more quickly, and therefore more cheaply, resulting in printed material becoming affordable to a much wider portion of society, while also permitting books of a greater length. To sketch the contours of Ming readerships, historians must often resort to clues from the surviving examples of books themselves. The aforementioned disenfranchised elite and aspiring civil servants certainly played a key role as consumers. There were also merchants and their families, the nouveau riche whose expendable income had come on the back of the thriving commerce of the times. Women formed a large body of consumers, both of reading material targeted

specifically at them and of wider kinds of publication. The specifics of readership identities, and to which strata within society books were meaningfully affordable and accessible, are issues which remain hotly under debate as historians continue to draw inferences from the large body of surviving materials.

Something we can be sure of, however, is that this wide and diverse readership spurred on the evolution and emergence of many different types of publication, be they wholly new varieties, or repackaged and reinvented to suit shifting market trends. In the ecology of late-Ming publishing, daily-use encyclopaedias and compendia of medicine, astronomy, gardening, and gastronomy sprung up alongside philosophical treatises and sample examination essay collections, commentaries on the classics, collections and discussions of poetry, dramatic miscellanies, long-form historical fiction, erotica and moralistic stories. Amongst them, there was one type of late-Ming publication which has not received the scholarly attention it deserves: humour compilations and "jokebooks". As we shall see, this was a diverse yet interconnected group of publications, which were written and compiled both by those who had risen to the very heights of the political sphere, like the aforementioned Zhao Nanxing and Guo Zizhang (Chapter 2), relatively little-known writer-publishers like Tu Benjun (Chapter 3) and well-established ones like Hu Wenhuan (Chapter 2) and Zhao Kaimei (Chapter 4). There was also variety in the humorous materials they chose to compile, from elaborate forms of wordplay like the anthropomorphic biography (Chapter 2), to straightforward pun-based humour and jokes of a sexual and scatological nature (Chapter 4). Some built upon pre-existing traditions involving named characters with a specific historical backdrop (Chapter 3), or collected

humorous anecdotes from the histories and writings of previous dynasties (Chapter 4). Some recounted generic scenarios and exchanges between stock characters which could in theory take place in any town in the Ming state (Chapter 2). There was also plenty of diversity in the ways compilers chose to arrange, categorise and present the humorous entries.

This wide variety suggests that that the phenomenon of humour publications and their consumption was something that crossed broad social divisions and different groups within the readership and tied these diverse and emergent readerships together. As we shall see, publishers altering or dressing up what had proven successful among certain readerships to make it palatable to a different groups was a key part of the processes of market-driven experimentation and adaptation in the late-Ming book industry. More detail on the Wanli specifics may be found in the "Timing Rationale" (section 0.3.1.). The next section will survey the existing literature on this topic, in order to illustrate what kind of contribution this study will make to the broader field.

0.2. State of the Field

One of the first English-language explorations of Chinese humour was the 1946 anthology *Chinese Wit and Humor*. The book project had been instigated by the famous twentieth-century figure Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895–1976), so-called "Master of Humour"

(*youmo dashi* 幽默大師),[11] and the very man who had invented and propagated the now ubiquitous term *youmo* 幽默 ("humour"). As George Kao (Gao Keyi 高克毅), the man to whom Lin had delegated the anthology, politely acknowledged, "Dr. Lin really should take on the job himself".[12] Dr. Lin did, however, pen a lengthy foreword for the publication, in which he declares:

> Those very earnest students and critics of Chinese affairs give me the impression of plodding, conscientious Ph.D. candidates who try to analyze a Shakespearean comedy in a very serious frame of mind. That is why I am glad that, for a change, there is a Chinese writer like George Kao, who is not a Ph.D., to try to present China from the standpoint of humor–and to do so, not by his own interpretation and theorizing, but through a collection of Chinese writing itself.[13]

I am still trying to decode what precisely he meant by that, and as such may very well be proving his point. Still, I do wonder how many PhD students have been put off by this remark over the subsequent 70+ years. Humour is already a daunting topic for academics, given that they must contend with some quite pervasive, sometimes unconscious perceptions that humour is a trivial subject, or at least the view that there are more worthwhile areas of study higher up on the laundry list. To make an acceptable topic out of it, then, we do apply the aforementioned "interpretation and theorising" with "a very serious frame of mind", and indeed do our best to make sure everyone notices that we have done so. In the process, humour often finds itself morphing into other vocabulary: "satire" to give it social significance, or "laughter" to grapple with its infinitely more tangible manifestation. Or else, we give up on the idea altogether and study something other than humour. Generally speaking, the studies of historical humour of various cultures and time periods have been the preserve of academics much further down the career track, having

[11] Rea, *The Age of Irreverence*, 132.

[12] George Kao, *Chinese Wit and Humor*, xv.

[13] George Kao, *Chinese Wit and Humor*, xxix.

first established themselves in more 'respectable' fields. As for PhD students, then, when it comes to humour research, we are probably not the main culprits of the phenomenon Lin is criticising.

0.2.1. Research on Pre-modern Chinese Humour

Despite Lin Yutang's misgivings about PhD students, I somehow suspect he would be disappointed to know how sparse the academic study of Chinese humour remained throughout the latter half of the 20th century. While studies did appear sporadically,[14] it would be until the 21st century that it finally started to gain ground. Literally picking up where Lin Yutang left off, the humour of the Republican era has now inspired several major contributions. Among an abundance of articles in Chinese and English, the monograph *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* by Christopher Rea stands out as a wide-ranging exploration of humour from the late-Qing through to Republican era, now also available in Chinese translation.[15] A recurring concern in this body of literature is how modern Chinese humour both engaged with and diverged from ideas of humour in pre-modern times. This is intriguing, considering that pre-modern humour itself (including but not limited to Ming humour) has received much less scholarly attention. Here I will survey a selection of the literature on the wider topic of pre-modern

[14] For example, English-language scholarship produced articles on pre-modern Chinese humour by David R. Knechtges, Joe Eng, and Christoph Harbsmeier.

[15] Christopher Rea, Hui-lin Hsu, trans., *Dabujing de niandai: Jindai Zhongguo xin xiaoshi*.

humour and pre-Ming humour texts while discussing the literature on Ming humour compilations in 0.2.3. and 0.2.4.

In the early 2010s two English-language edited volumes on the topic of pre-modern Chinese humour appeared in short succession: the 2011 *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters: Classical and Traditional Approaches*, edited by Jocelyn Chey and Jessica Milner Davies; and the 2012 *Laughing in Chinese*, edited by Paolo Santangelo. Taken together, the two volumes dip into particular pockets of issues in pre-modern Chinese humour, including Daoist and Zhuangzian humour, the humour in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), and an examination of the terms for "laugh" and "smile" in literary texts. The volumes served as bridges which introduced some central theories from the field of Humour Studies to that of the study of pre-modern Chinese literature and society: both have made sure to append full articles on Humour theories for reference purposes.

2011 was also the year in which Giulia Baccini, an important figure in the English-language literature of Chinese jokes and jestbooks, released her PhD dissertation "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*): Mapping the Offspring of Self-Aware Literature in Ancient China" which deals with the earliest verifiable collection of Chinese jokes and traces early concepts of humour in China. Since that time, Baccini has also written on and co-translated the chapter of the *Shiji* "Biographies of the Comics" (*Guji liezhuan* 滑稽列傳). Like many of Sima Qian's ideas, the central concepts in this chapter exerted a strong influence on later thought, in this case the concept of instrumentalised remonstrative

humour which was influential for centuries to come. This was regularly invoked by Ming compilers and is highly relevant to this dissertation, as we shall see in Chapter 2 and 3.

A very recent contribution by Baccini has been "Approaching Jokes and Jestbooks in Premodern China" a 2020 chapter in the edited volume *The Palgrave Handbook of Humour, History, and Methodology*. As the title would suggest, the chapter introduces several key issues for studying pre-modern Chinese jestbooks, and is sure to become a vital point of entry for any future researcher turning their sights on pre-modern Chinese humour. Baccini encourages us to look beyond both those deeply engrained filters established by Republican era approaches towards premodern jokes, which have perhaps not adequately taken "into consideration the language, the authors, the contents, and the particular social and cultural features of the various ages in which jokes and jestbooks have been shaped and circulated"[16] and not letting the early twentieth-century concerns with folk literature overshadow the fact that "the jokebooks transmitted from premodern China are written in a literary language and were produced by *literati*, and they should be considered accordingly",[17] that is to say, we should be wary of overstating their relationship to jokes in oral circulation. She also warns of even older filters set by premodern classification systems which often excluded, separated and redistributed humorous content. I do hope my dissertation can provide at least a partial response to these calls. As will become clear below, I hope to reassert a category of these texts on Ming terms, based on the way they were conceptualised by their own compilers, yet is less

[16] Baccini, "Approaching Jokes and Jestbooks", 203.
[17] Ibid., 206.

discernible within official or established systems of categorisation. The remainder of the chapter provides the two earliest examples of jestbooks, *The Forest of Laughs* (*Xiaolin* 笑林), and the *Record to Make One Laugh* (*Qiyan lu* 啓顏錄, lit. "Record to Open the Face"). Despite the broad notion of "premodern jokes and jestbooks", Baccini draws mostly upon earlier texts here. Occasional points do not apply as well to Ming and Qing examples, for example, that joke collections "defy attribution of authorship" is no longer always the case. As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, attributions of not just compilership, but indeed authorship, were an important paratextual feature of Ming humour compilations. This dissertation hopes to fill in the gap a little more with regard to the production circumstances of Ming contributions.

While Baccini's research has mostly focused on early medieval Chinese jokes and humour, she has also looked at the diachronic aspect of the Chinese tradition of humour. This is a concern shared by this dissertation, which will show how Ming compilers presented humour as part of a long-standing tradition. The most relevant article in this respect is "Traditional Chinese Jestbooks and Ming Revival" as part of "Linking Ancient and Contemporary Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese Literature" in *Sinica venetiana*. First of all I should point out that this overview is only nine pages in length, so Baccini is limited by space and format; there is so much more to be said on this phenomenon that even this (very long) dissertation is preliminary in nature. I hope to add to the conversation Baccini has begun. What she has termed the "Ming revival" mostly describes the way older humour compilations were republished wholesale in the Ming. As we shall see, Ming humour publication was a much broader, multifaceted phenomenon,

and that is just one part of the story. The processes of appropriation and engagement highlighted in the following chapters are complex, and even Ming compilers' direct transmission of past texts often bears the hallmarks of pretence rather than filial and genuine reproduction. In this chapter, Baccini has once again stepped forward to provide some much-needed light on yet another aspect of pre-modern humour. Owing to the luxury of its length, my dissertation can enter into greater depth and breadth.

Another major contributor to the English-language literature has been Weihe Xu 許衛和. In a 2005 article in *Philosophy East and West*, Xu discusses Confucianist politics of appearance and expectations of "reverence" in deportment deterred any "irreverence", which rendered the *junzi* 君子 unsmiling and humourless. Also, his book chapter in *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters*, "The Classical Confucian Concepts of Human Emotion and Proper Humour", discusses a variety of pre-modern Confucianist ideas on humour, which he summarises as follows: "proper humour, seen from the Confucian perspective, means a form of private, moderate, good-natured, tasteful and didactically useful mirth".[18] Due to the lack of existing research, Xu has taken on a huge topic in a restricted amount of words here, but it is nevertheless a useful and informative preliminary overview. Too often, however, the chapter paints ideas which crop up often as a uniform Confucian ideal form of humour which remained static for the millennia-long period the chapter covers, without taking into account the waves of commentarial tradition and interpretation which shaped understandings of these ideas, sometimes quite pervasively, at different points in Chinese history. This dissertation, as a longer, in-depth study of a

[18] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 70.

circumscribed time period has been able to take these into account, to more nuanced conclusions (for example, sections 2.4.2., 4.4.2.).

Xu's politics of appearance article is theoretical in nature, and does not explore if, how, or what extent these ideological prescriptions played out in reality during any given time period, beyond Lin Yutang's testimony that this was the case. However, the book chapter does touch upon how these ideals manifested in real terms, and significantly to this dissertation, quotes some prefaces to dramatic texts and "jokebooks". The latter kind of preface forms the key source base of this thesis. However, Xu dwells on these only briefly, and arguably only insofar as to mine specific quotes which express the classical ideas discussed, without further contextualisation or analysis. To this, I add that these prefaces are self-representational texts by a publisher or compiler, so it is unsurprising that they do manifest the concerns of appearance and propriety outlined by Xu to differing extents. Certainly, there was ambivalence surrounding humour itself and/or the proper kind of humour. But as soon as one adopts a historical rather than a philosophical approach, it becomes clear that this sprung out of a wider range of real-life publishing concerns than those outlined in Xu's article. The compilers we will meet in the following chapters, particularly those in Chapter 2, were evidently well-versed in the restrictions on humour he describes, but they invoke them in much more complex ways than a simple, passive endorsement (or even a simple, wholesale rejection, for that matter). Rather, compilers engaged with them creatively and adapted them for their purposes. They often endorsed them with a certain level of perfunctory lip service, pretence or even wink-wink artifice,

and in the process betrayed the awareness of these savvy compiler-publishers as to how much adherence to this "proper humour" was proper for their own purposes.

A more recent contribution has been Rao Xiao's 饒曉 2019 PhD thesis "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment: Laughter And Humor In Northern Song (960-1127) China", which has presented a wide-ranging exploration of literati humour and its intersections with Buddhism. A forthcoming article entitled "Humor under the Guise of Chan: Stories of Su Shi and Encounter Dialogues" will extend and update one chapter.[19] Rao Xiao's work has greatly enhanced our understanding of the significance and subtleties of the humour in the Song dynasty. As we shall see in the following chapters, Ming compilers owed a lot to Song material, so there is a strong relevance here, particularly in Chapter 4, which deals with a compilation with a Song and Buddhist theme.

Home and the World

One pathbreaking work from the past decade has been *Home and the World: Editing the "Glorious Ming" in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, by Yuming He 何予明. This book has now also entered Chinese-language scholarship, through a self-translated 2019 Zhonghua shuju 中华书局 publication. While He's focus is not primarily on humour compilations or even necessarily the idea of humour, this exploration of late-Ming book culture raises many points which

[19] The article is forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, late 2021. I am grateful to Prof. Rao for sharing a version of the article with me during the revision process.

are highly relevant to the compilations studied here. Some of the Ming publications discussed in *Home and the World* do contain joke collections as part of their content, but humour also pervades her source base more broadly through puns, wordgames and riddles. Several times, she tackles Ming instances of humour head-on, pointing out ironic uses of language and drawing attention to the subtle subversive quality to exhibited in this group of books, which often play on incongruous mismatches of page display, for example. Another point that is relevant to this study are her observations of parodic practices in the titling of Ming works. She even notes that the term, "Glorious Ming" (*Huang-Ming* 黃明), often found in Ming titles and carried through into that of her own monograph, had a somewhat ironic quality about it in contemporaneous usage.

Beside this thematic connection, there are two aspects of *Home and the World* that have been especially formative to this dissertation:

Firstly, *Home and the World* shines a spotlight on the filter that the Qing *Siku quanshu* project (四庫全書, "Complete Library in Four Treasuries") in the 1770s has placed upon our understanding of late-Ming book culture. She discusses how the criticism by *Siku* compilers has set the tone of the general verdict on particular publications and disadvantaged their trajectory as far as academic interest is concerned. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this has also been an issue for the humour compilations corpus studied here. Its effects can be direct and indirect, and sometimes leave a traceable paper trail, as will be briefly illustrated by the example of *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* (see 4.4.1.). He further notes that "a more fundamental factor underlying the forgetting of

these books, however, is that the very categories to which they belonged in the minds of Ming publishers and readers have been lost".[20] The reconstruction of one of these lost categories—or, more humbly, the reconnection of a group of texts that were connected in the eyes of Ming publishers and readers—is one of the major goals of this dissertation. He's thoughts on this are discussed further in section 1.2.

Secondly, *Home and the World* provides a vivid illustration of late-Ming compiling practices, stressing the role that the ideas of "novelty" and being "fashionable", or at least the pretence thereof, played in the process of putting together a publication: "The editors of Ming commercial publications played an essential role in shaping the meanings both of individual texts and groupings of texts… in reworking, organizing, and maximizing the audience appeal of a fluid repertoire of textual and visual resources. Working with a pool of resources that was largely shared, editors of different book projects competed to produce novel and distinctive versions of widely popular textual genres".[21] The humour compilations we will encounter are most certainly a product of this approach. There was a flipside, however, to this pursuit of "novelty" and "distinctiveness". As He notes, this "novelty" was in many cases just a case of packaging. This dissertation looks closely at cases whereby this claim was substantiated and how the very adoption of different ('new') approaches entailed some level of experimentation. These experimental approaches could involve attempting new kinds of content or categorisation, or taking a kind of publication which had proven itself viable in certain markets and producing a version for other

[20] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 6.
[21] Ibid., 74–5.

markets. Of course, in practice this seldom involved complete gambles or dramatic modifications. It is best understood as a gradual process of small tweaks across hundreds of publications and several decades, at the hand of experienced and astute publishers with a clear grasp of what would be well-received by their intended readership. Nevertheless, did this experimental aspect impact on how publishers presented their publications to their readers? While the teams behind the publications in *Home in the World* seem fairly self-confident they will make a smooth landing in the intended readership(s), several of the humour compilers studied here are arguably less at ease. This is a complex issue which has to do with the difference in subject matter and intended readership, which will be explored throughout this dissertation, especially in Chapter 2. In short, then, this dissertation intends to take *Home and the World*'s emphasis on the publishing concerns of novelty and distinctiveness even further to look at their more indirect manifestations of such motivations in Wanli publications and the compilers' paratextual self-representation.

0.2.2. Summary of the Two Major Contributions of this Dissertation

Before looking at existing studies of Ming humour compilations, I wish to summarise the two main ways in which this study is unprecedented and useful.

Firstly, the existing studies on pre-modern Chinese jokebooks and humour compilations have tended to be of single examples, or a small sample of texts. While these studies are valuable in other ways, and even as the comparative approach taken by some

could be said to implicitly acknowledge a connection of sorts, they are limited in what they can tell us much about the long tradition and wider 'genre' from which these individual examples sprung. The current landscape of sporadic studies on individual compilations misses opportunities to observe commonalities, differences, as well as change and continuity in the overall trajectory of the Chinese textual tradition of jokes and humour. Meanwhile, the fact that clusters of studies which have grown up around on particular collections (that is, Feng Menglong's *Treasury of Laughs* and his other works) has inadvertently resulted in giving them a overstated presence. In short, the general context is absent from the scholarship. What the field needs at this point is a study that takes a step back to survey many different texts at once, and while it has been restricted in scope to the Wanli period, this dissertation is a preliminary attempt to achieve this.[22] The lens of compiling practices used in this study permits it not just to sketch of the 'horizontal' context of the kinds of humour compilation which existed at this point in Chinese history, but also the 'vertical' context, observing how these compilations included, presented, rewrote, arranged, sequelled and otherwise engaged with pre-existing humour traditions, chiefly from the Song dynasty. It hopes to be a broad study which can help connect together the as-yet isolated pockets of existing research on individual humour texts.

Secondly, the existing studies on pre-modern Chinese jokebooks and humour compilations have chiefly drawn upon literary studies approaches, analysing the content of the text of the jokes. In studies where a historical studies approach has been applied, this

[22] By shifting the focus from the textual content ("jokes") to paratextual materials (see 0.4.), this is managed without much sacrifice of in-depth analysis.

has aimed to show how the subject matter of the content itself reflected the social issues of the day and the angle taken on said issue (e.g. criticism, perpetuation of social norms). What has been neglected as a result are the aspects how these texts were published, consumed, and viewed. This dissertation aims to remedy this by linking the humour compilations into their publication context through their paratextual materials (see 0.4.). This enables us to explore what motivated their production and how their content was understood at the time, in other words, attitudes towards humorous material. In a nutshell, my study is less focused on the textual content than on this group of publications as a historical phenomenon. And in this approach, it represents an entirely new addition to the body of existing literature.

0.2.3. Anthologies, Humour Studies, and the "Joke"

It is perhaps unusual to come across an acknowledgement of anthologising work in a literature review. However, since one goal of this dissertation is to connect together a genre or a connected group of texts, it is anthologies that form the precedents for its endeavour. Commercial publishing houses in China have long taken humour works seriously and done much work in sourcing, selecting, transcribing, summarising, annotating and arranging pre-modern humour compilations into extensive anthologies, and all scholarly writings discussed above and below are to some extent indebted to this effort. The most pathbreaking and comprehensive contributions have been Wang Liqi's 王利器 1956 collection *Jokes Through the Ages* (*Lidai xiaohua ji* 历代笑话集) and the five-

volume series *Collection of Chinese Jokes Through the Ages* (*Zhongguo lidai xiaohua ji* 中国历代笑话集成), especially the first volume, edited by Chen Weili 陈维礼 and Guo Junfeng 郭俊峰. Published in 1996, it covers the earliest examples of jokebooks to the Qing dynasty. Both exhibit selections from jokebooks in chronological order. They represent excellent sourcebooks for Chinese humour compilations, while supplying useful notes on editions and other textual information.

In parallel, English-language translations of Chinese humour, which can also be considered anthologising endeavours of sorts, anticipated English-language academic study of the topic by a long way. Notable contributions have been Herbert A. Giles's *Quips from a Chinese Jest-book* in 1925 (the jestbook in question is Feng Menglong's *Treasury*), the aforementioned 1946 *Chinese Wit and Humor* by George Kao, Howard S. Levy's 1974 thematic collection *Chinese Sex Jokes in Traditional Times*, and the 2005 *Chinese Humour: An Anthology* by William Dolby. Translations in other European languages have been similarly plentiful.[23] A concern with translations is that they tend to avoid the 'anecdotic' jokes and compilations (see 1.1.) whose context-dependent humour is more likely to die in translation than their 'generic' counterparts. This bias has resulted in a significant underrepresentation of this variety in translation-anthologies, which is not the case in Chinese-language anthologies.[24]

[23] For a list of German language translations and some French, see Lutz Bieg, "Laughter in China During the Ming and Qing Era", 56–8.

[24] Dolby includes some examples, but a full anecdotic humour compilation in translation awaits mine of the *Aizi* 'trilogy', scheduled for 2023. The Kao and Dolby anthologies widen their lenses to include humorous excerpts from novels and drama as well as early philosophical texts, but that is an even wider category than I am proposing here. See the terminological definitions in 0.3.2.

This dissertation proposes that a range of different factors, including scholarly inclinations during the Republican era,[25] the linguistic definitions and comparative impulses from the Humour Studies field,[26] and concerns of commercial and translational viability in recent anthologies and translated collections,[27] have converged to create an overwhelming focus on "*xiaohua* 笑話" or "jokes" and "jestbooks". The strange thing is that there does seem to be a vague and implicit acknowledgement of this in the field. For example, studies of Chinese humour regularly point out that the term *xiaohua* (at least in written form) is not seen before Feng Menglong.[28] Further, it is hard to find a paper on premodern Chinese humour which does not remind the reader that the current Chinese term for humour *youmo* 幽默 was invented and propagated by Lin Yutang (I too was guilty of this cliché above) then in the same breath points out that despite what Lin said, "humour" did nonetheless exist in earlier times, but in different forms, using different words. Mysteriously, though, the literature has not moved towards using the pre-modern

[25] For example, those outlined by Baccini, mentioned in section 0.2.1.

[26] Specifically, the formula of a "joke", as understood within Humour Studies, tend to be in the 'generic voice', as defined in Chapter 1. For one definition, see Salvatore Attardo, ed., *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, 417–8. These lend themselves readily for comparison since many cultures share examples of particular scenarios and stock characters. The Humour Studies field has a tendency toward comparative, cross-cultural approaches and attempts to trace the "universalities" in humour. These "jokes" lend themselves readily for comparison since many cultures have examples of similar scenarios or stock characters. However, the comparative impulse is perhaps premature: to my mind, in most cases, to be meaningful the comparative approach should be predicated by a more complete understanding of Chinese humour on own its own terms. At times I find it borders on Eurocentrism, with comparisons being drawn to ancient Greek and Roman tradition for no other reason than to say 'look, this is similar to something you know about!' This is usually a well-meaning attempt to acclimatise the uninitiated Western reader, but rarely adds to our understanding of Chinese humour.

[27] Specifically, concerns of length, favouring short jokes while some Ming compiled humour is very long; or whether the joke can survive translation, which favours and overrepresents jokes in the 'generic voice'.

[28] For instance, Baccini, "Approaching Jokes and Jestbooks", 205.

words instead. I propose here that an over-emphasis on anachronistic terminology has placed a huge filter on our ability to conduct a proper survey of the landscape of at least Ming humour, and possibly even pre-modern Chinese humour overall, although the latter claim falls beyond the scope of my research. To be very clear, I do not recommend that we discard the concepts of "*xiaohua*" and "jokes" altogether. These terms have their analytical uses and are certainly applicable to many pre-modern Chinese humour texts, including many of those studied here. 'Anachronistic' terms are not problematic by virtue of being anachronistic alone. On the contrary, anachronistic terms can often be incredibly useful, even vital, in enabling modern scholars to fully comprehend the past. I am also aware that my replacement terms (most prominently "humour" as defined in 0.3.2., but there are several) are also anachronistic. My point is merely that our quest for "*xiaohua*" and "jokes" has restricted our ability to understand the landscape of Ming humour on its own terms, using its contemporaneous set of concepts, which can lead to misinterpretations, misrepresentations and missed connections. The time is ripe to experiment with a different approach.

Xiaohua, in current usage, while the nearest and perfectly acceptable substitute in the imperfect art of translation, was not used on the page by Wanli imprints. It is also hard to say whether the term was used orally in reference to them, across such a long period of time and so many topolects. If we experiment with using the terminology which appear both in titles and contemporaneous discussions of humorous texts (primarily *xie* 諧, *xue*

謔, and the seemingly close *xiao* 笑 "laughs", among others, see 1.2.2.),[29] what we encounter is a group of texts which stretch beyond the modern connotations of both the Chinese word *xiaohua* and English word "joke". That is to say, Ming publishers of humour were concerned with a wider, less formalistically restricted group of texts than we might understand as "joke", either by general usage or the stricter Humour Studies definitions. By applying the "joke" filter, we are missing out.

A quick glance at "Refined Compilation of Jest (*xie*) Histories" from Chapter 2, alongside *Jest* (*xie*) *Stratagems of the Five Masters* from Chapter 3 serves to demonstrate the diversity of usage. The constituent books of *Jest Stratagems* are relatively short and conform to the general idea of "*xiaohua*" and are hence frequently anthologised.[30] Meanwhile, the elaborate, yet humorous anthropomorphic biographies of *Jest Histories* never appear, presumably due to their length and lack of punchline, and perhaps commercial concerns regarding the complexity of format. Nevertheless, these works have similar titles, and their prefaces raise similar concerns and themes and textual allusions. Moreover, the prefaces make clear that both compilers anticipated a similar reception. In other words, these two were closer in the minds of Ming compilers and consumers than the complete exclusion of *Jest Histories* from anthologies and translations would suggest.

[29] I have rendered *xie* and *xue* imperfectly as "jests/jesting" as "jibe/jibing", and firmly kept to these translations throughout the dissertation in order to express the conceptual connectedness of the works covered. The concept of *xue* is most relevant to section 2.4.2.

[30] Specifically in Chinese-language anthologies. They do not often find their way into translated collections, given their 'anecdotic' nature. See section 1.1.

In light of the above, this dissertation will perform an experiment in putting these concepts aside, making use of the broadness of the concepts of "humour" and *youmo* in current Chinese usage (as opposed to Lin Yutang's loaded usage),[31] in an attempt to survey the Ming landscape of compilations on its own terms. It will take advantage of the fact that the richly preserved paratextual world of Ming publications makes this possible in way that is not easily achievable for earlier humour collections. Chapter 1 of this dissertation reconstructs the category based on Ming terms, titles and recurring prefatory themes. The resultant concept of a 'humour compilation' turns out to be a more inclusive community of texts than the *xiaohua* or joke anthologies would suggest. Of course, many examples therein do compile *xiaohua* and may be considered "jokebooks" or "jestbooks", either by general usage and the stricter Humour Studies definitions. I repeat that the concept of 'humour compilations' does not aim to supersede or replace the existing terminology. On the contrary, it can be used alongside them in a complementary manner.

0.2.4. Studies on Individual Compilations

As mentioned in 0.2.2., while a considerable amount of research has looked into the textual content of individual humour compilations, there is still work to do in connecting the dots between them.

[31] It was important to stress this point because the term as coined Lin Yutang was imbued with a lot of ideological weight and vested interest. See Christopher Rea, "The Invention of Humor 幽默年", in *The Age of Irreverence*, 132–158. Also, Jocelyn Chey, "*Youmo* and the Chinese Sense of Humour", *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters*, 1–30, as well as the chapters by Joseph C. Sample and Qian Suoqiao.

Firstly, just as with the anthologies, Chinese-language commercial presses have made sizeable contributions in publishing reproductions of singular pre-modern compilations, or small groups of compilations, as well as punctuated and/or annotated editions, vernacular translations, and even illustrated versions. Similarly, Chinese-language scholarship contains numerous studies of individual collections, which detail their production background, editions and thematic content, as well as investigating intertextual elements, and tracing the textual origins of compiled material. These will appear case-by-case in connection to individual compilations looked at over the course of this dissertation. They have been very useful reference materials, and may be found in the Bibliography. Still, the point stands that dealing with publications individually creates pockets of knowledge about particular compilations, without an overarching framework linking them together. There is a tendency in the introduction of such studies to trace the connection of Ming humour back to the beginnings of Chinese humour like the *Zhuangzi* and the "Biographies of the Comics" *Shiji* chapter before launching into a discussion of a Ming text. While these early examples are indeed important, they are often mentioned at the expense of other important connections in the textual humour tradition, which are often more traceable and direct, especially those between Song and Ming compilations. The lens on compiling practices here will add more of this aspect into the overall conversation, especially Chapters 3 and 4.

One group of late-Ming compilations by Feng Menglong have received considerable attention, but this has inadvertently led to a distortion of the overall Ming context. *Treasury of Laughs* (*Xiaofu* 笑府) is one of several joke compilations by late-

Ming compiler Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), whose publishing career got started post-1620, that is, later than the period examined in this dissertation. Feng Menglong's exalted status within Ming and Chinese literature as a whole has ensured its current status as the most-studied Chinese humour compilation. As well as countless studies in Chinese and Japanese, it has been given a thorough treatment in English by Pi-ching Hsu 徐碧卿, whose research springs from her 1994 PhD thesis, and has included several articles,[32] a monograph: *Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading of Humor in Feng Menglong's* Child's Folly, and a full translation: *Feng Menglong's* Treasury of Laughs*: A Seventeenth-century Anthology of Traditional Chinese Humour*, published 2015.

The *Treasury* and other Feng humour compilations have become the go-to representative of a Chinese jokebook in 'tertiary' studies of Chinese humour and jokes, which carries a risk of misrepresenting the corpus as a whole. If the *Treasury* is overrepresented, however, this is merely symptomatic of the fact that research on the wider context is missing. The fact of the matter is that Feng and his team were in fact very much latecomers to this banquet. His humour works feed on a rich and long-standing tradition of joke and humour compiling, both from the Ming and from previous dynasties. Moreover, Feng's reputation is that of a great innovator and synthesiser, and his humour compilations too bear this 'Menglong touch', in ways that makes his *Treasury* less representative of Chinese jokes and humour than the standard specimen it is taken to be (even though this has come about largely by default). To put a different spin on this, it is

[32] For example, the 1998 "Feng Meng-lung's *Treasury of Laughs*: Humorous Satire on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Culture and Society" and the 2011 "Jokes on the Human Body from Feng Menglong's *Treasury of Laughs*".

only when the wider context is sketched that the full significance of his innovations and synthesis of resources can be properly understood. This should be welcomed by the large group of Feng researchers, but this point is just as true for the many, many, lesser-studied texts among humour compilations and jokebooks.

Another noteworthy English-language contribution to the study of Chinese jokes is an unpublished but oft-cited 1998 PhD dissertation "Jokes on the Four Books: Cultural Criticism in Early Modern China" by Ching-sheng Huang 黃慶聲. *Laughs on the Four Books* (*Sishu xiao* 四書笑) is a late-Ming compilation themed around the civil service examination texts and the antics of scholars, examiners, pedants, schoolteachers involved in the examination world. Huang uses joke explication and cross-comparison with content in other jokebooks (chiefly the *Treasury*) to demonstrate how failed examination candidates subversively used inside jokes that hinge on the learning gained from the set examination texts to mock and satirise the examination system and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianists. The third chapter is also devoted to sex jokes and the use of gender stereotypes. Huang Ching-sheng has been an important figure in promoting Chinese-language scholarship on jokes, taking a mostly gender-based approach to take in-depth looks at particular collections.[33]

[33] Huang Ching-sheng also published a monograph in 2009 entitled *Bursting Out in Laughter: Research on Pre-modern Chinese Jokes* (Jieyi bian: Zhongguo gudai xiaohua zhuanti yanjiu 解頤編: 中國古代笑話專題研究). This book is out-of-print and I have been unable to access this book over the course of my dissertation. Judging by the blurb and Huang's earlier research directions, at least, there should not be an inappropriate amount of overlap with my study.

0.3. Methodology 1: Terms and Timing

0.3.1. Timing Rationale: The Place of the Wanli Period in the History of Publishing

It should be clear by now that this dissertation is a preliminary exploration into the world of late imperial humour publishing. This being the case, where is the best place for it to start? Should it try to trace the beginnings of the Ming proliferation of humour compilations, or should it select a later point at which they were better established? This section will provide the justification for the selection of the Wanli reign period (1573–1620).

By the end of the Ming in 1644, the printing and publishing world had taken a position in society that was unimaginable when its founder pronounced himself emperor in 1368. The reasons for this fall outside the scope of this dissertation. Suffice to say, it was enabled by a huge a mix of factors including but not limited to a burgeoning commercial economy, a new font which entailed lower labour costs, faster transport networks, increased literacies, civil service examination culture and a substantial increase in the amount of hopeful examinees, shifts towards new forms of literature, the relationships between various urban centres, prolonged periods of peace, as well as the imaginative entrepreneurship of creative individuals.

However, it is important to situate this study in terms of the progression of this "ascendence of print", as Joseph McDermott has described it.[34] The reason for which I

[34] Joseph McDermott, "The Ascendence of Print in China".

have selected the Wanli period as the focus is not simply due to the relative bounty of surviving imprints to use as primary sources,[35] or even because its lengthy reign of close to half a century presents the historian with a manageable half-century freezeframe which is long enough to observe and trace changes yet compact enough to connect them in a meaningful manner. Of course, these factors do play a role in making the study feasible. But the Wanli period holds a particular significance in the trajectory of Ming publishing beyond the matter of its sheer productivity, which made it the ideal point at which to perch this study of humour publication. After all, the ascendency of printing and publishing had not taken the form of a gradual, continual rise from the start of the dynasty. On the contrary, several scholars have observed how for the first century or so the change in this area was negligible,[36] and that some regions even saw a decline in their publishing activities.[37] It was not until the early to mid-1500s, varying slightly by region, that the publishing industry started to gather speed, consolidate its urban centres, and pump out publications ever-increasing both in amount and variety.[38] This was a period of time which coincided neatly with the long reign of the Wanli emperor's grandfather, the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–1567) and more briefly with that of his father, the Longqing emperor (r. 1567–1572). So when the nine-year-old Wanli emperor ascended to the throne, while still on the rise and in flux, publishing was a fully-fledged entity: one that was now deep-rooted, simply a part of life for residents of many areas, and could be presumed to remain

[35] Tina Lu describes how "Year for year, commercial publishing was on average six times more active in the Wanli period than in the fifty years preceding it". "The Literary Culture of the Late Ming", 63–4.
[36] For example, K.T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers", 203. Also, Joseph McDermott, "The Ascendence of the Imprint in China", 68–72.
[37] Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit*, 184.
[38] Tobie Meyer-Fong, "The Printed World: Books, Publishing Culture, and Society in Late Imperial China", 795.

so for the foreseeable future. The Jiajing and Longqing periods had provided several generations of time for printing infrastructure to take root, for different markets to develop, and reputations to be built. In short, in Wanli times, the printing and publishing industries and the relative accessibility of printed materials had become an established and familiar part of society, and any prior state of affairs had virtually faded out of living memory.

It almost goes without saying that there are many practical differences between an emerging industry with developing markets and its established, self-confident counterpart. For instance, publishers in Wanli benefited from the prior experience of several generations of predecessors, and the demand for books and publications had grown to such an extent that at least in the urban centres of printing, an army of carvers and printers were readily available for hire. This was an outsourced, flexible service which was open, in theory, to whoever could pay for the labour costs and raw materials.[39] In other words, such infrastructure was in place so that one needed not be engaged with an established studio or publishing house to commission and publish a book. As for those publishers and compilers who headed or were involved with larger enterprises, the new-found industry stability of Wanli offered a range of opportunities. One example of these was Hu Wenhuan (Chapter 2), whose operations had grown extensive enough to sustain two simultaneous locations in the major publishing centres of present-day Nanjing and Hangzhou.[40] Such publishers found themselves comfortably established in a fairly stable industry, with the resources and recourses in place to allow them to experiment a little more and test out different kinds of publication. Arguably, even, the flourishing of publishing infrastructure and market did

[39] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 60–2.
[40] Benjamin Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 36.

not just enable experimentation, but demanded it: innovation and adaptation were one way to stay ahead of other publishers. Scholars have long noted innovations to the format of imprints which sprung out of market competition, such as the introduction of illustration panels and attractive higher quality editions of particular texts. It should not surprise us, then, that this competitive element was also the driving force behind new kinds of content and fresh material. Yuming He has discussed the strategies of presentation used by publishers to present their books as 'new' in some way, noting Ming book culture's "emphasis on novelty amid a marketplace of rapidly shifting fashions".[41]

Alongside the "fashionable" and the "novel", we also find the "secret": not new, but purportedly revealed for the first time. Such publications included the *Secret Satchel from Baoyan tang* (*Baoyan tang miji* 寶顏堂秘笈) compilations which appear in Chapter 4. Fresh content and ideas, it would seem, were marketable commodities in these times. This was not always just a case of dressing up a book by putting the ideas of 'vogue' or 'novelty' in its title, but of real and profound innovation and experimentation in content. The aforementioned bigshot publisher Hu Wenhuan was certainly dabbling in experimental compilation ideas when he produced his "Jest Histories" humour section. In fact, his self-consciousness about doing so is very evident in its preface, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

This array of phenomena is my rationale for selecting this reign period in which to look at the publication of humour. Despite conducting a preliminary exploration, rather than tracing from the beginnings, which were much more variable by region and shaky in

[41] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 6; also ibid., 79, 141–3, 248.

foundation, meaning many extraneous variables to contest with when comparing different examples, the more stable and established publishing world of the Wanli reign presents the historian with a snapshot of the Ming publishing world at its most productive and accessible. Looking forward, too, the Wanli period ended just prior to the onset of a prolonged and chaotic dynastic downfall. While the publishing industry remained highly productive, the ramifications of the various insurrections and other conflicts were felt throughout the economic, social and cultural spheres and hence most certainly in the publishing world. These differed from decade to decade and from region to region, which increases the difficulty of comparison with earlier times so much so that it becomes impossible for a study of this length to address. For the above reasons, the Wanli reign is not just a manageable period of time, but also a highly suitable one for the purposes of this study.

0.3.2. Terminology: What Constitutes a 'Humour Compilation'?

'Compilations' and 'Entries'

The term I have chosen to describe the kind of humour books which form the focus of this dissertation is 'compilation'; that is, a book comprised of shorter texts compiled into a collection.[42] These shorter texts are often what in any regular conversation could be

[42] In Chinese there are several terms which could correspond to my definition of the English word "compilation", which are used in their titles, such as *bian* 編, *ji* 集, and sometimes *pian* 篇. Each come with slightly different conventions and associations, but all fall under my broader understanding of 'compilation'. I have rendered each differently in translation, selecting "Compilation" for *bian* 編, as seen in the

called "jokes", but that is not true of all. As discussed at length in section 0.2.3., this dissertation is hoping to experiment with putting aside the idea of "jokes" and "jokebooks/jestbooks", in order to approach Ming humour publications on their own terms as much as possible. Furthermore, in the field of Humour Studies, the "joke" as a linguistic form can be subject to much more restricted use, sometimes defined in opposition to "conversational humour" and the many forms humour can take.[43] While some entries still do count as "jokes" even by these definitions, I have opted for the catch-all term '(humorous) entries', so as to increase the compatibility of this historical study within the Humour Studies field, and also to capture something of their compiled nature. The 'entries' in a compilation were compiled into one compilation by one or more compilers, and in some cases an unrecorded team of helpers.

Beyond that, however, there is much variety. Some compilations are long, for example *Compilation for the Augmentation of Knowledge* which is made up of 41 fascicles (Chapter 2), while others are much shorter. Some compilations are straightforward compilations of entries, while others are compilations of compilations (of entries), such as *Joking Stratagems of the Five Masters* (Chapter 3), which is comprised of five similarly themed compilations put together by its compiler Tu Benjun. In the majority of compilations, the entries have been selected from pre-existing texts, with or without minor edits, but there are also cases where some or all of the entries appear to have been

Compilation for the Augmentation of Knowledge (*Yizhi bian* 益智編). This is just an accident of translation, and not linked to my usage of "compilation" to describe the group of texts as a whole.

[43] For one clear introductory explanation with examples, Marta Dynel, "Beyond a Joke: Types of Conversational Humour", but there is ongoing debate in the Humour Studies field on this issue. With this distinction now made, the remainder of this dissertation will avoid the term "joke" where possible.

composed by the compiler. There is also much variety in the compilers' approaches to organising the compilation into categories and the kinds of entries they chose to compile. As we shall see, this could furnish the compilations with quite different characters.

"Humour"

For further substantiation of the shared characteristics of the books which this dissertation considers to be 'humour compilations', the reader should turn to Chapter 1. Here it is necessary only to cover some basic qualifying issues: how this dissertation defines "humour", and the proportion of humorous content required for a text to be considered a 'humour compilation'.

'Compilations' and 'entries' are decidedly more straightforward to define than the famously elusive term "humour". Academic writings on history and literature which start off with the intention to look at humour often end up switching the professed focus of their study from "humour" to "laughter", the tangible manifestation of humour (among other sentiments, of course), which enables them to avoid grappling with tricky definitions and a term for which every reader of this dissertation will carry an inherent understanding, yet when challenged may have difficulty defining. Others have coined other expressions like "comic amusement" to sift out the specific sense of the word "humour" under discussion.[44] In any case, the "humour" on the page, as opposed to the "humour" we experience is more straightforward: the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it in sense 9b as follows: "With reference to action, speech, writing, etc.: the quality of being amusing, the capacity to

[44] That is, comic amusement as "the mental state that humour is meant to provoke", often also known as "humour". Noël Carroll, *Humor: A Very Short Introduction*, 1.

elicit laughter or amusement".[45] That happens to fit neatly with the self-professed titles of many pre-modern humour compilations, which tend quite helpfully to declare themselves in possession of this very quality/capacity in their title, like *Treasury of Laughs* (*Xiaofu* 笑府) and *Record for Flailing Over* (*Juedao lu* 絕倒錄). For more on titling conventions, see section 1.2.2.

Importantly, though, the humorous element is not always made explicit in the titles of compilations that would otherwise count, which means we cannot go by name alone. The question that remains to be answered, then, is this: How much humour content is enough 'humour' for a text to be a 'humour compilation'? The *Zhuangzi*, for instance, famously contains instances of joking and humour,[46] so could a Ming annotated compilation of *Zhuangzi* extracts, containing such instances, among other non-humorous extracts, be considered a humour compilation? For this dissertation, the answer is no. Being one of few existing studies and hence preliminary in nature, this dissertation has permitted itself a fairly strict approach to defining its primary source base. For a compilation to be considered a 'humour compilation' here, *all* of its entries must possess *some element of humour*. Chapter 2 looks at humour sections within wider compilations which are not entirely humorous in nature. Again, to be considered a 'humour section', *all* the entries in the section must possess *some element of humour*.

[45] *OED Online*, "humour | humor, n.", sense 9b. June 2021. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 27, 2021.

[46] There is much writing on the humour in the *Zhuangzi*. For a recent contribution, see Paul J. Ambrosio, "Reading the Zhuangzi playfully: Stepping back from 'Ancient Chinese Wisdom'".

Does this strict definition mean that this dissertation is incomplete in its coverage of all the ways in which humour appeared in publication during the Wanli period? Yes, it does, and while reading this dissertation one should keep in mind that these humorous texts are part of a wider phenomenon, both textual and oral in nature. The entries (which outside this study may well be called "jokes") that appeared in these compilations will have appeared in other, less regimented ways across all kinds of publication, writings, drama, and daily-use encyclopaedias.[47] Nevertheless, it is a simple fact that a study of this length must restrict itself to a manageable scope. The number of examples yielded by 'humour compilations' in this strict sense is by no means small, and the category maintains high levels of internal comparability. To boot, most of them happen to be highly understudied, which further raises the value of this dissertation.

The reader may be finding the 'some element of humour' part disturbingly vague. How subtle can this be? In practice, the humorous element of the entries tends to be very overt. Entries in the generic voice[48] usually consist of a set-up, build-up and end with a punchline (e.g., both entries in 1.1.1.). Those in the anecdotic voice also take this approach (e.g., Aizi entry, p. 68), while others recount obviously humorous conversation exchanges (e.g., sleeping monk entry, pp. 69–70). Many anecdotic entries mark the humour even more overtly: it is common for entries to begin by informing the reader that the character in question habitually joked around, or end by remarking that the characters were laughing (e.g., Liu Ban entry, pp. 66–7). Indeed, I have not come across an entry in which the

[47] Cheng-hua Wang, "Lifestyles, Knowledge, and Cultural Products", 8. Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 100–4.

[48] The 'generic' and 'anecdotic' voices are fully outlined in Chapter 1.

presence of a humorous element is dubious or debatable in some way in any of the humour compilations here (or the internal humour sections of Chapter 2).

A Term for 'Humour Compilation' in Chinese

That I have coined this term using English is not an ideal situation. It would have been preferable to find a term from the original corpus, but due to the fact that connection between these texts is implied rather than specified, as well as the differing concerns of premodern categorisation systems outlined in sections 0.2.2., 0.2.3. and 1.2.1., this was not achievable. However, despite the fact that we are forced to rely on these two English words, the concept and phenomenon I use them to describe transcends the term itself. Towards a Chinese-language term for this concept, I tentatively propose '*youmo jibian* 幽默集編', along with the following justifications.

Given that I am introducing a broader category and concept, it must definitely mark a distinction from the existing terms like *xiaohua ji* 笑話集. A Chinese term should also be distinct from the descriptive terms used during the Ming, since *xie* and *xue* and *xiao* and so on all tend to fall into the broader 'humour compilation' umbrella. Therefore, to deploy one, or even a combination of these, risks inadvertently implying the exclusion of the others which could easily lead to misunderstandings. I find that '*youmo* 幽默' does work, but must reiterate that that I mean *youmo* in the sense in which it is currently used, and certainly not the ideologically-imbued sense coined by Lin Yutang, that he constructed in

opposition to pre-modern humour, which happens to be the very type we are using it to describe here.[49]

'Compilation' could perhaps be '*jibian* 集編', as a noun. As mentioned above, it was my intention to emphasise the action of 'compiling' which led me to 'compilation', and *bian* 編 could be said to carry marginally stronger connotations of this than *ji* 集. The same concerns about not using contemporaneous Ming terms do apply here, but in this case it proved unavoidable given that the same terms are used in modern Chinese. Since both terms are found in premodern compilation titles, to avoid inadvertently excluding some texts, the two-character word was preferable to just one or the other. Another recommendation is that the term should not carry connotations of a particular length or a particular level of structural complexity, since there is much variety in these regards in humour compilations.

Hence, I tentatively suggest '*youmo jibian* 幽默集編', and await the further suggestions of wiser colleagues.

0.3.3. A Note on Primary Source Dates

The Jiajing and Longqing periods had certainly seen the publication of humour, and beyond this, the humour publications of the Wanli period spring from and draw upon a

[49] Christopher Rea notes how "*Youmo* became part of a broader fundamental reappraisal of Chinese culture that intellectuals had been engaged in since the late nineteenth century". See "The Invention of Humor 幽默年", in *The Age of Irreverence*, 146–50. See also note 31.

long, yet sparsely preserved, tradition of humour compilations from earlier dynasties. This will become abundantly clear in the following chapters, which have been careful to recognise the historical context, both recent and more distant. Given the key role played by pre-existing textual content in Wanli publications, there is an important methodological clarification to make concerning the primary source basis of this dissertation. I have limited the sources to those which beyond reasonable doubt underwent printing in the Wanli reign. This is a broader category than the alternative, which would be restricting the focus to texts and compilations that were first written or put together in the Wanli period. It is only through my chosen approach that we can accurately represent the humour publishing activities of the time, which frequently involved the printing of earlier texts (as the aforementioned "secret" compilations would suggest), and the repackaging of textual content which had existed for a long time through processes of compilation and re-compilation. In other words, this dissertation takes Wanli imprints as its source basis, as opposed to the more restrictive category of texts and compilations which were first created during the Wanli period. That said, publications in the latter category are mostly subsumed by the former, and most of the texts studied here do fit into both categories. For instance, Chapter 3 deals with two compilations which predate Wanli: *Miscellaneous Sayings of Master Ai*, perhaps Northern Song (960–1127), and the *Further Sayings of Master Ai*, which was prefaced in 1516, just prior to the Jiajing reign. These texts count as Wanli imprints by virtue of Tu Benjun's repackaging of them into his *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters*, prefaced Wanli 36 (1608).

There is one further issue concerning dating. In the absence of other evidence, which is the usual situation, scholars generally date Ming books using their prefaces, which conventionally supply a date of composition. But since prefaces had to be completed before the compiler had the blocks carved (although technically the preface block could be carved after the main blocks were finished), any study of Ming book culture must deal with some level of uncertainty concerning whether the book was indeed carved and printed in the immediate aftermath of the writing of the preface. In many cases, there was indeed a close temporal relation between the completion of the preface and the carving process. For instance, in Zhao Kaimei's preface in Chapter 4, a string of otherwise airy musings are ended with the abrupt announcement: "I [hereby] carve the *Record of Dongpo and Foyin's Inquiry and Response Dialogues*".[50] With rich figures like Zhao Kaimei, and certainly big publishers like the aforementioned Hu Wenhuan, we can be fairly sure the resources were on hand for speedy printing.

There nonetheless remains a small amount of uncertainty in this regard, but this is unavoidable. The prefaces here at least supply a Wanli *terminus post quem*, and there does not seem to be any reason to assume that any of these publishers did not manage to get the books printed before the end of the period, which would push them out of the scope of this study. In each case, biographical information on the publishers has been supplied with this concern in mind.

[50] 刻東坡佛印問答錄. Su Shi, *Chen Meigong dingzheng wenda lu*, 527.

0.4. Methodology 2: Paratextual Matters

0.4.1. Paratextual Materials in the Late-Ming Context

While the following chapters do also look at the overall entries of the compilations themselves, much emphasis will be placed on the "paratexts", which this study posits as a space in which our compilers communed with the readership. This section will provide an overview of the term itself and the kinds of paratextual material we will encounter in the coming chapters. It can simultaneously be read as a short introduction to the structure of Ming publications.

Paratexts and the Ming

Since the notion of the "paratext" was formally introduced and defined within semiotics by Gérard Genette in 1987, it has entered wide use in literary studies and the history of the book. The *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* summarises the concept as follows: "the framing devices authors and publishers use to contextualize works and generate interest…although not officially part of the text, the paratext can have a significant influence over the way a text is received".[51] In other words, "paratext" is a useful catch-all term for all which flanks the main textual content of a text. For example, prefaces, afterwords, acknowledgements, the author's name, the choice of image on the

[51] Ian Buchanan, *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 360.

cover, publishing information, annotations, even the very title of the book can all be considered paratextual materials.

Genette's main concern was how such paratextual interventions shape the meaning of the text which they flank. However, this study is historical in nature, being an investigation into practices of humour publication in the late Ming. Its focus falls on people—both those behind and in front of the humour publication—and approaches paratextual materials as a means to access the thoughts, intentions and practices of publishers and their readers. As is now quite standard in history of the book studies, my appropriation the notion of the paratext is shallow and utilitarian in nature: the word serves as an apt term for the primary sources which form the basis of my discussion.

Paratextual materials are gifts for a historian of the publishing world, because they supply a more direct form of access to the voice of those behind the production. Of course, the publisher/author's thoughts and intentions are also present in the main text, through their choices of what to compile and what to leave out, arrangement of texts and so on, for the historian to unpick and infer. However, it is in paratextual materials such as prefaces, annotations, category rationales and so on, that Ming compilers and other contributors communicate overtly with their readership, and, unknowingly, with modern historians.

Paratextual materials formed an integral part of Ming publications, and I am by no means the first to apply the term to the late-Ming scene. Lucille Chia's *Printing for Profit* and Kai-wing Chow's *Publishing, Culture and Power*, two pathbreaking works on Ming book culture from the early 2000s both applied the term, the latter extensively, and it has

been inextricable from Western-language studies of Ming book culture ever since. Unusually, this English translation of a French term, originally formulated around more contemporary texts, has slid comfortably into the study of early modern Chinese imprints without necessitating many alterations, amendments, caveats, or even critique on grounds of Eurocentric concerns. The inclusivity occasioned by the all-embracingness of the concept has granted it some level of immunity in these regards, and meanwhile rendered it applicable to a host of paratextual varieties specific to late imperial China which go beyond those outlined in Genette's book. Some varieties of Ming paratext which will appear in the coming chapters are as follows:

Prefatory Materials

The kind of paratextual material which will be studied most frequently in this dissertation will be prefatory material. These are mostly termed *xu* 序, which I have rendered "preface" throughout, but other terms appear from time to time. The use of a different term tends to signify a slightly more informal or less formulaic contribution. Such paratexts tend to be placed prior to a compilation or section, but similar forms can appear after it. More methodological detail on how this dissertation will engage with prefaces can be found in 0.4.2., "Working with Prefaces".

Comments, Annotations and Appraisals

Comments and annotations might at first seem insignificant compared to the main text, but in the late Ming they were a key selling point and should not be underestimated. In the market-driven world of late-Ming books, a famous annotator raised the book's

status. For example, in *Record of Tongue Flowers*, a compilation discussed in Chapter 2, famous literary man Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1624) added comments to the compilation that had been prepared by someone other than himself. This was likely a commission or favour, with the object of the exchange a literary celebrity's very valuable seal of approval. Kai-wing Chow's discussion of "reputable masters" (*minggong* 名公) shows how certain figures could commodify their names,[52] and annotations could be said to underscore this phenomenon, as an even more involved and detailed way of validating a work.

The comments on a publication were not always unanimously positive. For example, in *Tongue Flowers* Yuan also makes occasional remarks like "This is not especially good".[53] This aspect taps into a mode of late-Ming book consumption noted by other scholars: the use of books as a window on a sophisticated world through which aspiring readers could learn stylishness and proper etiquette. That explains the presence of Yuan's negative comments, which might at first glance seem to disparage the content and make the compilation appear to be of mixed quality. In fact, these helped the compiler Cao Chen just as much as his positive comments, as they would have been hoped for and valued by readers who were using them to acquaint themselves with the appropriate way to react to the content. Below is an entry from *Record of Tongue Flowers*, in which Yuan Zhongdao's comment "Marvellous!" (*miao* 妙) is visible at the top left above the main panel.

[52] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 110–2.

[53] 此不甚佳.

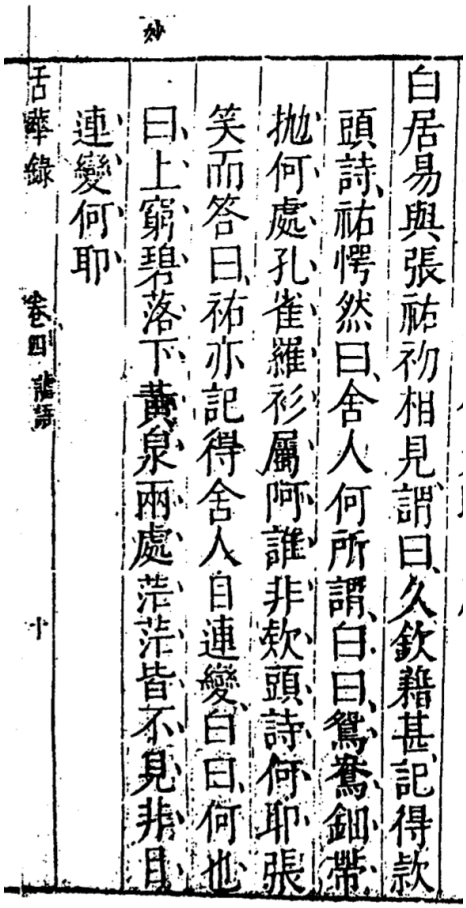
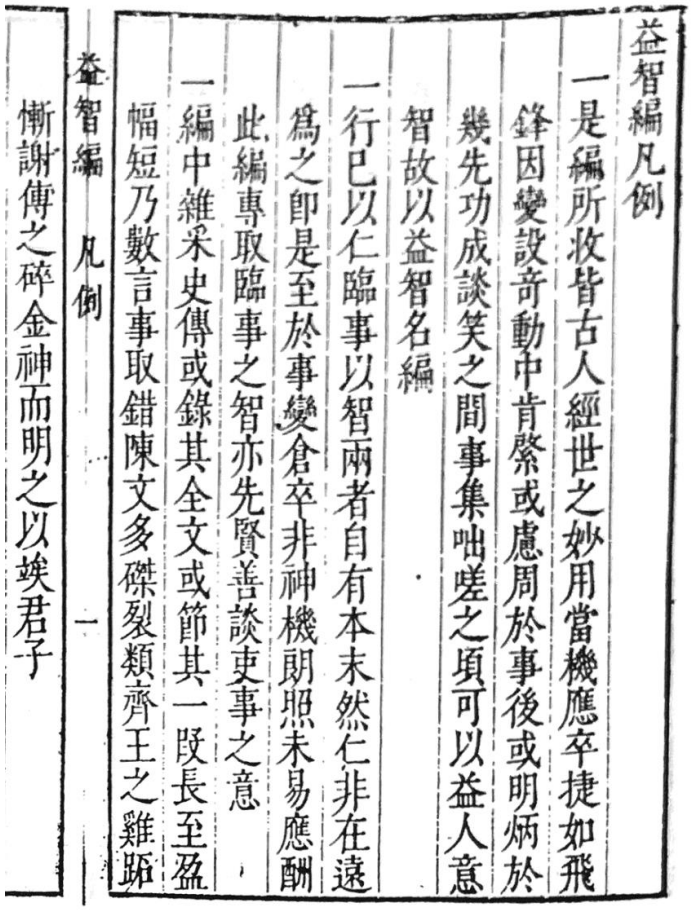

妙
白居易與張祐初相見謂曰久欽藉甚記得款
頭詩祐愕然曰舍人何所謂白曰鴛鴦鈿帶
拋何處孔雀羅衫屬阿誰非款頭詩何耶張
笑而答曰祐亦記得舍人自連變白曰何也
曰上窮碧落下黃泉兩處茫茫皆不見非目
連變何耶

Figure 1 An entry from "Jibing Words" in Record of Tongue Flowers, *including a comment by Yuan Zhongdao in the top margin.*

"General Scope and Regulations"

"General Scope and Regulations" (*fanli* 凡例) sections, sometimes rendered as "editorial regulations", took the form of a series of bullet points placed before the main content or table of contents which summarised the content and structure of the text. They often function as a kind of 'small print' or disclaimer of the content. For example, some warn the reader that the compilation contains some kind of uncouth or lewd content. To an extent, these can be understood as a sort of reader's guide: an attempt to prepare and shape

how the reader should interpret and engage with the material they were about to read. Not every compilation contains "General Scope and Regulations" section; these tended to be in larger compilations with more elaborate categorisation structures. These paratexts have an 'appendage-like' quality, so we should not assume that all readers read them assiduously, if at all, but they still represent an important window on compiling practices and processes, as well as the way the compilers perceived their creation.


益智編凡例

一是編所收皆古人經世之妙用當機應卒捷如飛鋒因變設奇動中肯綮或慮周於事後或明炳於幾先功成談笑之間事集咄嗟之頃可以益人意智故以益智名編

一行已以仁臨事以智兩者自有本末然仁非在遠爲之即是至於事變倉卒非神機朗照未易應酬此編專取臨事之智亦先賢善談吏事之意

一編中雜采史傳或錄其全文或節其一段長至盈幅短乃數言事取錯陳文多碎裂類齊王之雞跖

益智編 凡例 一

慚謝傳之碎金神而明之以竢君子

Figure 2 - The beginning of the "General Scope and Regulations" of Compilation for the Augmentation of Knowledge *(Chapter 2).*

0.4.2. Working with Prefaces

Paratextual materials (just like any other historical source) come with their own set of biases and limitations. While more direct than the main text itself, they too can only offer a murky window onto the heart of the publisher and compiler. To interpret them accurately, one must not just tackle the various biases stemming from the compiler or publisher's self-representation, but also the commercial functions of these paratexts in presenting and advertising the books. With prefaces in particular, of which this dissertation will make considerable use, another confounding matter is that during the Ming these were an extremely commodified piece of writing. Publishers would often commission celebrity writers, who, without any other involvement or stake in the text, could roll off a preface for all manner of publications as requests arose.

This is also vividly illustrated by *Record of Tongue Flowers*, (Chapter 2). Yuan Zhongdao, a celebrated writer who supplied a preface and (as mentioned) appraisal annotations to the work is remarkably transparent about the manner in which his services were provided, describing in the preface itself how after a prolonged period of illness in which he had been hallucinating about blooming flowers, "suddenly I heard the sound of knocking at the door, and the pageboy entered clutching a letter", which turned out to contain a request to supply comments and proofreading for a friend of a friend's compilation (that is, *Tongue Flowers*). "I laughed to myself that the plants and vegetation all flowering seem to have already made my illness worse; if we now add 'tongue flowers' into the mix, I will be a dead man! But it couldn't be helped, since the postal turnaround

was very urgent, forcing me to read it through… and now having read it, I find that my arms and legs are moving with joy, and without realising it, I am up [out of bed]!... I have written in a few remarks, and return them along with the letter".[54]

This is not to say commissioned prefaces have nothing to tell us about the attitudes towards humour publications. On the contrary, they can be read as a form of reader response. But it does mean that their authors lacked both the hands-on or supervisory experience of preparing the text and the stake in the publication we could expect of a preface by a compiler or publisher, so our interpretation of them should be adjusted accordingly.[55] For example, the aforementioned *Record of Tongue Flowers* has three opening paratexts: two prefaces (*xu* 序) which are outside commissions, and a "little intro" (*xiaoyin* 小引) by Wu Yuan, who was involved in arranging the compilation. We must stay aware of these different identities in the conclusions we draw from the paratexts. Indeed, even between the two commissioned preface-writers there is a difference: Yuan Zhongdao supplied annotations and therefore we can assume did read the entire book (besides his own assertion above),[56] but this is an assumption we are unable to make about the other preface-writer. To this end, I have been careful to fully research the paratextual

[54] 忽聞敲門聲, 童子持友人郝公琰書進…予復自笑: 草木一華, 尚增疑病; 今加舌華, 病夫死矣. 奈郵者取回甚急, 不得已, 強一披閱…予一讀至此, 手足欣然, 不覺自起…乃書數語, 伴書歸之.

[55] Of course, the level of hands-on experience and envisioned stake in publications also varied among different compilers and publishers, particularly as publishing enterprises grew in size. The contextual information provided in the later chapters should give the reader a sufficient idea of this too.

[56] Here we enter murky territory, since at the height of their popularity some writers may too have had others to do the work or write the preface for them. This is paratextual work at its most tricky. My view is that since this work was founded on one's reputation, which one would have a vested interest in protecting, in the vast majority of cases, we can assume that at these celebrities would at least have read and assented to what was ghost-written or drafted for them.

contributors and have provided this contextual information in each chapter wherever extensive use of a paratext is made.

Along with such hermeneutical pitfalls, the commercial nature of many of these publications also brings us opportunities. From a sheer practical standpoint, a famous preface writer or commentator has in many cases ensured the preservation—and therefore survival—of these texts. Also, the marketability of the preface-writer's name also meant it was common in the Ming to commission several prefaces from different writers. Kai-wing Chow even mentions a publication with no less than 18 prefaces![57] While I have not encountered such an extreme example, several of the humour publications here have followed this trend of multiple prefaces. The presence of more than one helpfully provides us with several different perspectives on the same text. Also, the identity of the choice of preface-writer can tell us something about what kind of image humour publishers were attempting to shape for their publication, and in turn, about the intended sectors of the market they were aiming for.

On a more profound level, however, the Ming prefaces are indeed, as Genette puts it, a "threshold" from which it is still possible to turn back.[58] Paratexts are an interface between the Ming contributors and readers: they contain a communion between a publisher and his faceless, imagined reader-consumers. Publishers used a preface as a one-chance, outward-facing expression to all who might happen upon the book for all of perpetuity, with a mind both to market the book and to shape others' understanding of the

[57] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 114.

[58] Gérard Genette, Jane E. Lewin, trans., *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 2.

contents. For example, in Chapter 2 we will meet a preface in which the compiler discusses the conflicting reactions of two "guests" to whom he has shown the book before having the printing blocks cut. His invented guests act as an invitation to the readers to see which category they fall into, and as I will later argue, as ventriloquist puppets through which he can voice an apologetic defence of experimental content that he expects to fall foul of some readers.

Reading backwards from the compilers' prefatory strategies in this way, one can uncover the reactions and responses publishers expected from their readers. This, in turn, in many cases simultaneously grants access to the kind of reception it would actually have received, if we can assume that the compilers had a fairly good grasp of the mindset of their readership and the zeitgeist of the times, which in the majority of cases there is no reason to doubt. At least, it is usually a more reliable idea than we would be otherwise be able to reconstruct. Small as they are, these windows into the readers' mind are greatly valuable. This is a field in which reader reactions to texts are few and far between, which creates a lacuna in our knowledge of the publishing scene as a whole.[59] As mentioned in the Historical Background (section 0.1.), there is not much we know for certain about the readership of this flourishing book scene, and there is much debate. Often, the published

[59] The temptation to straightforwardly measure the influence or popularity of a given publication based on the quantifiable written reader responses becomes a dangerous assumption when we consider that these responses are merely those which have survived the passage of time, particularly when the contemptuous attitude against Ming publications in the intervening years is thrown into the mix. Several erstwhile famous Ming authors and publication houses have now almost vanished from the record, and whole genres and groups of texts are no less vulnerable in this regard.

text is all that remains. So, paratexts can offer extremely valuable glimpses both sides of the act of publishing, allowing us to perceive a fuller panorama of late-Ming book culture.

0.4.3. Approaching Attributions

Another type of paratext which this dissertation touches upon are 'attributions'. While perhaps less overt appendages as prefaces and annotations, the inclusion of the names of authors and contributors are another kind of paratext. Ming publications made a point of providing what we shall here call 'attributions' (e.g. "by Su Shi", "proofread by Chen Jiru"), often along with the titles of source texts for their compiled material.

In Ming publications, a contributor's name is found close to the beginning of the book or the relevant section or piece of writing. There was a constellation of different terms for contributory roles in use, which generally fall into Kai-wing Chow's helpful categories of "authored", "edited/compiled", "critiqued/commented" and "proofread".[60] In the vast majority of instances, this name comes attached to a specified role within the production which delineates the boundaries of the person's involvement. Since the name and role are inextricably bound together, I have opted to use 'attribution' as a term which can cover both the name and designated role, rather than the set of "-nymity" name-based vocabulary coined by Genette and taken up by Chow.[61]

[60] For the further implications of such roles, see Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 119–22, 169–70. For a quantitative breakdown of different roles taken by particular figures, see ibid., 204–5.
[61] Genette breaks down the forms taken by this kind of paratext into "anonymity", "pseudonymity", etc, seemingly under the assumption that what is indicated thereby is the role of creator, that is 'authorship'. My

Given the marketability of the identity of paratextual contributors, false attributions are also a concern in this area. This dissertation views attributions, false and genuine, as historical facts in their own right, with much to tell the historian about the humour publishing scene. This will be most relevant in Chapters 3 and 4, both of which cover Ming humour publications whose attributions to Song literatus Su Shi are now widely disputed. Where authorial authenticity is challenged in this dissertation, whether with regard to the origin of the primary textual content or paratextual authorship, this has been done purely to enable us to interpret the text accurately. Whether an author actually composed a text rarely holds serious relevance to the central questions of this dissertation; what matters here is whether or not the publishers and/or readers believed they did, and why. The neglect humour compilations have suffered is at least partly due to their dubious pedigree, but this did not seem to have had much bearing on the popularity of the corpus at the time and therefore on the historical significance of this group of publications. As it happens, none of the prefaces by Ming men in this dissertation are of overly dubious origin, so we are able to straightforwardly treat them as by the man whose name is appended.

To a lesser extent, a further phenomenon in humour publication attributions was the choice of self-attribution or whether to remain anonymous. While the publishers and compilers in the publications studied here are all named figures, that in itself was a choice in the Ming publishing context. Other humour publications opted for names like “Master

rationale for using ‘attribution’ instead is not just the aforementioned inseparability of name and role, but that in Ming imprints the varieties of significant named contributions were more complex. Chapter 4 does employ Chow’s idea of “misonymity” in the case of Su Shi. There it makes sense because it is the constituent ‘name’ part of the attribution which is under dispute.

of the Studio of Brimming Wine Cups" (*Fubai zhai zhuren* 浮白齋主人).[62] Of course, whether such pseudonymic attributions actually did constitute anonymity at the time is another issue. But the choice we see in the humour compilations studied here to give traceable attributions is telling, both with regard to the commercial facet of marketable names, and the perceived acceptability of the content. This will be discussed over the course of the dissertation.

0.5. Overview of Chapters

The above **Introduction** has hopefully convinced the reader of the need for this study and equipped them with an understanding of the terms and approaches which will be used in the subsequent chapters. Building on this, **Chapter 1 – The Landscape of Late-Ming Humour Publishing** aims to provide an overview of the scope of the publication of humour in the Wanli reign. As promised, it will elaborate further on what exactly constitutes a 'humour compilation', through outlining two broad varieties of the humorous entries they contain, which I have termed the 'generic voice' and the 'anecdotic voice'. More importantly, however, this chapter is intended as a preliminary attempt to rescue this group of texts from the categorisation and anthologising systems of subsequent history which have separated connected examples and dispersed them, while letting others fall through the gaps entirely. In order to reconstruct the humour compilation as the category Ming compilers and readers may have envisioned, the chapter leans upon paratextual

[62] The presumed compiler of both *Refined Jibes* (*Yaxue* 雅謔), and one *Forest of Laughs* (*Xiaolin* 笑林).

materials including titles and prefaces, tracing the patterns of reference and allusion and recurrent keywords which bind this disparate group of texts together. This will lay the foundation for the subsequent three chapters, which explore more specific aspects of Ming humour publishing, through examples of individual publications and their paratextual materials.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, **Chapter 2 – "Good Wood on Crowdpleasers": Humour Sections in Wider Wanli Compilations**, shifts the focus away from compilations which are entirely humorous in nature. However, if we are to accurately assess the place of humour in the world of Ming publishing, it is important to look also towards those compilations which have made the deliberate choice of incorporating one or more sections devoted to humorous entries amongst a wider set of non-humorous compiled material. This is something that has not yet been attempted in existing scholarship, and has much to tell us about how humour was perceived to slot into intellectual, political, social and cultural concerns of the day. The chapter surveys four compilations, which vary widely in terms of theme, professed purpose, and compiling approach, and investigate how their paratextual materials present the constituent humour section(s). We can hypothesise that such collections might have encountered different groups within the readership, people who might not otherwise have been inclined to add a standalone humour compilation to their collection, and that this in turn impacted on how those behind the compilation communicated with readers in through their paratexts. Indeed, what this chapter reveals is an anticipated ambivalence on the part of the readership, which is anticipated by the compilers and manifested in the apologetic, almost defensive, tone of

their paratextual materials. The preface to "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories", part of *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* is used to take a deeper look at the mechanisms of how this is communicated with the reader. It is from this preface that I have borrowed the phrase "(wasting) good wood on crowdpleasers" (*zaimu meishi* 災木媚世, lit: "bringing trees to ruin for the sake of enthralling society"), for both the title of this chapter and the dissertation as a whole.

Chapter 3 – A Wandering Persuader in Wanli: The Satirical Tradition of Aizi takes a close look at a character and tradition which is exclusive to humour compilations as a genre, allowing us to further substantiate the cohesion of this group of publications. Aizi (艾子, "Master Ai" or even "Master Mugwort") is a fictional Warring States figure who first appeared in the Northern Song. A "wandering persuader" consultant-philosopher of sorts, *Aizi* compilations seeing him travel from state to state interacting with famous Warring States figures, yet the situations he encounters and the exchanges in which he participates always turn out to be humorous in some way. The original Aizi compilation was a Song text, but the Ming publishers who inherited the tradition retold and came up with their own "Aizi jokes", which are scattered as entries throughout Ming humour compilations. The character even inspired two verifiable Ming sequels: *Further Sayings of Master Ai* and the *Unofficial Sayings of Master Ai*. The case of Aizi permits this dissertation to add a 'vertical' angle to this study of Wanli humour compilations to show how they identified themselves with established joking traditions and precedents of humour compilations from earlier dynasties. The chapter looks in depth at one example of how Ming compilers engaged with the Aizi tradition and repurposed it to suit Ming

concerns through a humour compilation entitled *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* (*Wuzi xiece* 五子諧策), prefaced Wanli 36 (1608), which contains three Aizi compilations and two further "Master" (*zi* 子) humour compilations. It will also examine how humour compilations slotted into the intellectual concerns of late imperial China through comparison to the Qing text *"Stratagems of the Warring States" with the Poison Extracted* (*Zhanguo ce qudu* 戰國策去毒).

Chapter 4 – Wanli Humour Compilations and the 'Dongpo vogue' is similar in that it also looks at a theme that was hugely popular within the genre. This time, however, the figure is not fictional one, but rather a historical one: the Song dynasty literatus Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101, *zi* Zizhan 子瞻; *hao* Dongpo 東坡 "East Slope"). Su Shi was championed in all kinds of late-Ming literature, but in Ming humour publications he is a true superstar. While there are several figures from the past who make frequent appearances in humour compilations, Su's popularity went beyond this. He does not just outstrip them in terms of sheer frequency of appearances as subject matter for humour entries, but also in that he was also championed as a composer of humour in his own right. Chief amongst his alleged contributions to Ming humour publishing was the aforementioned tradition of Aizi, which was attributed by Ming publishers to Su Shi. But this is just the tip of the iceberg: his "brushnotes" (*biji* 筆記) writings appeared in a huge number of humour compilations, and his association with the humorous "anthropomorphic biography" ("jest histories" *xieshi* 諧史 in the Ming)[63] helped push this form of humour writing to new heights in the Ming. While his popularity was part of a wider phenomenon

[63] For the anthropomorphic biography form in the Song, see Huijun Mai, "The Double Life of the Scallop".

which I have termed the ‘Dongpo vogue’, this wider phenomenon itself has lot to do with this Song literatus’ association with humour, which resonated with late-Ming intellectual and cultural currents. In this way, the focus on Su Shi allows this dissertation to situate the humour publication corpus within the wider social context. The situation was symbiotic: Ming humour compilations were influenced by this wider trend, but also enacted their own perpetuating influence upon it. This chapter’s textual focus is the *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* (*Wenda lu* 問答錄), a collection of humorous exchanges between Su Shi and his monk friend Foyin 佛印. A preface to this compilation, which was printed and reprinted during Wanli, grants us access to one publisher’s musings on Su Shi’s enduring comic popularity. The preface demonstrates how ideas of humour were in flux during the late Ming, in a way that was arguably inextricable from the various vicissitudes of the publishing industry.

Chapter 1 – The Landscape of Late-Ming Humour Publishing

This chapter is a marriage of two aims. The first is to sketch a picture of the textual landscape and characteristics of Wanli humour compilations. The second aim is to 'rescue' this group of texts by reassembling them as a category within the textual tradition, or at least reconnect a group of texts that were connected in the eyes of Ming publishers and readers. To do this, it will look at how their paratextual materials exhibit similar themes and patterns, to show that compilers viewed these compilations as a similar variety of publication. This would make the case for us too to treat it as a particular category. For example, the titles of such works tend to adhere to formulaic patterns, while their prefaces and other introductory materials discuss the same issues and invoke the same textual allusions. This chapter will also provide some background concerning the long tradition into which humour compilers placed their own contributions. After all, humour compilations were not a Wanli invention, and sprung out of a rich textual tradition. These two aims work in tandem: the process of making the case for the category doubles as an overview of the group of texts which prepares the reader for the more in-depth studies in the coming chapters. First, however, it would be helpful to provide a better understanding of the content and nature of humour compilations.

1.1. Ming Humour Entries in Two Broad Varieties

While the focus of the dissertation falls mostly on the paratextual materials of these humour compilations, these cannot be properly interpreted in isolation from the content of the wider compilation. In order to give the reader a better understanding of the nature of the compilations from which these paratexts are drawn, this section will demarcate two formalistic varieties of entries found in Ming humour publications, namely those which adopt the 'generic voice' and those which adopt the 'anecdotic voice'. Ming humour entries can be filed away under these two broad categories with surprising ease.

1.1.1. Type 1: The 'Generic Voice'

The first variety of humour entries adopt the 'generic voice'. These are generic scenarios, usually brief, about people (or occasionally animals) saying or doing something funny. The characters are typically unnamed, often referred to by their role in society or their position in the exchange. For example, in the below example we meet "a man" (*yiren* 一人) who is then referred to as the would-be "patron" (*ke* 客) upon entering a pub. The owner of the establishment is similarly referred to simply as "the owner of the pub" (*dianzhu* 店主). The result is a generic, everyday scenario which could in theory take place anywhere such an establishment existed:

> A man walked into a wine establishment. Upon seeing there were no customers, he took delight in the place being quiet and clear. After a short while, the owner of the pub came out. He hurriedly took out some rope and tied the patron to a pillar. The shocked patron exclaimed, "I'm here to buy some wine and a meal! Why've I been

> tied up?" The owner said, "Because I'm afraid you'll leave while I'm out to get firewood!"[1]
>
> 一人上酒店。見店中無客。喜其清淨。已而店主出。急取索縛客於柱。客訝曰:「買酒飯吃。何為見縛。」店主曰:「我若乞火去時。怕你又走了。」

Within this group of unnamed figures, sometimes referred to by their position in society or the conversational exchange, many are stereotyped stock characters, such as monks, village schoolteachers and henpecked husbands. For example, many entries in the generic voice, such as the following, are themed around incompetent doctors:

> A sick man's family requested a doctor come examine him. The doctor promised that he would be fine and charged a lot of money, but in the end he died. The sick man's family resented this very much, so they sent a servant to go round and revile him. After a short while, though, he was back. The family asked if he had reviled him, and the servant said he hadn't. When asked why not, he said, "There were too many people there to revile him. How could I have pushed to the front?!"[2]
>
> 病家請醫看。醫許以無事費多金。竟不起。病家恨甚,遣僕往罵之。頃間便回。問曾罵否,曰:「不曾。」問何以不罵,曰:「罵者太多,教我如何擠得上。」

Both these examples come from Feng Menglong's *Treasury of Laughs* (*Xiaofu* 笑府) in which the vast majority of entries are in the generic voice.[3] The entries are compiled under thematic categories, several named for the kinds of character involved. For example, the first entry here is filed under "Various Vocations", and the second under "The Occult and Medicine", to borrow Pi-ching Hsu's renderings.[4] Clearly, these generic, relatable social roles and the stereotypes which revolved around them played a big part in the humour of this variety.

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[1] Own translation, with reference to Pi-ching Hsu, *Feng Menglong's Treasury of Laughs*, 152.

[2] Own translation, with reference to ibid., 118–9.

[3] The second variety does make an occasional appearance in the *Treasury*, however. The jokes involving Confucius and his disciples, for example, use the anecdotic voice. Overtly invented, they should be understood along the same lines as the Aizi anecdotic tradition (see Type 2).

[4] For *guangcui* 廣萃 and *fangshu* 方術, respectively.

1.1.2. Type 2: The 'Anecdotic Voice'

The second type of entry could well be described as "anecdotes", that is, "a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident" according to *Merriam-Webster*,[5] or "a short, often amusing story about an event, usually involving a particular person", according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*.[6] I have also resurrected the adjective "anecdotic" to steer clear of the now dominant connotations of dubious veracity in the word's more familiar adjectival form "anecdotal". Whether these humorous anecdotes were factual or believable is besides the point, so "anecdotic" offers a more neutral, and therefore more suitable, option. "Anecdotic" has two senses: "of, relating to, or consisting of anecdotes; anecdotal.", and "of a person: given to or skilled in telling anecdotes".[7]

The basic distinction between the generic voice and the anecdotic voice is a matter of specificity. This is mostly distinguished by the provision of the identity of the people whose words or actions are recounted, so while entries in the generic voice concern unnamed figures, entries in the 'anecdotic voice' concern named figures. Here is one example of an entry in the anecdotic voice in which we find the two joker titans of the Northern Song, Liu Ban 劉攽 (1023–1089) and Su Shi, at the same social gathering:

> In his later years, Liu Gongfu (Liu Ban) contracted a horrible disease. His facial hair and eyebrows dropped off, and the bridge of his nose broke down. It was unspeakably

[5] *Merriam-Webster*, "Anecdote", available at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anecdote. Accessed March 05, 2021.
[6] *Cambridge English Dictionary*, "ANECDOTE | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary", available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/anecdote. Accessed July 27, 2021.
[7] *OED Online*, "anecdotic, adj.", June 2021. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 27, 2021.

> painful. One day, Gongfu, the Gentleman Su Zizhan (Su Shi) and a few others were quoting lines from the ancients to make fun of one another. When Zizhan's turn came, (using a verse by the first Emperor of Han) he said "O, the great wind rises! The *eyebrows* fly up. O, where to find a fierce warrior, to protect my *nose*!" Those seated snorted loudly, while Gongfu just felt sad.[8]
>
> 劉貢父晚年得惡疾, 鬚眉墮落、鼻樑斷壞。苦不可言。一日與蘇公子瞻數人各引古人一聯以相戲。子瞻遽言曰:「大風起兮, 眉飛揚。安得猛士兮, 守鼻梁。」坐中大噓。貢父但愴感而已。

The above anecdote recounts a madlibs-esque drinking game, in which Su Shi swaps out the "clouds" (*yun* 雲) which fly up in the original poem for Liu Ban's "eyebrows". In another twist, the fierce warrior envisaged by the first Emperor of Han to protect "all four directions" (*sifang* 四方) of his empire instead finds himself tasked with protecting Liu Ban's "nose". It is primarily the fact that this entry recounts one named scholar-official interacting with another named scholar-official which makes it a clear example of the anecdotic voice. Further, Liu Ban's particular medical condition plays a key role in setting up the humour, and this is specified accordingly at the start.

Although some compilations also contain anecdotes about living celebrities,[9] the majority of anecdotic entries in Ming compilations concern historical figures, like the above example. The evident reliance on pre-existing anecdotes has to do with the prevalent compiling practices of the day. Suffice to say that many were cribbed from anecdote collections from earlier dynasties like the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, while the Song "brushnotes" (*biji* 筆記) genre played an especially important role. Their common format of anecdotic snapshots from the lives of particular literati figures, combined with the informality

[8] Guo Zizhang, *Liu yu*, 365–6.

[9] For example, contemporaneous figures appear in *Record of Tongue Flowers* (preface 1615), a compilation discussed in Chapter 2.

permitted by the genre, had given rise to a large number of records of humorous incidents and joking exchanges. In turn, the well-preserved corpus furnished Ming humour compilers with a wealth of materials. Humour compilers lifted anecdotes from existing collections and transferred them, with or without minor edits, into Ming humour collections.

It is crucial to note, however, that the 'anecdotic voice' is a formalist distinction. Entries in a humour compilation need not have pre-existed the compilation as anecdotes, even if that is true for most examples. It was also possible to adopt the anecdotic voice in the creation of new material. This is why I have termed this variety the 'anecdotic voice' rather than straightforwardly calling them "anecdotes". Chapter 3, for example, discusses an entire tradition of this kind of 'invented anecdote' which revolved around "Aizi", a Warring States period wandering persuader-type, who was invented during the Song dynasty and popular enough in the Ming to be recycled into many humour compilations and even generate two sequels. Here is one example of an Aizi entry:

> Aizi was magistrate of Ju. One day, word came that the State of Qin was about march on Ju with Bai Qi as general. The people of Ju were all making arrangements to flee to escape him. Aizi called for the city elders and comforted them, saying, "Do not flee for now. Bai Qi will be easy to tackle. Moreover, he is by nature humane! When he attacked Zhao that time, his soldiers did not spill one drop of blood!"[10]
>
> 艾子為莒守，一日，聞秦將以白起為將伐莒，莒之民悉欲逃避。艾子呼父老而慰安之曰：「汝且弗逃，白起易與耳，且其性仁。前且伐趙，兵不血刃也。」

As far as we know, this does not predate the compilation in which we find it, and to be sure, it is not a Warring States anecdote. Thus, it is best understood as a written-for-purpose

[10] The incident of which Aizi reminds his terrified citizens here is the Battle of Changping around 260 BCE, which was infamous within traditional historiography for Bai Qi's order to bury 400,000 people alive in giant pits, hence the punchline.

anecdote: it is 'written in the anecdotic voice', so to speak. *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues,* the compilation discussed in Chapter 4 (details 4.4.2.), also makes use of this approach.

1.1.3. Overlaps and Otherwise

Anecdotic Framing of the Generic Voice

Importantly, the anecdotic voice is also used a framing device housing an example of the generic voice discussed above. For instance, the Aizi tradition offers such entries as:

> Aizi was travelling. Out on the road to Handan,[11] he saw two old women discussing who should be the one to give way to whom. The first asked, "Old dear, how many years of age are you?" The other said, "Seventy". The first one said, "I'm sixty-nine. But next year I'll be the same age as you".
>
> 艾子行，出邯鄲道上，見二媼相與讓路。一曰：「媼幾歲？」曰：「七十。」問者曰：「我六十九。然則，明年當與爾同歲矣。」

This entry has borrowed the figure of Aizi, together with the iconic Warring States setting of Handan, capital of Zhao. But the humorous exchange that unfolds before his eyes is a generic scenario between two unnamed old women. In theory, it could be set in any time or place. Nevertheless, here the compiler has encased it within an anecdotic frame, which in effect fixes it not just in a specific time and place, but also in association with specific figure. And equally, later compilers have made the decision not to remove the entry from its frame. Editorial choices like this are rarely entirely arbitrary, so while maintaining an awareness of

[11] This expression can mean 'on the official career track', so this entry probably intends to suggest that civil servants exhibit similar behaviour to the two old women here.

the overlap with the generic voice variety, framed entries such as these are best treated as the anecdotic voice. That is of course not to say that studies should not take the generic nature of the frame's contents into account.

While Aizi is admittedly an invented figure, and perhaps therefore more malleable in this regard, there are plenty of entries about well-known historical figures which exhibit the same framing strategy. For example, one frequently encounters entries that recount conversational exchanges in which one named scholar-official tells a "joke" in the generic voice to another named scholar-official.

A Red Herring

The reader may be wondering how to classify an entry in which a named figure meets an unnamed figure, especially in cases whereby the latter is referred to by a generic societal role. Such examples certainly exist. While occasionally these are a slightly more elaborate, interlaced version of the aforementioned framing strategy, in the majority of cases they are not true overlaps. Rather, it is simply that the name of the interactee was not considered significant enough to be written down or remembered, and their social identity or position in the exchange is mentioned merely insofar as to set up the joke. For example:

> When Dongpo (Su Shi) was magistrate of Huzhou, he once took some guests on a trip to Mount Daochang. Leaving their attendants at the foot, they entered the mountain area, where they found a monk fast asleep against a door. In jest, Dongpo said, "*Kun kunshang kun*! ['the baldie slumbers at the threshold']". One of the guests responded, "Why not then '*Ding dingshang ding*? ['nailing the Buddhist headmound to a door']'".[12]

[12] Cao Chen, *Shehua lu*, 109.

> 東坡知湖州，嘗與賓客遊道場山，屏退從者而入，有僧憑門閽熟睡，東坡戲云：「髡閽上困。」有客即答曰：「何不用釘頂上釘？」

Here, Su Shi appears alongside generic-sounding “guests”, and a drowsy “monk”, but their identity is mentioned only insofar as to lay the necessary groundwork for these quips.

This situation occurs particularly often when the interaction in the anecdotic entry is between a well-known figure and a member of his household staff or a commoner of some other profession. There are also much rarer cases whereby the names of certain interactees have been excised by later compilers, which can result in a similar effect.[13] In short, the appearance of a character who seems ‘generic’ in an anecdotic voice entry does not represent a challenge to the two varieties, nor even is it an instance of overlap between the two varieties.

1.1.4. Compiling Approaches

The reader may be finding these two categories, which could be said to boil down to the binary of if a character is ‘named’ or ‘unnamed’, quite simple and uninspiring. But what gives them pertinence to this study is that they are representative of two very different kinds of compiling practices. In this sense they are analytically useful, and indeed, telling about the over landscape of Ming humour publication.

[13] For example, in the case of Northern Song chancellor Wang Anshi, there are cases of the same conversational exchange in circulation. Some mention his name, while others appear to have omitted it.

The entries found in Ming compilations can be filed away under ‘generic voice’ or ‘anecdotic voice’ with surprising ease. Most compilations stick mostly to one or the other, but there are compilations which contain a fairly even mix, such as *Appraisals of Laughs* (*Xiaozan* 笑贊), which we have encountered in the introduction. Indeed, at points in his preface Zhao Nanxing echoes the distinction between two varieties himself, remarking that “In that which is chronicled *in the written tradition* and appears *before our eyes*, there is no shortage of things to laugh about” (emphasis mine).[14] He nevertheless brings them together effortlessly into his collection “…I indiscriminately recorded seventy-two entries, wrote an appraisal for each, and titled it ‘Appraisals of Laughs’”.[15] Zhao’s compilation does not provide any further categorisation for its entries, nor does it otherwise arrange or distinguish between the two varieties. The result is a compilation that switches seamlessly between the generic voice to the anecdotic voice in no given order, taking the reader from “There was a man who was being beaten by his wife…”, to “When Zhang of Jiangling (Zhang Juzheng) was unwilling to return home to observe the filial mourning period…”, to “Wang Anshi said to Su Dongpo…”, to “In the North, male shamans are called *duangong*s 端公. There was a *duangong* who had taken on a disciple. One day…”, to “There was a diviner whose son would not apply himself to the study of the trade…”.[16]

Examples like *Appraisals of Laughs* are important because they show that despite for the most part appearing separately, the two varieties were, or at least could be, conceived of

[14] 書傳之所紀，目前之所見，不乏可笑者.
[15] 漫錄七十二則，各為之贊，名《笑贊》云.
[16] Extracts as follows: 一人被其妻採打……; 張江陵不肯丁憂……; 王安石向蘇東坡言……; 北方男子跳神，叫做端公。有一端公教著個徒弟，一日……; 卜者子不習本業……. Zhao Nanxing, “Xiaozan”, *Ming-Qing xiaohua sizhong*, entries 15–9.

as a single category of text, rather than two entirely distinct formats. Thus, it is neither arbitrary nor erroneous to bring them together under the umbrella category of 'humour compilation', as the evidence suggests they could also be viewed this way in the Ming.

1.2. Casualties of Categorisation

1.2.1. The "Lost Categories" of Ming Publication

In her pathbreaking exploration of late-Ming publishing culture *Home and the World*, Yuming He states:

> [T]he eighteenth-century condemnation of Ming book culture has had undeniably real and lasting consequences. Several of the books I have chosen for discussion in the following chapters have largely, if not completely, disappeared from the map of Chinese bibliographical tradition… [a] fundamental factor underlying the forgetting of these books, however, is that the very categories to which they belonged in the minds of Ming publishers and readers have been lost.[17]

As He goes on to explain, these "lost categories" formed the basis of contemporaneous modes of book consumption, which have been consequently forgotten and lie unresearched. The reconstruction of some of these modes is, broadly speaking, the task she sets herself in *Home and the World*, a mission she has accomplished admirably. Nevertheless, in outlining the fundamental issue here, He has posed a silent, yet gargantuan, challenge to future

[17] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 6.

scholarship. After all, the reconstruction of these "lost categories of publication" is a massive task which calls upon a large body of literature to chip away at it, piece by piece, "genre" by "genre". My own study hopes to make a very small contribution towards that aim by painting a picture of a group of texts I have termed 'humour compilations'. Because this dissertation is interested mostly in how people (that is, compilers and readers) viewed these books and their contents, while He Yuming's "modes of consumption" are certainly not irrelevant thereto, they are not a direct focus of this study. To build the basis for this study, it will suffice to set up 'humour compilations' as comparable group of texts, in other words, to demonstrate that they are category of their own.

From the perspective of their content alone, all the humour compilations here follow the rule set in the Introduction that "*all* of its entries must have *some element of humour*". Further to this, they adhere exclusively to the parameters of the 'generic' and 'anecdotic' voices, outlined in 1.1.[18] This alone is already a strong argument that they may be considered a category of their own. Another facet of their content that ties them together is the way there are some recurrent themes and traditions that are exclusive to this group of texts, chiefly the Aizi tradition, which is the topic of Chapter 3. However, this dissertation hopes to explore Ming perceptions of this group of texts, so it is not quite sufficient that to modern eyes they are similar enough in terms of content to be considered a category: there also needs to be evidence that they were viewed this way in the Ming. To this end, I now turn to the paratextual materials of the corpus to look for a kind of group identification.

[18] A caveat: "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" strays a little outside the parameters, but I have explained why it should still count in Chapter 2 (see 2.2.4.).

This section must broaden the scope to include humour compilations which appeared prior to 1573. While this study has been confined to Wanli humour compilations for reasons stated in the "Timing Rationale" (section 0.3.1.), it does not wish to misrepresent humour compilations as a Wanli phenomenon. On the contrary, these Wanli imprints were part of a tradition that had existed for a long time. As we shall find throughout this dissertation, that compilers acknowledged this and presented their compilations as such is one reason this should be understood as a cohesive category of texts.

1.2.2. Formulaic Titles

A glance at the Table of Contents of any modern anthologies with the focus of jokebooks or *xiaohua ji* 笑話集 (see 0.2.3. for examples), several naming patterns used for premodern humour compilations and humour sections become immediately evident. As outlined in 0.3.2., these anthologies select for a more restrictive category than the concepts of 'humour compilations' used in this dissertation. Nevertheless, the sections and texts covered there generally fall *within* my broader category, apart from in rare cases where a modern compiler has brought together a selection of humorous extracts from a compilation whose entries do not all contain some element of humour. Therefore, they make for a convenient starting point.

The first formula is ["laughs" (*xiao* 笑)] or ["jests" (*xie* 諧)] or ["jibes" (*xue* 謔)] + [reference to the textual content/compilation, often expressed via a metaphor]. We have encountered at least two examples of this already: the earliest known jokebook, the *Forest of*

Laughs (*Xiaolin* 笑林), and Feng Menglong's famous offering, the *Treasury of Laughs* (*Xiaofu* 笑府). During the Ming there was a *Thickets of Jests* (*Xiecong* 諧叢) and *Bogland of Jests* (*Xiesou* 諧藪), and as we shall discover in Chapter 2, "Jest History/Jest Histories"[19] (*Xieshi* 諧史) was a frequently-used title. We also meet a "Jesting Words" in Chapter 2, and a *Jest Stratagems* (*Xiece* 諧策) in Chapter 3. For *xue*, there was *An Effusion of Jibes* (*Xuelang* 謔浪, lit. "Waves of Jibes"). Creative metaphors are often involved to signify the book/section or its content, but whether "laughs", "jests" or "jibes", there is a clear and undeniable characterisation of the content as humorous in nature.

A second formula is [euphemism for laughing] + [textual form]. For example, the Song *Record for Flailing Over* (*Juedao lu* 絕倒錄) and the Ming *Record for Spitting Out Your Food* (*Penfan lu* 噴飯錄). In contrast to the former titles which refer to the content, they provide a declaration of what the text is to be used for. In short, they describe the function of the compilation, rather than the nature of its content. To be clear, these are not records and collections of descriptions of people laughing *per se*, but records and collections that promise to make their reader laugh.[20] This cannot help but bring to mind the definition of humour quoted in 0.3.2.: "the quality of being amusing, the capacity to elicit laughter or amusement".[21]

Whether the focus falls on the content or the function, the key point is that there is a central and primary emphasis on concepts related to humour or laughing. Whoever named

[19] See 2.2.4. for an explanation why there are two options in translation.

[20] Hence, I propose they are better translated using "to" or "for", as opposed to "of", as is sometimes seen in English renderings.

[21] *OED Online*. "humour | humor, n.", sense 9b. June 2021. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 27, 2021.

these texts and compilations, whether the original writer or compiler or a later re-publisher, desired to characterise these works as containing humorous content or carrying the function of provoking humour. The lack of crossover in titles is also conspicuous. Although there are other factors involved, such as the interference of later editors and the fact that these are presumably the only surviving examples from what was a larger corpus, there remains a vague indication of an awareness of other existing compilations and the consequent avoidance of using the same combination in the formula. This is a further hint that these works were conceived of as connected group of texts.

Occasionally, of course, texts are not named by those behind their production or recirculation, and particularly with the Song texts, the origin and timing of the name can be unclear. While these must be taken on a case-by-case basis, in general the names have been documented from Ming onwards, due to the frequency of Song texts being reprinted in the late-Ming publishing boom, which is convenient given the Wanli temporal vantage point of this dissertation. The fact that such titles were in circulation shows that readers and others who knew of the text in the Ming identified these as a humorous text. The patterns we see in naming indicates that there were a set of established ways to title a humour collection.

However, the above formulae were by no means employed by all publications that were humour compilations. Among the others, the preference for *xiao*, *xie* and *xue* ("laughs", "jests" and "jibes") is extremely prominent. We have already come across *Appraisals of Laughs* (*Xiaozan* 笑贊) in the Introduction. Other Ming publications included *Record of Jesting Exchanges* (*Yingxie lu* 應諧錄) and *Refined Jibes* (*Yaxue* 雅謔), and so on. Other compilations are named after humorous tropes like the Aizi tradition (see Chapter 3) or allude

to earlier texts with strongly humorous connotations, for example *Words of Banter* (*Tanyan* 談言). "Words of banter" is an allusion to a chapter of Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 "Records of the Grand Historian" which will feature prominently throughout this dissertation (e.g., 2.4.1., and 3.4.2.).

What these naming tendencies tell us is that humour compilations tended to cluster around specific vocabulary which was indicative of humour, particularly *xiao*, *xie* and *xue* (here rendered "laughs", "jests" and "jibes"). That is to say, Ming compilers tended to deliberately choose titles that indicated and emphasised humour, and these titles in turn made the nature of the compilation immediately evident to readers. The titling choices indicate a clear characterisation of this particular group of compilations and sections of compilations put in place by contemporaneous publishers and presumably accepted by contemporaneous readers. All this is further underscored by the fact that these titling patterns and keyword preferences were in continued use for such a long period of time. Titles appear to have been chosen with earlier and contemporaneous examples in mind, which indicates an awareness of a wider tradition of this specific kind of text.

1.2.3. Prefatory Commonalities

The same concepts that make a frequent appearance in humour compilation titles—*xiao*, *xie* and *xue*—also became central points of discussion in the paratexts of these publications. Further to this, the prefaces and other paratexts of humour compilations tend to

weave in the same textual allusions as each other. This is a clear sign that compilers and publishers conceived of these publications in a similar way, selecting their textual references and allusions from those which were viewed as applicable to a publication with these characteristics.

While Song humour compilations rarely contain (surviving) prefaces, in Ming compilations they are a regular feature. As indicated in the Methodology section (0.4.), commercial Wanli compilations incorporated this kind of paratext in abundance, and examples of them comprise the main primary source base of this dissertation. It was customary for prefatory material to ruminate on the theme of the work, and, where composed by a compiler or publisher, to mention something of the motivations behind and process of producing the book in question. Given that these books all revolved around humorous content of some kind, there were high levels of cohesion in the prefaces to these compilations, despite the fact that they were composed independently at different times by figures with different social backgrounds and positions within the publishing world.

Late-Ming humour compilers regularly also make a point of confessing their own enjoyment of jests, jibes and laughs (*xie*, *xue* and *xiao*). In a preface introduced in Chapter 3, Lu Cai (3.2.2.) states that "I have had a weakness for jibes (*xue*) since my youth, and when I get hold of one I am sure to make a note of it".[22] Likewise, Hu Wenhuan (2.3.1.) remarks that "[I] am also by nature fond of jests (*xie*)".[23] In the Introduction to this dissertation, we

[22] 余幼有謔癖，有所得必志之.
[23] 余生晚季世, 性亦好諧.

have seen Zhao Nanxing mention how "the laughs (*xiao*) and banter (*tan* 談) passed around in society…spring to mind from time to time and make me laugh. Recently this has been of assistance to me while living on my own, free of bothers".[24] Compilers then often go on to state that the process of compiling was one of selecting this specific variety of text. The aforementioned Lu Cai and Hu Wenhuan say, "So, I selected those [jibes (*xue*)] which were especially tasteful and collated them into a book"[25] and "So, I took up the jest (*xie*) histories of past and present and picked out several tens of pieces",[26] respectively. The compilers seem to have a very clear idea of what they are looking for, and by the means of their prefaces present the book as a compilation of this kind of text.

Another striking commonality is how often we find the same textual allusions and quotations used in humour compilation prefaces. Humour compilers tend to self-identify their own compilations with the same set of classical textual antecedents, which is a further indication that they viewed their publications in the same way as each other. For example, two frequently encountered references are "Biography of the Comics" (*Guji liezhuan* 滑稽列傳) in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Shiji* 史記 ("Historical Records"), discussed in 2.4.1., and the "Qiyu 淇奧" ode from the *Shijing* 詩經 ("Classic of Poetry", among other renderings), discussed in 2.4.2. These references are usually used as part of a rumination on the topic of *xie* or *xue*, to set up the overall theme of the book. Other frequently encountered allusions include the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, which appears in various guises in Hu Wenhuan's preface in Chapter 2 (see 2.3.1.). The *Zhuangzi* is widely acknowledged as a humorous text.

[24] 世所傳笑談….時或憶及，為之解頤，此孤居無悶之一助也.
[25] 因取其尤雅者，纂而成編.
[26] 故取古今諧史著書擇其數十篇.

As for *xie* and *xue* themselves, there is also evidence that some compilers viewed them quite interchangeably. Some prefaces, like that of Hu Wenhuan, weave in textual references of both "jibes" and "jests", despite the compilation in question nominally being one of "jests" ("Refined Collection of Jest Histories"). There is also the specific example of *Record of Tongue Flowers* (2.2.2.). This compilation contains two sections called "Jesting words" (*xieyu* 諧語) and "Jibing words" (*xueyu* 謔語). As the compiler's remarks at the beginning of the sections claim, "These two kinds are much the same with little difference, but one cannot help but have an ordering",[27] and "I split one category into two. Isn't [the very existence] of these two characters superfluous? …In order to use up the selected remarks, I ventured to set [these] two characters and that's all".[28] That Wu could make this kind of remark demonstrates that these two words were conceptually close in the Ming.

The attitudes towards this group of compilations expressed by the compilers, both in setting the titles and discussing their content in the preface, all point to the fact that they were seen as a similar kind of publication. Further, the compilers outwardly presented them in this way to their readership, who, guided by the view in the paratexts, were probably persuaded to concur. This, coupled with the observable similarities in content across the surviving examples outlined in section 1.1., allows us to view them as a category of publications, which could plausibly be described as a "genre". Based on this foundation, the subsequent chapters

[27] 此二種大同小異，不得不有先後.

[28] 一類而兩之. 非字之蛇足乎？… 吾請以盡之所取諸語定二字耳.

will explore various examples of such publications, and several central issues in the late-Ming publication of humour.

Chapter 2 – "Good Wood on Crowdpleasers": Humour Sections in Wider Wanli Compilations

2.1. Introduction

As discussed in the State of the Field sections 0.2.2. and 0.2.4., there has been a tendency in research on pre-modern Chinese humour publications to focus on a specific compilation as a case study. While this narrower view is valuable in other ways, the approach is less helpful in assessing the place of humour compilations across the broader landscape of Ming publishing, or in connecting the dots between this wider group of publications. This chapter will take a step towards remedying this issue by focusing on sections of humour which were compiled as part of wider collections whose content was not entirely humorous in nature. Arguably, compilations which made the deliberate editing decision to insert a humour section have a lot to tell us about how jokes and humour were perceived to slot into the wider social and intellectual terrain. Indeed, one thing this chapter hopes to impress upon the reader is the sheer broadness of the range of publications which carried a humour section. The compilations we will encounter here exhibit great variety in terms of style, compiler identity, publishing house, professed reading purpose, and in how the humour section is internally categorised. When combined, they can enable us to sketch up an idea of the concept, functions and perceptions of humour as aimed at slightly different groups within the Wanli readership.

After all, there were several practical differences in both the publishing and consumption of humorous material as part of a broader, categorised compilation versus as a standalone humour compilation.[1] For example, the books which appear in this chapter were printed, purchased and read for purposes outside of the humour they contain. Practically speaking, this widens their readership to people who were interested in them for reasons besides their humour content, as well as those not necessarily inclined to add a compilation of purely humorous content to their shelves. In turn, this wider readership had an impact on how those behind a given compilation presented its humorous content. In this case, the paratextual materials of these publications reveal a certain self-consciousness about the decision to include a humour section that is probably due to contributors' anticipation of some level of ambivalence or pushback. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, these compilers went to great lengths to justify the inclusion, almost to the point of defensiveness, and from this attitude it is possible to infer a wider prejudice, or at least an anticipated one, with regard to the humorous portion(s). However, at the end of the day, this was not enough to deter them from making the deliberate editing choice of including a humour section.

I will begin by introducing the compilations which appear in this chapter, before introducing the 1593 preface to "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" by Hu Wenhuan. This preface is representative in that it draws together many of the issues raised by other prefaces. The chapter will then take an in-depth look at a selection of these issues.

[1] Or, equally, single sections as presented by modern studies which pay inadequate attention to the compilation(s) to which they belonged.

2.2 Source Compilations

2.2.1. *Words in Six* 六語

Words in Six (*Liuyu* 六語) is prefaced Wanli 36 (1608). The high-ranking civil service career of its compiler Guo Zizhang 郭子章 (1543–1618, *jinshi* 1571) has made him the best documented of all our compilation editors.[2] Guo's career posted him across China and involved a number of military, judicial and examination-related positions. *Words in Six* was prefaced in 1608, the year he was granted permission to retire, but the death of its proofreader Zhang Yangmeng 張養蒙 (*jinshi* 1577) in 1602 suggests that it was at least for the most part compiled earlier. Zhang was another high-level bureaucrat. Seeing as he held the position of Left Vice Censor-in-Chief while Guo was Right Vice Censor-in-Chief, my conjecture is that the book came into being while the pair were colleagues between 1599 and 1602.

As its title suggests, the work contains a total of six themed sections, of which the humour section "Jesting Words" (*xieyu* 諧語) is the last, in 7 fascicles. It follows "Ballad Words" (7 fascicles) "Proverbial Words" (7), "Allegorical Words" (2), "Prophetic Words" (6), "Mocking Words" (2).[3] Each individual section carries a preface by Guo Zizhang

[2] L. Carrington Goodrich, "KUO Tzu-chang", *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 775.

[3] Chinese: "Ballad Words" (*yaoyu* 謠語); "Proverbial Words" (*yanyu* 諺語); "Allegorical Words" (*yinyu* 讔語); "Prophetic Words" (*chenyu* 讖語); "Mocking Words" (*jiyu* 譏語). There is a pattern at play: note how each category starts with the speech radical *yan* 言.

himself. The humour section in this case, “Jesting Words”, collects humorous exchanges in the anecdotic voice. The book is noticeably upfront about its compiling practices, collating humorous anecdotes in chronological order under dynastic subheadings from Warring States Qi right down to the “Great Ming” itself. The source text for each anecdote is provided in each instance, as illustrated in Figure 1. Up until the Song dynasty section, Guo relies mostly on major histories, and after that, on “brushnotes” (*biji* 筆記) writings and diaries. Some further content from the compilation will appear in section 4.3.1.

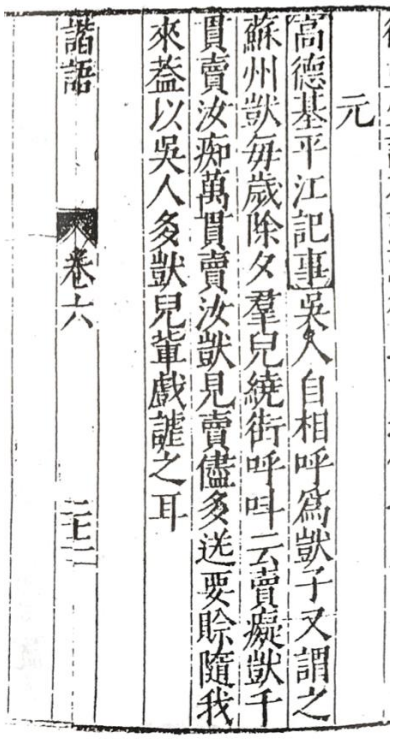
元
高德基平江記事吳人自相呼爲獃子又謂之
蘇州獃每歲除夕羣兒繞街呼叫云賣癡獃千
貫賣汝痴萬貫賣汝獃見賣儘多送要賒隨我
來蓋以吳人多獃兒輩戲謔之耳
諧語 卷六 三七

Figure 3. The sole entry in Jesting Words for the Yuan dynasty. Notice the dynastic subheading and boxed name of the source text.

2.2.2. *Record of Tongue Flowers* 舌華錄

Record of Tongue Flowers (*Shehua lu* 舌華錄) is prefaced Wanli 43 (1615). As its name might suggest, this is a compilation of entries in the anecdotic voice which recount remarks or exchanges between named individuals. While *Tongue Flowers* is similar to *Words in Six* insofar as it collates spoken exchanges from throughout history and the present dynasty, its categorisation strategy is dramatically different. The eighteen categories in *Tongue Flowers* are thematic and eclectic, ranging as wide as "Wise words", "Crazy words", "Rhymed words", and "Depraved words".[4] Each category has its own introductory remark. Unlike *Words in Six*, the anecdotes in these categories do not adhere to a strict chronological format, and instead jump between different periods.

Two of the humour sections, "Jesting words" (*xieyu* 諧語) and "Jibing words" (*xueyu* 謔語) make up the seventh and eighth sections respectively. While they are separate categories, there are hints that they were treated as a fairly similar concept in the compilation process. As Wu Yuan's remarks at the beginning of the chapters claim, "These two kinds are much the same with little difference, but one cannot help but have an ordering",[5] and "I split one category into two. Isn't [the very existence] of these two characters superfluous? …In order to use up the selected remarks, I ventured to set [these] two characters and that's all."[6] Certain annotations by Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1624) complicate this to an extent, for

[4] Respectively: *huiyu* 慧語; *kuangyu* 狂語; *yunyu* 韻語; *jiaoyu* 澆語.

[5] 此二種大同小異，不得不有先後.

[6] […] 一類而兩之. 非字之蛇足乎? […] 吾請以盡之所取諸語定二字耳.

example of one entry in "Jibing words", he remarks "This could go into 'Jesting words'".[7] While these are categories are reserved exclusively for humorous material, there are plenty of anecdotes in the other categories in which a particular individual tells a joke, or recount other kinds of humorous exchanges. That is to say, there is humour to be found throughout this compilation.

The actual production of its content seems to have been completed by two figures. The first is Wu Yuan 吳苑, who decided its 18 thematic categories and for each affixes an introductory remark. He also adds a short preface to the compilation as a whole (a "Little Intro"; *xiaoyin* 小引). The entries were selected by Cao Chen 曹臣 (1583–1647), who remains silent except through his compiling choices. The work was then proofread (*canding* 參訂) by Wu Yuan. However, the fame of these two men is outweighed both in their day and ours by that of those who affix full prefaces. One is playwright and literary man Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 (d.1621). It is noteworthy that this was not Pan's only preface to a humour compilation; he also prefaced the *Xuetao Jesting History* 雪濤諧史 by Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553–1605), a close associate of Pan and the famous writers, the Yuan brothers of Gong'an school (Gong'an pai 公安派).[8] The third brother of the trio, Yuan was commissioned to write the other preface for *Tongue Flowers*. As mentioned, Yuan also provides short annotations appraising the entries throughout the printed edition. The fact that two famous literary men have composed endorsements for an otherwise unconnected work gives *Tongue*

[7] 可入諧語. Cao Chen, *Shehua lu*, 601.

[8] This term refers to a group literary men centred around the three Yuan brothers, named for its location in present-day Hubei. It is often understood in juxtaposition to other groups like the Former and Later Seven Masters (*Qianhou qizi* 前後七子) on account of its advocations of individuality, spontaneity and vernacular forms of Chinese. It will appear again in 4.1.

Flowers a strikingly commercial character. The Methodology section 0.4.2. has discussed how Yuan Zhongdao's preface is fairly blasé in its description of his commissioning.

2.2.3. *Compilation for the Augmentation of Knowledge* 益智編

The *Compilation for the Augmentation of Knowledge* (*Yizhi bian* 益智編)[9] was prefaced Wanli 42 (1614), with compiler's opening remarks dated Wanli 41 (1613). As the title of the compilation might suggest, it diverges from the above compilations in both premise and professed purpose. Nevertheless, it likewise includes what we may consider a humour section. The professed concept of the overall compilation is to collect anecdotes in which historical figures dealt adeptly with adverse situations. As the very first line of its "General Scope and Regulations" announces: "What this compilation has incorporated are all the marvellous [instances] of people of the past in their management of affairs".[10] As such, it is an anecdotic collection, and the primary purpose is supposedly didactic: the reader is encouraged to keep the approaches in mind and apply them should comparable issues arise in his own dealings. This practical facet brings to mind another type of Ming publication called "daily-use encyclopaedias" (*riyong leishu* 日用類書) which professed similarly to equip readers with the know-how required in real life situations.

The compilation's prefatory materials make much of its goal of learning from wise men of the past for present day dilemmas, and the categories (discussed below) are shaped

[9] Further detail on the book and its editions may be found in Vol. 1 of Pierre-Étienne Will, ed., *Handbooks and Anthologies for Officials in Imperial China*, Vol. 1, 53–5 (0043).
[10] 是編所收皆古人經世之妙.

heavily around the various kinds of situations one might encounter during an official career. These reference purposes were no doubt one facet of its consumption. However, this is a compilation which would have served further purposes, including supplying inspiration for civil service examinations, which would ask questions concerning how to approach a particular situation as an official. Examination relevance was a fail-safe when it came to ensuring a good sale of a book.[11]

There was also an element of pure entertainment, in that this long compilation of 41 fascicles it allowed its readers to vicariously experience the life of a high-flying governmental official. Wang Cheng-hua 王正華 has observed how despite the self-declared practical purpose of Jianyang daily-use encyclopaedias (*riyong leishu* 日用類書), these were often read by the literate non-elite as a window unto the lives of the elite.[12] One could even say the anecdotic approach of *Augmentation of Knowledge* lent itself even more readily to a vicarious governmental-official-experience. Something that speaks to this is the fact that there is a roughly even distribution across categories except for "Warfare" (*bingrong* 兵戎), which at 12 fascicles outnumbers all others by far. While there was plenty of conflict throughout the Ming, direct involvement as an official was hardly common enough to warrant this level of prominence based on the stated utilitarian purpose of the book alone. Wang Hung-tai 王鴻泰 has noted the a fashion among late-Ming society for all things "martial" (*wu* 武).[13] The disproportionate emphasis on matters of warfare in *Augmentation of Knowledge* can be read as a manifestation of this, which underscores the entertainment

[11] Joseph McDermott, "The Ascendence of the Imprint", 82.

[12] Wang Cheng-hua, "Lifestyles, Knowledge, and Cultural Products: Fujian Daily-Use Encyclopedias".

[13] Wang Hung-tai, "Wugong, wuxue, wuyi, wuxia".

function. In sum, as well as acting as a reference work for real-life problems, the compilation was possibly also used as examination reference, and definitely for pure entertainment. This combination of major book-selling functions is indicative of a very commercially-oriented publication.

Augmentation of Knowledge is noticeably larger than the other three compilations at 41 fascicles, and its categorisation system is more elaborate. The anecdotes are split into twelve main categories (*lei* 類), which take the form of broad themes, such as "Governance" (*zhengshi* 政事), "Sentencing and Imprisonment" (*xingyu* 刑獄), and "Frontiers" (*biansai* 邊塞). The anecdotes within each category are then grouped under further sub-categories, mostly concerning specific situations one might encounter. For example, the relevant sub-category for us is "Jests and Indirect Criticism" (*xiefeng* 諧諷), which is found in the "Argumentation and Speeches" (*shuoci* 說詞) main category (4 fascicles). It is one of six other sub-categories: "Envoy Missions", "Reception of Incoming Envoys", "Forming Alliances", "Good Persuasions", "Good Remonstrations", and "Disputative Talent".[14] To be sure, the humour section occupies a very minor position compared to the other compilations here, but to accurately assess of the status of humour in Ming publications we must not overlook such examples.[15]

[14] Chinese, respectively: *fengshi* 奉使; *dui laishi* 對來使; *menghui* 盟會; *shanci* 善說; *shanjian* 善諫; *biancai* 辯才.

[15] While this relative insignificance at first makes it seem out-of-place here, it should be seen as an argument for its inclusion in this chapter. To focus only on those compilations which give prominence to their humour sections risks mischaracterising the general view of the publishing landscape.

The principal compiler of this massive undertaking, at least in name, was Sun Nengchuan 孫能傳 (1590–1665), who supplies an "Opening remarks" (*tici* 題辭), just prior to his *jinshi* success in 1616. The book was published by a younger brother, Sun Nengzheng 孫能正, who probably managed the printing activities of Ewei tang (鄂韡堂), just north of Mount Siming 四明山. He affixes his own "Little Intro" (*xiaoyin* 小引) immediately before the contents. All contributors associate themselves with Siming 四明, an area in Zhejiang located at a central point between modern-day Shaoxing, Ningbo and Taizhou. Another Siming friend (*youren* 友人) who had a hand in the compilation process was Xie Yingchen 謝應宸, who writes his own note before the "General Scope and Regulations".

The main preface (*xu* 序) is by Wu Minglei 鄔鳴雷 (1566–1621), a slightly senior successful exam candidate from the same area. While other collections such as *Tongue Flowers* commission prefaces from literary figures, the choice to request the endorsement of a successful working civil servant underscores the book's professed purpose as a collection of model examples for application to one's dealings as an official.

2.2.4. *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* 胡氏粹編

This paper will foreground the preface to "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" (*Xieshi cuibian* 諧史粹編) from *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* (*Hushi cuibian* 胡氏粹編),

which was prefaced Wanli 21 (1593),[16] making it the earliest collection studied in this chapter. Considering his impressive stature in the publishing world of the late Ming, little information remains on the life of the titular "Mr. Hu", that is, Hu Wenhuan 胡文煥 (b.1558?).[17] This is a classic and frustrating case of the reluctance of pre-modern sources to associate members of the exam-taking class with their more worldly (read: money-making) printing activities.[18] Nevertheless, Xiang Zhizhu 向志柱 has assembled a good amount of biographical information from Hu's compositions, publications and letters in his 2008 monograph on *Mr. Hu's Refined Collections*,[19] while Benjamin Elman has broached his biography and publishing activities when looking at one of Hu's encyclopaedic publications.

It is safe to say that Hu Wenhuan was a big figure in the publishing world of the Wanli reign. Mostly active within the modern-day Hangzhou area, his publishing enterprise spanned and sustained print shops in both Hangzhou and Nanjing,[20] two of the major hubs of publishing and literary activity in their day. The Hu enterprise was extremely prolific, overseeing the production of hundreds of volumes over a single decade. This has led some to estimate that he was the most prolific Hangzhou publisher of his time.[21] Something of his stature can be reconstructed once we notice that, unlike several of the other compilations in

[16] Xiang Zhizhu provides a description of the editions and collection background *Refined Compilations*. Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 1–3.

[17] Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 11. As Xiang Zhizhu himself admits, this is a very daring estimate. But it is nevertheless a helpful place to start, and indeed much "better than nothing" (*liao sheng yu wu* 聊胜于无), as he puts it.

[18] As Kai-wing Chow memorably remarks, members of the *shishang* 士商 class preferred to identify with the *shi* facet of their identity over the *shang*. *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 101–3.

[19] Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 8–14.

[20] Benjamin Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 35.

[21] Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 86.

this chapter which have contracted a well-known literary or civil figure to compose the preface, *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* is a complete in-house job. Its appended prefaces and postfaces are nominally by a team of three principal contributors: Hu himself, a frequent collaborator and Hu's own fraternal nephew. In other words, this "Mr. Hu" could ensure a successful circulation without the aid of external recommendation. His surname alone was enough to indicate to consumers which "Mr. Hu" was meant, and it is inserted into the overall titles as a brand of sorts.[22]

Hu's studio, Wenhui tang 文會堂 ("Studio for the Assembly of Writings" or "for Literary Gatherings"), has been better known for its publications on medicine and musicology in line with academic leanings towards these topics, and more recently, his encyclopaedic compilations. However, Hu Wenhuan's publishing interests ranged more widely than this, and *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* illustrates this well. Like many publishers of his day, Hu came from several generations of book collectors.[23] A large book collection represented a considerable advantage for a publisher, given the nature of the task, which Yuming He has described as "working with a pool of resources that was largely shared, editors of different book projects competed to produce novel and distinctive versions of widely popular textual genres".[24] This process is manifest in the categorisation of the publication, which is ordered into five themed "Refined Compilations" (*cuibian* 粹編) as follows: "Unofficial Historians" (8 fascicles); "Literary Digest" (6); "Jest Histories" (2);

[22] This draws inevitable parallels to the better-known self-promoting publisher Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 of Jianyang. Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit*, 156–60. Yu is often referred to in scholarship via his *hao* Wentai 文臺.

[23] Benjamin Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 35.

[24] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 74–5.

"Allegories" (2); and "Letters" (2).[25] Each section is given two prefaces, the first by Hu Wenhuan, the second by Zhuang Rujing 莊汝敬, his friend and frequent publishing collaborator. Each also appends a postface (*ba* 跋) by fraternal nephew Hu Guangsheng 胡光盛.[26] Although this could not be called a standalone humour compilation, as Xiang Zhizhu points out, humorous material may be found throughout the collection.[27]

The entries in the "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" section are more elaborate in form than the short exchanges collected by the other collections. In fact, they are "anthropomorphic biographies": a specific form of writing which borrows the typical format of the biography (*zhuanji* 傳記), but instead provides "accounts of the lives of objects rather than real historical figures… a double text: a biography of a person's life and deeds, and a treatise containing specific knowledge of an object", in Huijun Mai's words.[28] In modern Chinese scholarship, these are known as "*jiazhuan* 假傳", which is occasionally found in (potentially misleading) English translation as "pseudo-biography".[29] Huijun Mai has rightly

[25] Chinese: "Unofficial Historians" (*baijia* 稗家); "Literary Digest" (*youlan* 遊覽); "Jest Histories" (*xieshi* 諧史); "Allegories" (*yuwen* 寓文); and "Letters" (*cunzha* 寸札). For more detail, see Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 34–8.

[26] The matching bookending of prefaces and postfaces and matching names of the five *Refined Compilations* are suggestive that they were intended as a set, but also left the possibility open for standalone purchase and circulation. This provision of different options is perhaps a commercial strategy of sorts. In any case, that the *Refined Compilations* were at least in some cases a set qualifies it for this discussion.

[27] Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 40–4. Xiang looks at the humour (*huixiewen* 詼諧文) of the *Refined Collections* as a whole in Chapter 7, 205–19. He takes a literary studies approach and does not involve the prefaces, so there is not a great deal of overlap with this dissertation.

[28] Huijun Mai, "The Double Life of the Scallop", 150. This article provides a useful exploration of how the anthropomorphic biography format intersected with intellectual and literary trends in the Song. While the format pre-dates the Song, the fact that it seems to have flourished in the Song is yet another example of how the humour compilations of the Ming made use of and built upon Song content. Prof. Mai kindly shared a copy of her article when a global pandemic rendered it inaccessible to me.

[29] For an English-language overview of the format and a few examples, see Herbert Franke, "Literary Parody in Traditional Chinese Literature: Descriptive Pseudo-Biographies".

avoided this, instead coining the term "anthropomorphic biography". This is a more apt description of the form, which I recommend to future studies. I will employ "anthropomorphic biography" for the format and "jest histories" (*xieshi* 諧史) in reference to the texts themselves, since for the purposes of this dissertation it is important to retain Hu Wenhuan's contemporaneous characterisation of the format and the humorous quality thereby emphasised to his Ming readers. Hu Wenhuan was not the first to use the term "Jest Histories": Hu's use of the term (Wanli 21, 1593) was anticipated by the Wanli 7 (1579) *Jest Histories* (also *Xieshi* 諧史) by Xu Changji 徐常吉 whose preface implies he coined the term, and succeeded by the Wanli 43 (1615) *Expanded Jest Histories* (*Guang xieshi* 廣諧史), published by Chen Bangjun 陳邦俊, which has included Hu Wenhuan's contributions.[30] As Xiang Zhizhu has illustrated by counting the amount of contributors and contributions in Chen Bangjun's collection, which is the largest, this form of writing experienced a boom in the Ming,[31] which is unlikely to have resulted from the favourable circumstances with regard to the preservation of Ming materials alone.

These "jest histories" each take the life story of an object or animal and tell it through the life story of an invented human, whose name, attributes and situations encountered mimic that of the object in question. Hu Wenhuan's collection contains 47 such biographies, which have been arranged thematically under the following categories: "Body Parts", "Gems and Jewels", "Utensils", "Food and Drink", "Medicines", "Flowers and Trees", "Birds and

[30] The Xu Changji collection does not seem to have survived, but its preface is preserved as part of *Expanded Jest History*. See Chen Bangjun, *Guang xieshi*, 203.

[31] Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 208.

Beasts", and "Bugs and Insects", and "Astronomy".[32] Puns and other kinds of wordplay play a huge role in the format. They are woven throughout the stories in order to sustain the two parallel stories of a human and the object, but are already found in the names of the subjects. For example, "The Biography of Scholar Kong Fang" (*Kong Fang sheng zhuan* 孔方生傳), follows the life story of money. The name "Kong Fang" is a pun: while "Kong" is on the one hand a perfectly inconspicuous Chinese surname, on the other it carries the meaning of "hole", while "Fang" means "square". Thus, the name turns out be a reference to the square holes in the coinage of the time.

As noted in Chapter 1, this is the one compilation covered in this dissertation that does not fall neatly into the anecdotic voice category. There is certainly a case for us to understand it as an extended, or at least related, form of the anecdotic voice, not least because such biographies were always named and specific, but moreover because the structure of the pre-modern Chinese biography can be described an amalgamation of brief anecdotic snapshots of the subject's life from which the reader could infer his character, with other customary structures top and tail. Regardless of whether or not it is possible or useful to stretch the definition of the anecdotic voice this far, however, it is beyond dispute that Hu Wenhuan both considered and presented the compilation as humorous in nature, from its title to the contents of its preface. This is a humour publication, and is therefore not out of place in this selection of compilations.[33] Furthermore, though the name "jest histories" (*xieshi* 諧史)

[32] For a list of the entry titles, see either the section contents page of the reproduction: Hu Wenhuan, *Hushi cuibian*, 357–8, or Xiang Zhizhu, *Hu Wenhuan 'Hushi cuibian' yanjiu*, 51.

[33] Further to this, the extant editions of *Appraisals of Laughs* (from the Introduction) also append an anthropomorphic biography following the seventy-two entries, which would be a further link with the "jest histories" and the generic/anecdotic varieties, but it is unclear as to whether this was included in the early editions.

was used for at least three anthropomorphic biography compilations, it did not belong exclusively to them. There had been a Song dynasty *Jest History* (also *Xieshi* 諧史) by Shen Chu 沈俶, and Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553–1605), who was active at the same time, also compiled *The Xuetao Jest History* (*Xuetao xieshi* 雪濤諧史).[34] Neither of these are collections of anthropomorphic biographies, so in choosing this name, Hu placed the compilation into a wider tradition of humour compilations as well as within the narrower category of anthropomorphic biography compilations.

2.3. A Publisher's Take on Publishing Humour – Hu Wenhuan

2.3.1. Preface to the "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories"

The preface to the humour section of Hu Wenhuan's compilation draws into one place many of the common allusions and concerns expressed in the paratextual material of the other collections. Hu Wenhuan's perspective represents that of both a compiler and a publisher, while its rare description of contrasting reader reactions to the compilation offers us a valuable glimpse of contemporaneous attitudes towards jokes and humorous publications. Below is a translation in full:

Preface to the "Refined Collection of Jest Histories"
By Hu Wenhuan (Defu) of Qiantang

[34] And indeed, the naming approach of "history" (*shi*) in works humour (though not necessarily paired with *xie*) would go on to be used in the Qing and Republican eras, and has even been borrowed for recent monographs. See Rea, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China*, 8.

The *Zhuangzi* says, “The *Qixie* is a record of the bizarre”. That would make “jests” (*xie*) the father of the written tradition. Now, that which when spoken becomes words and when written becomes letters, which values properness and insight—what need has [literature] for jests? It was said by the Grand Historian, “Words of banter indirectly strike a chord, which can be a means to resolve discord”. For this reason, he composed the “Biographies of the Comics”, with Chunyu Kun among their ranks. Subsequently, in the Han, Dongfang Shuo took up and carried on this style. In the [Southern] Liang, Wu Jun took up and made a sequel to the book.[35] And following this, “jest history” works became very abundant. But if they were merely intent on jesting, and without literariness to savour, without principles to heed, enclosing no lessons to be learned and with unaffecting emotivity, then why would they be worth picking up? If there is [just] one of those four within, while they are “jests”, at the same time they are not. The *Odes* say, “given to jibes, yet ne’er to excess”. I suppose this is what it is trying to convey?

I was born later, into this sordid age, and am also by nature fond of jests. So, I took up the jest histories of past and present and picked out several tens of pieces. I even ventured to affix my own compositions in between them, bound them together and had the blocks carved. I was about to release it to the world as nothing but an aid for the venting of moods. But when a guest happened to see it, he sighed and said, “Why just for venting moods?! The literature can be savoured and the principles heeded. There are lessons to contemplate and emotivity to absorb. In this lives on very much what the Grand Historian had in mind”.

Then there was another guest who said, “You turned your mind towards Sima Qian, and learning his steps has ended in this [futile imitation]. You’re making excuses for empty words, wasting good wood for the sake of crowdpleasers!” And so I have defied them—sigh! The opinions of the guests diverged to this extent. How am I to know which of them is right and which is wrong? I just happened to be on the receiving end of it, that’s all.

諧史粹編序。錢唐胡文煥德夫撰。莊子曰：《齊諧》者，志怪者也。然則諧之為書傳之父矣。夫出之為言，作之為文，貴正貴達，何以諧為？ 太史公有云：「談言微中；可以解紛。」故著《滑稽傳》，淳于髡列焉。嗣是漢有東方朔起繼其風，梁有吳均起續其書，而諧史之作，於是乎甚盛矣。使其一於諧，而無文之可味、理之可聽，規鑑之弗寓、感格之弗興；何足取哉！四者有一焉，雖諧猶弗諧也。《詩》曰：「善戲謔兮、不為虐兮」其斯之謂歟？余生晚季世，性亦好諧。故取古今諧史著書擇其數十篇。間亦竊附己作，編而梓之。將以公諸世為遣興一助已耳。適有客見而嘆曰：「詎特遣興乎哉？文可味，理可聽，規鑑可觀，感格可籍。深有太史公之意存焉。」 迺又有客曰：「子移心於彼，學步於此。託物舞文，灾木媚世！」吾則有所不取也。嗟嗟！客論不齊乃爾。余又烏知其孰為是非。余亦聽之而已。

[35] Wu Jun 吳鈞 (469–520) authored *Qixie, Continued* 續齊諧記, a collection of mythological stories.

In prefaces (*xu* 序) it was a standard approach to trace one's publication back to earlier examples of the genre or topic, and thereby position it within a wider tradition or discussion. So it is not surprising that Hu Wenhuan should begin his ruminations on the topic of *xie* 諧 "jests", with a nod to historical precedent. What *is* perhaps surprising, however, is his choice of precedent, which is (the *Zhuangzi*'s mention of) the long-lost text *Qixie*.[36] This is likely in jest itself: a wilful misinterpretation of title from something like "The Harmony of Qi" to the "Jests of Qi", or even "Amalgamated Jests". Several commentators had already pointed out that Zhuangzi seems to be quoting a made-up text here,[37] as Hu was presumably aware, and in any case, *Qixie* was more likely understood as a book of mythical stories, not a humorous text. However vacuously, this reference permits Hu to carve the history and tradition of the theme and genre deeper into pre-unification terrain than other Ming humour paratexts dare, all the while thematically piggybacking on the *Zhuangzi*, the humorous flair of which is, and was, widely acknowledged. The *Zhuangzi* appears often in other humour compilation prefaces.

Having placed his topic on somewhat of an unreachable (and suspected to be non-existent) pedestal, Hu Wenhuan asks a big question: "What need has [literature] for jests? 何以諧為？ ". This question could be said to implicitly acknowledge of an uncomfortable

[36] I suspect Hu Wenhuan mentions *Qixie* here in line with his predecessor *A Jest History*, compiled by Xu Changji, whose preface also opens with *Qixie.* There it is used as a springboard from which to ruminate on the meaning of *xie*, rather than on the place of *xie* within the written tradition. See 2.5.2. for a further discussion.
[37] As mentioned, the sequel by Wu Jun that Hu namedrops here is certainly not a jokebook or humour compilation. And readers would surely have known that the line from the *Qixie* quoted by the *Zhuangzi* in this mention of the text, which Hu has omitted, is a description of the mythical *peng* 鵬 bird, not a jest.

contradiction entailed by his placing of "jesting" within the elevated jurisdiction of the written tradition (*shuchuan* 書傳). Sweeping this away through an appeal to the Grand Historian (see 2.4.1.), Hu then proffers four criteria for worthwhile literature, which may be paraphrased as follows: a pleasingly decorative writing style, the presence of (Confucianist) principles, didactic worth and emotive effectiveness.

The preface then takes a personal turn in which Hu confesses his own proclivity for jests. There, he deprecates the worth of this humour section in two ways: first by noting how casually it was thrown together in his leisure time—a common claim in humour prefaces;[38] and second by claiming his original intention for the book just to be "for the venting of moods", that is, to be read as a mere diversion. In other words, Hu is implying that the work is of little didactic or moral value, and wishes lower the readers' expectations in that regard. While these are in part customary expressions of self-deprecation and humility on the part of a book publisher, on some level they still have the effect of distancing the publication from said publisher. What follows, however, is an even more intriguing turn.

2.3.2. Hu Wenhuan's Two Guests: A Window on Reader Response

Having granted the reader limited access to his own intentions, then, Hu Wenhuan turns to introduce the pre-publication comments of two unwitting anonymous reviewers. We would be unwise to take Hu's two guests literally as encounters that actually took place, even

[38] For instance, *Appraisals of Laughs* (*Xiaozan* 笑贊), with which this dissertation began.

if they had been inspired by real events. The two guests are best interpreted as fictional devices through which Hu can voice ideas which might be unseemly coming from the originator of the book.

Both voices are exaggerations: one gushes with enthusiasm, while the other is critical almost to the point of personal insult, even if we assume a relationship which permitted this guest to tease Hu in this manner. Nevertheless, for the device to work, their responses should not stray too far from opinions Hu Wenhuan believed the book could reasonably encounter once it entered circulation. This means that through these two "guests", however indirectly, we can catch a glimpse of the Ming readership.[39] The guests' exaggerated, contrasting views frame the opposite ends of a consumer spectrum as envisaged by a publisher, which his publication (and other Wanli humour compilations) could be reasonably expected to encounter.

The intriguing thing here, and of course the reason Hu Wenhuan reserves a space for them in his preface in the first place, is the sharp contrast to their responses. The first guest praises the work's accomplishment of the four aforementioned criteria and asserts that even Sima Qian, the Grand Historian himself, would approve. The second guest declares the work a failure with regard to what Hu set out to accomplish, and further implies that Hu misusing

[39] I have translated *ke* 客 vaguely as "guest". The term could be interpreted something like "acquaintance", and could even come close to "customer", which is perhaps too daring, but really would drive the readership parallel home. The point to note is that Hu presents them as figures who were uninvolved the book project. They are unimplicated and impartial, in the same sense as the modern Chinese term for "objective": *keguan* 客觀 , lit. "as viewed by a guest".

his responsibility as a learned man with the ability and means to educate for the sake of publishing popular works of little moral value.

We will begin by taking a closer look at the first guest:

> But when a guest happened to see it, he sighed and said, "Why just for venting moods?! The literature can be savoured and the principles heeded. There are lessons to contemplate and emotivity to absorb. In this lives on very much what the Grand Historian had in mind".
>
> 適有客見而嘆曰：「詎特遣興乎哉？文可味，理可聽，規鑑可觀，感格可籍。深有太史公之意存焉。」

So, on one side we have the first guest, the true convert. Not content with perceiving them as casual leisure reading ("for the venting of moods"), he aggrandises this book of jest histories to the highest echelon of literature, affirming its literary quality, Confucianist principles, didactic worth and emotivity in one gushing breath of enthusiasm, before likening it to the all-time greatest work of history. In the process, the compiler-publisher finds his own stated purpose of casual perusal abruptly discounted and thrown aside, in favour of some aggrandised, and unachievable greater purpose. Indeed, one senses a touch of disdain on Hu Wenhuan's part, as the melodramatic gushing reaching us via his brush seems intended elicit scornful comic amusement from the reader. So, while at face value this might seem like high praise, the comments of the first guest conversely aim to lower the expectations of the reader: this is Hu Wenhuan's way of pointing towards areas in which the compilation may have merit beyond "venting moods", while simultaneously setting an upper limit in that regard.

Nevertheless, this guest can be taken as an exaggerated version of those keen members of the readership that were by that point accustomed to humorous texts and accepted them wholeheartedly: the kind of consumer who might purchase standalone humour

publications. If this inflation is the highest imaginable praise, though, we should pay note to the fact that it remains tethered to the previously outlined external criteria. That is to say, not even this most eager supporter would suggest that humour has some other innate quality that validates their existence. This ties into the pre-modern Chinese didactic ideals and prescriptions for any kind of literature, and indeed directly to humour, "playing the comic emptily" (*kong xi guji* 空戲滑稽), or "humour for humour's sake" as rendered by Weihe Xu.[40] By contrast, Hu Wenhuan's original intention of "venting moods" now seems unacceptable.

The adverse reaction of Hu's second guest is delivered with equal melodrama:

> Then there was another guest who said, "You turned your mind towards Sima Qian, and learning his steps has ended in this [futile imitation]. You're making excuses for empty words, wasting good wood for the sake of crowdpleasers (lit: bringing trees to ruin for the sake of enthralling society')!"
>
> 迺又有客曰:「子移心於彼，學步於此。託物舞文，灾木媚世！」

The *Zhuangzi* is alluded to again here, through his "learning the steps" remark. This is short for "learning the Handan steps" (*xuebu Handan* 學步邯鄲), which is to say, to attempt an imitation of others' accomplished manner of doing something, only to fail, and moreover forget the way one used to do it in the process.[41] The phrase is a reference to a youngster who tried to learn Handan people's way of walking, but could not manage it, ended up forgetting his original way of walking, and had to crawl back home. It is likely that Hu Wenhuan is hoping to bring to his readers' minds the *Zhuangzi* passage that gave rise to this: after the logician Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (in Hu Wenhuan's position) claims himself to be on

[40] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 68. A differing view on this is expressed by the preface discussed in 4.4.2.

[41] *Zhuangzi*, Outer Chapters, 10:10. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 187.

Zhuangzi's level (punching above his weight), the Daoist Prince Mou 公子牟 (in the second guest's position) launches into a mocking tirade, comparing Gongsun to a frog in a well, a mosquito trying to carry a mountain, and a millipede trying to run as fast as the Yellow River: "aren't your [instruments] too small [for the purpose]? Get lost!"[42] Finally, he invokes the Handan analogy as a mikedrop, leaving Gongsun Long cowed and speechless: "Gongsun Long's mouth hung agape and his tongue stood on end. He broke into a run and scurried off",[43] which could be said to mirror Hu's own stunned response and the way he hurriedly draws the preface to a close following the second guest's remarks. The parallels are palpable: it was not just anyone that Gongsun Long had compared himself to but Zhuangzi, who is famous for coming up with humorous analogies with deeper meanings, which have continued to be discussed for millennia. Meanwhile, Hu Wenhuan attempts to make humour with deeper meanings and inadvertently finds himself compared with Sima Qian, who famously outlined how humour can have a deeper, moralistic uses. Clearly, Hu Wenhuan is poking fun at himself, but by that same token draws two implicit parallels: Hu Wenhuan with Zhuangzi, and "Jest Histories" with the *Zhuangzi*.[44]

Just as we have seen for the first guest, the deliberate exaggeration serves to downgrade the seriousness with which the reader takes the second's view on "Jest Histories", but crucially, the parallels that have been drawn in the process remain. Nevertheless, to the eyes of this guest, Hu Wenhuan is no Sima Qian. He has overestimated his capabilities and

[42] 不亦小乎！子往矣!

[43] 公孫龍口呿而不合，舌舉而不下，乃逸而走.

[44] In the 1930s, Lin Yutang dubbed Zhuangzi the "father of Chinese humour". This presents an interesting parallel with Hu Wenhuan's opening line. Rea, *The Age of Irreverence*, 147.

his chapter has ended up as a failed imitation. But again, in a way that is similar to the first guest, this does not go as far as to challenge the premise that humour has potential to be worthwhile and carry deeper meanings. In the second guest's eyes humour *can* have this purpose; it is just that this lies beyond the abilities of Hu Wenhuan. The possibility itself is left open, aided by the fact that the deliberate exaggeration has reduced the credibility of the second guest.

The "failed imitation" part is just one of two charges the second guest lays against Hu Wenhuan and his compilation. The next charge is directed specifically at Hu's position as a publisher, and is particularly pertinent to this study since it can be taken more broadly to reflect views on the publishing industry of the times, and the publication of humorous content. This time, Hu's guest levels his censure less at the content than at the compiler himself. He implies that Hu was not imitating in earnest in any case, but rather, using higher ideals to unconvincingly dress up something for "venting moods" with a greater purpose. The "wasting good wood on crowdpleasers" remark effectively accuses Hu Wenhuan, that famous and prolific publisher, of misusing his position as a learned man with both the ability and means to produce knowledge and educate, to instead publish attractive well-selling books of little further value. The second guest's emphasis on didacticism means he comes close to the unyielding Cheng-Zhu Confucianist pedant, the "rotten scholar" (*furu* 腐儒) that was a common stock character in late-Ming humour compilations,[45] and thus provokes the publisher to pivot the satirical gaze onto him.

[45] For example, the second section of Feng Menglong's compilation *Treasury of Laughter* 笑府 is dedicated to such figures. See Hsu, *Feng Menglong's Treasury of Laughs*, 55–83.

If the first guest can be taken as an exaggerated form of those most enthusiastic consumers of humour, this second guest is an exaggerated form of precisely that section of society that compilers felt their broader collections stood a chance of reaching, while standalone humour collections did not. By airing the guests' ideas in this way, Hu implicitly invites readers to consider to which camp they themselves belong. His attempts to draw attention to the worth of humour in his preface, as well as the prefatory strategies we will encounter in the following sections, were written with the latter group of readers in mind. As for Hu Wenhuan, after granting both "guests" some airtime, he shrugs off the issue without taking sides, "Sigh! The opinions of the guests diverged to this extent. How am I to know which of them is right and which is wrong?" and publishes the work regardless. We will revisit his side of the story in the conclusion to this chapter (2.5.).

2.4. "Wasting Good Wood on Crowdpleasers 灾木媚世": Pre-emptive Defences of Humour

By way of his preface, Hu Wenhuan has inadvertently provided the modern-day historian with a sketch of the social position of humour compilations in the late Ming. Particularly useful is the voice of his less-persuaded guest, which gives a tangibility to what is never overtly stated, and yet can be discerned between the lines of these compilations through the subtle, yet noticeable, defensive tone which permeates all of them.

The choice to include a humour-themed section into a wider compilation of topics was a very deliberate one, and regardless of a publisher's stature or means, represented a non-negligible investment in the block carving and printing process. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, these broader compilations opened humorous material up to a wider readership, who may not otherwise be inclined to add a standalone, or predominantly, humorous compilation to their shelves. The compilers' awareness of this and their self-consciousness in this regard is manifested in the measures taken in the prefaces to counter any criticism. For several, one gets the sense that, unlike the other categories included in the collection, it was not self-evident why a humour section might be included in the first place. Since these prefaces are paratexts directly aimed at the reading public, they have much to tell us about currents of thought within the anticipated readership, the status, acceptability and connotations of humour in broader society. Scholars have previously drawn attention to the prescriptive ideals which prohibited certain kinds of humour and restricted its use within certain settings. Rao Xiao has noted the "Confucian aversion to clever and flowery language (*qiaoyan* 巧言) that is associated to moral corruption",[46] while Weihe Xu has summarised pre-modern Confucianist ideas on humour as follows: "proper humour, seen from the Confucian perspective, means a form of private, moderate, good-natured, tasteful and didactically useful mirth".[47] But how, if at all, influential were these ideological prescriptions on the ground, and if they were, how were they manifested? Giulia Baccini has already complicated these ideas for a much earlier text by demonstrating how the *Forest of Laughs* does not always conform to prescriptive ideas.[48] If that is the case, it is even more important

[46] Rao Xiao, "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment", 203.
[47] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 70.
[48] Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 108–9.

to interrogate these concepts when it comes to the diverse group of late-Ming publishers and readers, at a time which witnessed the flourishing of several competing strands of Confucianist thought. A long time had passed, so to what extent did the prescriptions actually apply to the late-Ming context? For example, did the unprecedented commercial backdrop mean that concerns of book-selling potential intervened in some way? Humour compilations and their prefaces can supply some clues in that regard.

In short, the prefatory defences tell us that there was indeed an ambivalence surrounding humorous content, something that is made especially clear from their appeals to historical precedent. While in any prefatory piece of writing there is conventional element to the namedropping of precedent works as part of the customary ruminations on the theme at hand, the choice of precedent, specific quotation and how they are used within the wider argumentative structure are clearly suggestive of something more deliberate and meaningful in these cases. It is striking how often we find compilers at pains to explicate the choice to include a humour section, with their customary ruminations on the topic tending to veer into a kind of advocation or reinterpretation of pre-existing ideas.

In this regard, the sheer omnipresence of the same quotes and sources throughout humour compilation prefaces, despite the fact that the written tradition presented compilers with an abundance of thematic alternatives, is a phenomenon which demands interrogation. Sections 2.4.1. and 2.4.2. will respectively examine the manner in which humour section prefaces deploy references to the canonical texts *Shiji* 史記 (“Records of the Grand Historian”), and *Shijing* 詩經 (“Book of Odes”).

2.4.1. Appeals to the Grand Historian: "Words of Banter" 談言

The go-to textual reference for humour compilers was "Biographies of the Comics" (*Guji liezhuan* 滑稽列傳),[49] *liezhuan* 126 of the *Shiji* 史記 ("Records of the Grand Historian"), by the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?–86?BCE).[50] In fact, one is extremely hard pushed to find any humour compilation preface that does not reference it. Yet this is not a jestbook or humour compilation. Rather, the focus here is restricted to the instrumental use of humour in ruler-minister interaction and remonstration. The chapter covers several subjects of biography, each one demonstrating how a courtier's indirect silly remark or comically exaggerated enthusiasm got an obstinate ruler to realise his own wrongdoing, particularly when direct remonstration had proven ineffective or been forbidden on pain of death. This idea was encapsulated in a nine-line phrase in the Grand Historian's opening comment for the chapter: "Words of banter indirectly strike a chord, which can even be a means to resolve discord" (*tanyan weizhong, yi keyi jiefen* 談言微中，亦可以解紛), resolving the "confusion" (*fen* 紛) of the ruler, so to speak.[51] There is at least one Ming

[49] This word is related to the word with the same characters which is now pronounced *huaji,* but "*guji*" is the correct reading in this context. See Timoteus Pokora, "The Etymology of *ku-chi* (or *hua-chi*)". For a discussion of the early commentaries on the meaning, and the various ways this chapter title has been translated, see Giulia Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 14–5.

[50] Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 3885–905. For an English translation, see Baccini and Barenghi, trans., "The Witty Courtiers, Memoir 66", 149–95. For a detailed discussion of the chapter, see Giulia Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 14–31.

[51] Baccini and Barenghi translate as "Even conversations and speeches may subtly address [correct] points and equally unravel disputes". Mine seems quite different at first glance, but the only significant alteration is *tanyan*

humour compilation named *Words of Banter* (*Tanyan* 談言) for it,[52] and humour compilation prefaces show a particular fondness for quoting this line.

We have already come across a typical example of this in Hu Wenhuan's preface, where towards the beginning, Sima Qian's voice is invoked to answer the big question of how the idea of jesting can be reconciled within the literary tradition:

> …what need has [literature] for jests? It was said by the Grand Historian, "Words of banter indirectly strike a chord, which can be a means to resolve discord". For this reason, he composed the "Biographies of the Comics", with Chunyu Kun among their ranks…
>
> 何以諧為？太史公有云：「談言微中；可以解紛。」故著《滑稽傳》，淳于髡列焉。

What is notable here is that via one short *Shiji* quote, the question has been answered, and the focus of Hu's discussion takes a turn thereafter, suggesting that the issue has been indisputably laid to rest. It would seem that there was simply no arguing back to an explicit judgement cast by a figure as canonical and reputable as Sima Qian. Hu Wenhuan knew this, of course; he has deployed the quote judiciously to this effect.

What this *Shiji* quote offered to Ming preface writers was clear and concise affirmation for the "usefulness" of humour from a reputed source which, crucially, they could expect their intended readerships to know. The "usefulness" concern reflects Weihe Xu's

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談言 "conversations and speeches" for "words of banter" or "banterous words". The rationale behind this is to present a Ming reading that expresses how intricately bound the quote had become to the concept expounded by the chapter by this point in time. Indeed, that *tan* 談 came to take on the meaning that is now regularly rendered as "banter" probably owes a great deal with the association to Sima Qian's famous encapsulation of this use of humour. The *Hanyu da cidian* defines *tan* in this sense at least from the sixth century CE. Also, even in Han times there were some that understood *tan* as a stand-in for *hui* 詼, roughly "humorous", "jocular". See Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 22, note 73.

[52] For example, one by Jiang Yingke 江盈科 (1553–1605).

description that, "[one] Confucian precept for proper humour is that it should be useful — or, stated more precisely, the benefits of humour depend on proper usage".[53] Xu also notes how traditional Chinese literary criticism, most notably those raised by Liu Xie 劉勰 in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 ("The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons"), that writings should exist for a didactic purpose, in opposition to "humour for humour's sake".[54] Both concerns tie into the idea of "usefulness", and are vaguely reflected in the subsequent musings by Hu Wenhuan.

In other words, pure enjoyment (the purpose we in current times perhaps associate most readily with humour) was not considered sufficient. This, perhaps above all, was the unspoken criticism to which the compilers believe their humour compilations most susceptible. A closer look at Hu Wenhuan's preface reveals the extent to which it is permeated by anxiety over its "un-useful" humorous content. It lurks behind the immediacy of delivery of the first guest's discreditation of Hu's stated intention for the compilation as "nothing but an aid for the venting of moods" (*qianxing yi zhu yi'er* 遣興一助已耳), and his second guest's accusation of "wasting good wood on crowdpleasers" (*zaimu meishi* 災木媚世), and of "empty words" (*maiwen* 舞文), or "literary prancing", which was a common term used to criticise of texts rich in superficial decoration, yet with little further substance.

Here it is key to remember that Hu's preface "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" is a compilation of anthropomorphic biographies, whose very form depends on mimicking

[53] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 67.
[54] Ibid., 68.

the biographical style immortalised by Sima Qian in the first place. Perhaps then, it is unsurprising that the presence of *Shiji* should be felt so strongly in is preface. However, this is far from the only humour compilation which references "Biographies of the Comics". One compilation that makes heavy use of it is *Augmentation of Knowledge*, our representative for a compilation with a practical use. While I have complicated this professed purpose in 2.2.3., it remains the book's explicit function and imparts *Augmentation of Knowledge* with a character quite distinct from the other compilations here. Indeed, the title of its humour section, "Jests and Indirect Criticism" (*xiefeng* 諧諷), carries an emphasis which is unusual among the titles of humour sections or humour compilations: *feng* 諷 ("Indirect Criticism", or "Satire") with its strong connotations of the instrumentalised remonstrative uses of humour described in "Biographies of the Comics".

In line with the section title, a few of the entries in "Jests and Indirect Criticism" are directly from the *Shiji* biographies, and all anecdotic exchanges take place all between a person in a position of power (mostly rulers) who is neglecting his duties, acting with excessive cruelty or has become fixated on some kind of unwise plan. Over the course of the exchange, he is persuaded out of this course of action or habit by a courtier or civil servant. The humour of the exchange is deployed in aid of this specific, persuasive purpose, which is illustrated well by the final lines of the entries: "Emperor [Zhuangzong of Tang] laughed, and the magistrate [by whose remonstration he had been vexed] thereupon got away with his life"; or "the Duke of Jing (Song chancellor Wang Anshi) laughed and desisted [from his overzealous water conservancy]"; or "at this point the Ruler of Liao cottoned on and did not

play these games again".[55] The shared formula of its entries gives the section an almost clinical feel, which is reflective of the section's strict selection criteria that work towards the compilations' professed overall aim of providing adept ways to deal with adverse situations. These entries have been chosen to provide a replicable formula which distils a particular art of speech, for the reader to apply in his own official career. In this case, that art is instrumentalised jesting in a strict *Shiji* sense. Naturally, this restricted lens does not permit it to veer into humour for humour's sake or even humour without this precise, explicit utilitarian purpose, as could be said for the other humour sections discussed in this chapter. In other words, the humour here is not 'borderline' in any sense, which (combined with the minor position of the section in the book and paratextual structure) explains why the compilers have not felt any need to justify it in the preface.

In fact, the regimented utilitarian humour in *Augmentation of Knowledge* brings into relief the murkiness of humour in the other compilations. The content the entries of these collections range far beyond the *Shiji* formula for humour, yet, if anything, their compilers invoke "Biographies of the Comics" even more insistently. This is no coincidence. In the case of Hu Wenhuan's preface and others, the quote is used to underscore the usefulness of humour in an area as crucial and sacred as the ruler-minister relationship in an attempt to legitimise the nature of the overall section as well as its right to exist in amongst the other topics. Given the anthropomorphic biography format of his humour section, that argument was probably sufficient. However, this alone would not stretch to cover the other compilations studied in this chapter—what about all those entries whose 'usefulness' was

[55] Quoted portions: …帝笑, 令乃得免去; …荆公笑而止; …遼主始悟, 不復戲.

either absent or not so readily discernible? In response to this conundrum, the paratextual contributors to these sections did not refrain from alluding to "Biographies of the Comics", but they did make amendments and change their approaches towards it. A good example of this is found in compiler Guo Zizhang's preface to the "Jesting Words" section *Words in Six*.

The entries in "Jesting Words" have been meticulously arranged in chronological order under dynastic headings, with many taken from major histories, so it is not devoid of the facet of a 'historical record'. Nevertheless, in its preface we find a different strategy to advocate for and protect its humorous content: an attempt to categorise and thereby circumscribe the acceptable and unacceptable forms of "jest" (*xie* 謔). Guo uses classical prescriptions, including the ones spotlighted in this chapter, to back his categories up. The preface opens as follows:

> As to why there should be a "Jesting" in *Words in Six*, this goes without saying. In the *Odes* there is the verse of "being given to jibes", while in the *Analects* there is the playful [remark] "with a grin".[56] The *Shiji* has "Biographies of the Comics" and *The Carving of Dragons* has a category for "Jesting and Enigma".[57]
>
> 夫諧之于六語無謂矣。顧詩有善謔之章，語有莞爾之戲，史記傳列滑稽，雕龍目著諧讔。

From the outset, then, Guo Zizhang brushes any possible ambivalence aside, and traces the concept of "jesting" back to four hallowed ancient texts in quick succession.

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[56] *Analects*, 17:4. In this exchange, Confucius grins and laughs (*fuzi wan'er er xiao* 夫子莞爾而笑) and makes a silly remark about the music he is hearing, only for his disciple Ziyou to point out a contradiction between the remark and a previous statement made by the Master. Confucius agrees that the two remarks contradict each other, and explains that he was only joking: "What I said just now was just playful (in sport), that's all (*qian yan xi zhi er* 前言戲之耳)". For a discussion of the various interpretations of this line, see Harbsmeier, "Confucius ridens", 133.

[57] For an annotated translation, see Giulia Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 204–10. Alternatively, Vincent Yu-cheng Shih (Shi Youzhong), *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 154–65.

But Guo does not stop there, and goes on to theorise, using these classical precedents to define the categories. In essence, he postulates that there is another variety of "jest", essentially filing the aforementioned kind under the *Shiji* and this second one under the *Shijing*:

> …With regard to jests (*xie* 諧), there are two kinds. The first, which does not help to sort out disorder and has nothing to do with Confucianist ethical teachings, is the "quick-tongued in retort"[58] kind. This is the kind that Scholar Ban Gu called "a jesting mouth and debating like an entertainer".[59] The other is the kind which rubs the scales on the dragon's neck[60] with banterous laughter. It can halt petty squabbles and enlighten rulers to "resolve discord". This is the one that the Grand Historian called "words of banter [which] indirectly strike a chord"… The first kind is like the Martial Duke, "ne'er to excess";[61] the second is like Chunyu Kun and Dongfang Shuo's ability to talk their lords around…[62]
>
> […] 顧諧有二：有無益于理亂，無關于名教，而禦人「口給」者：班生所謂「口諧倡辯」是也。有批龍鱗于談笑，息蝸爭于頃刻，而悟主「解紛」者：太史公所謂「談言微中」是也 […] 上之如武公之不為虐，下之如髡朔之能回主 […]

Either way, this deals with the blind spot left by Hu Wenhuan's answer to "What need has [literature] for jests?", that is, the fact that not all kinds of humorous exchange are as overtly useful as those described in the *Shiji* chapter. Unlike Sun Nengchuan's *Augmentation of Knowledge*, which has clinically avoided any such material, Guo Zizhang's *Words in Six* includes it in great quantities. He justifies this by broadening the scope of acceptable "jesting", which he achieves by carving out a space for another kind of jest alongside the lofty, morally corrective *Shiji* variety we have come across. And to simultaneously characterise and substantiate this variety of jest he picks upon a second quotation which appears with great frequency in humour prefaces, which is the topic of the following section.

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[58] *Analects*, 5:5. See 2.4.2.

[59] Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 2841–76. See 2.4.2.

[60] That is, to remonstrate with a ruler.

[61] For the identity of the Martial Duke, see 2.4.2.

[62] Guo Zizhang, *Liu yu*, 332.

2.4.2. Appeals to the *Shijing*: "Ne'er to excess" 不為虐

Another exceedingly common historical precedent and route of appeal in prefaces to humour compilations and sections was the *Shijing* 詩經 or the *Shi* 詩, known in English as the *Classic of Poetry*, *Book of Songs*/*Odes* (among others). It is the oldest existing anthology of Chinese poetry and song, collecting examples which hail from between the 12th–7th centuries BCE.[63] Its editing was attributed to Confucius and the text was consistently upheld as part of Confucian canons throughout dynastic history. In the *Analects* 論語, Confucius quotes the *Odes* frequently, mostly expressing utmost approval and admiration for its content.

Just as we have seen in the case of the *Shiji*, humour preface writers have an overwhelming tendency to turn to one quote in particular. In this case, that is: "a talent for [or, 'given to'] being playful and jibing, yet ne'er to excess (*shan xixue xi, buwei nüe xi* 善戲謔兮、不為虐兮)".[64] Weihe Xu has rendered the line as "Oh, how good he is at chaffing and

[63] Nienhauser, *Indiana Companion*, 692.

[64] In justification of the "excess" translation. As for *nüe* 虐 here, early annotations gloss it as *ju* 劇, which fuses the concepts of "extreme/excessive" and "severity". The dictionary *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 offers a separate definition of "without moderation; uninhibited indulgence" (*wu jiezhi*; *zongqing* 無節制; 縱情) which it ties exclusively to this particular *Shijing* passage and allusions thereto. In other words, the dictionary's compilers believed the word to have taken on a new sense in exclusive association with the *Shijing* ode. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that Zhu Xi 朱熹, in his *Shijing jizhuan* 詩經集傳, glossed the *Shijing* line as follows: "'Given to being playful and jibing, yet ne'er to excess' is saying that he was merry and amicable, while measured (i.e., with restraint/in moderation)" Chinese: *shan xixue bu wei nüe zhe, yan qi leyi er you jie ye* 善戲謔不為虐者, 言其樂易而有節也)". Zhu Xi's readings of the *Shijing* remained the most influential in the Ming (Rusk, *Critics and Commentators*, 126). So this had probably superseded earlier commentaries, which glossed it as *ju* 劇. So, it is likely that the standard, go-to understanding of the phrase was along Zhu Xi's lines, "with restraint" or "ne'er to excess". However, it can perhaps be called a circuitous route to the same end. I

joking, But never crude or rude".[65] The quote is drawn from "Qiyu 淇奧", first ode of the "Airs of Wey (*Weifeng* 衛風)".[66] Pre-modern annotators understood the ode to be voiced by folk labouring beside the Qi river, singing about the luxuriant scenery and the joys of living under the benevolent rule of the virtuous Martial Duke of Wey (Wei Wugong 衛武公),[67] and this seems to have remained the case during Wanli. Indeed, we have already seen the Duke namedropped in the *Words in Six* preface: "The first kind is like the Martial Duke, 'ne'er to excess'".[68]

When viewed as a whole, the "Qiyu" ode has little to do with jests, laughing or humour until this, its final line.[69] On the other hand, there are a great many instances of laughter and joking in the *Shijing*, and even in the *Airs of the States* (*Guofeng* 國風) section, from which this quote is drawn, there are plenty of other options. So, one might ask why this particular reference should become the go-to allusion, were it not for the fact that the allusion is not just to the *Shijing*, but also to the *Analects*. The approval the compilers seek is not that of the river folk of Wey but rather that of the Master himself. The *Analects* 1:15 recounts Confucius recognise the good in being poor but happy, or rich but fond of the rites, by which his disciple Zi Gong 子貢 is prompted to point out the parallels of what Confucius has

presume the thinking behind Weihe Xu's rendering of "never crude nor rude" is that these are the very ways in which "chaffing and joking" could become excessive. Certainly, while we will not broach the issue here, some Ming humour compilations clearly use the quote in the "abuse"/"maltreatment" sense more familiar from modern Chinese, and this may even have been in defiance of Zhu Xi.

[65] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 57.

[66] Here I use "Wey" as often seen in scholarship to distinguish this state from that of Wei 魏.

[67] Cheng, *Shijing zhuxi*, 155.

[68] 上之如武公之不為虐.

[69] For reference purposes, the full ode in Chinese and English translation by James Legge may be found on the Chinese Text Project website, "淇奧 - Qi Yu", https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/qi-yu/ens. Accessed 23 July, 2021.

described to the content of the "Qiyu" ode, saying "The *Odes* say, 'Like chipping, like sanding; like chiselling, like polishing!' I suppose this is what it is trying to convey?".[70] Confucius declares that this was indeed exactly what he had had in mind, and, critically for our purposes, praises Zi Gong's comprehension of the *Shi*.[71]

Confucius' blatant praise of the ruler in the poem (a.k.a. the Martial Duke) is appropriated by Ming compilers to exonerate humour and jesting. As the reader will surely have noticed, Zi Gong's quote was an earlier line from "Qiyu"—"Like chipping, like sanding; like chiselling, like polishing!"—as opposed to the "given to being playful and jibing" one. So Confucius did not praise "jibing" directly here. Nevertheless, it can be perhaps be filed under the idea of "rich yet fond of the rites (*fu er haolizhe* 富而好禮者)", the propriety in this case meaning to exert the restraint required not to let one's jibing become excessive (or cruel). Besides, "Qiyu" is structured around the recurrent line in of "Don't we have a [good] ruler! [or, 'Is he not a *junzi*!'] (*you fei junzi* 有匪君子!)", flanked by lines specifying why this is the case, which include the one on jesting. In other words, the Ming compilers are certainly not extrapolating too far when making the case to their readers that Confucius must have also found the jesting aspect of his personality acceptable too in order to remark as he did.

[70] 子貢曰：《詩》云：如切如磋，如琢如磨。其斯之謂與？

[71] *Analects* 1:15. Chinese passage: 子貢曰：貧而無諂，富而無驕，何如？子曰：可也。未若貧而樂，富而好禮者也。子貢曰：《詩》云：如切如磋，如琢如磨。其斯之謂與？子曰：賜也，始可與言詩已矣！告諸往而知來者。

Christoph Harbsmeier's article on humour in the *Analects* has demonstrated several instances in which the subsequent commentarial tradition that surrounded the text has interpreted away several instances of joking and sarcasm.[72] While one might at first be tempted to think of this as an "erasure" of the humour in the *Analects*, Harbsmeier reminds us the words on the page did not disappear: "The smile on Confucius's face will not go away just because the passages where it emerges are politely disregarded, pedantically reinterpreted, or philologically expurgated for a few centuries - or millennia". He also muses, "I do like to think that *Confucius ridens*, the smiling Confucius, has always been privately and quietly appreciated by congenial readers and scholars, East and West".[73] Our Ming humour compilers do not just prove Harbsmeier's point; they are taking advantage of this very fact. Taking the affirmation straight from *Analects* allowed them to bypass any interceding interpretations and commentarial traditions to place the content safely under the protection of Confucius himself. Given the various divergent and competing strands of Confucianist thought in late-Ming society, we can think of this quote as a safe bet, or—more cynically—even as a catch-all commercial strategy which made the book amenable to more consumers.

Indeed, Hu Wenhuan's deployment of this quote takes a further step to underscore the *Analects* connection. In what is an almost flagrant act of mimicry, Hu simply slaps his desired "Qiyu" quote atop the one actually used by Zi Gong, resulting in, "The *Odes* say, 'given to jibes, yet ne'er to excess'. I suppose this is what it is trying to convey? 《詩》曰:

[72] Prior to Harbsmeier, this had been a concern of the Master of Humour (*youmo dashi* 幽默大師) himself, Lin Yutang. Rea, *The Age of Irreverence*, 147–8.
[73] Harbsmeier, "Confucius ridens", 160, 131.

「善戲謔兮、不為虐兮」其斯之謂歟？”.[74] Hu relays this in own voice rather than that of Zi Gong. With a text as canonical as the *Analects*,[75] we can assume he expected his readers to notice what he had done: this remark is humorously intended, and certainly not a misremembering on Hu's part. The quip nevertheless serves a purpose: Hu has in effect given the reader a quick reminder that Confucius himself did approve of certain "jibes" (*xue* 謔), lest they have forgotten through years of grappling with commentarial interpretations.

But if the "words of banter" reference to the *Shiji* served as an argument for the "usefulness" of humour, so to speak,[76] what justification does the "given to being playful and jibing" reference offer, beyond an association with Confucius? In his chapter on proper Confucian humour, Weihe Xu says that proper humour should be "benign", noting that "Qiyu" is the "the earliest direct portrayal in Chinese literature of a sense of humour as a virtuous personality trait", and observes that "'never crude or rude' [ne'er to excess] became a dictum for proper humour, evidenced in dramaturgical treatises and prefaces or postscripts to the traditional Chinese joke books" and outlines how it was used dramatists to make the case for tasteful dramatic humour.[77]

[74] The only other difference is the word for "to say" (Hu's *yue* 曰 vs. transmitted *Analects*' *yun* 云), but this is not of meaningful significance here.

[75] In making this assumption I am taking the nature of Hu's compilation into account – the anthropomorphic biography is comprised of highly complex allusive forms of literary wordplay. It is unimaginable that Ming readers conversant with this kind of text would not know the *Analects*. The rule does not automatically follow for all readers of Ming humour compilations/sections, but at least for a text as basic and canonical as *Analects*, it may indeed be safely assumed for all the compilations studied in this dissertation.

[76] I should reiterate that this is a slight simplification. As noted in the previous sub-section 2.4.1., Weihe Xu has said that "stated more precisely, the benefits of humour depend on proper usage". Xu himself mostly refers to the concept as "usefulness".

[77] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 64–6.

It was these associations that prompted Guo Zizhang to utilise the quote in a way that is much more fundamental to his preface's argument than Hu Wenhuan. As the reader will remember, the "Qiyu" reference is placed on a pedestal in Guo's preface as the archetype of his first variety of acceptable "jest" (*xie* 諧):

> …The first, which does not help to sort out disorder and has nothing to do with Confucianist ethical teachings, is the "quick-tongued in retort" kind.[78] This is the kind that Scholar Ban Gu called "a jesting mouth and debating like an entertainer"[79]….
>
> […]有無益于理亂，無關于名教，而禦人「口給」者：班生所謂「口諧倡辯」是也。[…]

The "ne'er to excess" reference is similar to what we have seen with the *Shiji* in the way it is used by the compilers to borrow authority and prestige for their publications. However, the argument it makes on humour's behalf is quite a different one. Specifically, while the *Shiji* quote affirms the usefulness of humour, the *Shijing* quote asserts its benignity when used in moderation. Thus, we are looking at a separate line of defence against an unspoken assumption that humour can be somehow malignant.

Guo Zizhang's preface is a manifesto of sorts. He demarcates the kinds of humour that will be accepted into his compilation as a kind of quality assurance, and inserts some choice references to both strengthen his case and give the categories substance. His preface is

[78] *Analects*, 5:5. "The Master said, 'What use is there in being smart-mouthed? They who counter others with a quick tongue are often resented by people". 子曰：焉用佞？禦人以口給，屢憎於人.

[79] Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 2841–76. Intriguingly, Guo Zizhang's choice of quotes has listed Dongfang Shuo as an exemplar in both varieties. For the different biographical traditions concerning Dongfang Shuo, see Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 38–48, or idem, "The *Xiaolin* as a *Paiyou xiaoshuo*". The translation of *changbian* 倡辯 follows that of Baccini. For the record, the only reason I have changed her "jester" to "entertainer" is because this dissertation avoids terms derived from the verb "jest" unless translating from the keyword *xie* 諧.

not alone in this respect; in fact these specific *Shiji* and *Shijing* quotes are almost ubiquitous in late-Ming humour compilations.

2.5. Conclusions

2.5.1. Words versus Actions in the Publication of Humour

In this chapter, observing how the humour sections in Ming compilations attempted to defend their humour sections has allowed us to inversely read into the very prevailing attitudes from outside which they are trying to counter. Again, while there is a conventional element to the namedropping of precedent works in a preface, the choices of precedent, the way specific quotations appear time and time again, and how they are used within the wider argumentative structure is clearly suggestive of something more deliberate and meaningful. From the compilers' use of the *Shiji*, we can infer they felt there was potential for humorous materials to be seen as lacking in didactic worth, while their repeated use of *Shijing* suggests there were limits to the acceptable forms of humorous content, and compilers felt the need to provide some kind disclaimer to show their collection did not stray outside those bounds.

As demonstrated by the diversity of the above contributors, the publication of humour was a phenomenon that stretched across social strata, from high-level bureaucrats, to large publishing houses, to commissioned writers. Nevertheless, at the point of publication, the compilers fear that the sections will find themselves at odds with the values of certain

members of their readership, and strike pre-emptively to avoid any potential misunderstandings or backlash. This speaks to a divide between the compiler-publisher side and at least a portion of the anticipated readership. Here, it is key to remember the fate of compiled works would be to encounter a wider readership who might not purchase or read a standalone humour book. And it is within this wider group that the compilers expect some level of pushback. In short, what these prefaces reveal is a juncture in currents of thought, in which some readers are fully open to humour and others are not.

The above chapter has devoted much consideration to readers and consumers. Perhaps the theatrical praise and censure of the two guests in Hu Wenhuan's preface has distracted attention from the views of the other person in the room. In this, we have fallen into his trap, if, as I suspect, he inserted the two "guests" to throw us off course in this way. So, what of Hu Wenhuan? After all, he is the one responsible for the creation of this "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories", and our representative for the publisher-compiler's side of the story. It was his reputation and sales that would be affected should this book have collided with any real-life iterations of the sentiment expressed by his two exaggerated guests. Hu closes his preface as follows:

> And so I have defied them—sigh! The opinions of the guests diverged to this extent. How am I to know which of them is right and which is wrong? I just happened to be on the receiving end of it, that's all.
>
> 吾則有所不取也。嗟嗟！客論不齊乃爾。余又烏知其孰為是非。余亦聽之而已。

As profusely as Hu tries to disassociate his intentions from the situation he has landed himself in, we would do well to observe his actions: "I took up the jest histories of past and present and picked out several tens of pieces. I even ventured to affix my own compositions

in between them, bound them together and had the blocks carved. I was about to release it to the world…".[80] That is to say, by the time he permits these "guests" to lay eyes on the work, the blocks had already been cut. There is some level of play-acting going on here, and Hu's surprise at the guest's response is certainly feigned. Nevertheless, it does seem that the idea that the work would be subject to public censure and praise had *not* been a major concern throughout what appears to have been a long and involved production process. Somewhat paradoxically, while we as readers encounter prefaces appended at the start of a book or section, they were usually the final part of the work to be composed. And it is unlikely that large book projects like this would be launched unless the publisher could already predict enough selling potential to warrant the investment of time and expenses in the first place. So while that was assured, the more intricate specificities of public opinion, such as those voiced by the guests, may well have been somewhat of an afterthought. A compiler may not even have had time to give the issue proper thought until he sat down to compose that one-chance outward-facing expression of intent and recommendation to the readership that is the preface. In this light, Hu's mock surprise in the preface at his two guest's responses may well have been genuine the first time he tried to imagine what they would have to say.

The takeaway point is that whatever pushback compilers had in mind, it was clearly not enough to dissuade them from publishing humour compilations, and they were sure the sales response would be such as to repay their investment. While we have focused in on Hu Wenhuan here, his humour section was one of many compilations like it. Therefore, whatever prejudices and restrictions may have existed towards humour, however long-standing and

[80] 取古今諧史著書擇其數十篇。間亦竊附己作，編而梓之。將以公諸世…

classically-sanctified, they realistically speaking were not influential enough among a sizeable portion of the Wanli readership to dissuade them from buying the book. However, compilers still must have felt some people would view the book in a negative light, and hence used the preface to do the minimum amount of damage control to counter potential 'second guests'. This would be in line with the huge role played by reputation on the late-Ming publishing scene, as demonstrated by Kai-wing Chow.[81] Just as we have seen in the case of Hu Wenhuan, these publishers' actions spoke louder than their words.

2.5.2. The "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" Preface as a Parody of Humour Prefaces?

With regard to Hu Wenhuan's preface in particular, it is even possible to read this as a parody of other humour compilation prefaces and a satire of their compilers. While Hu's is the earliest preface studied in this chapter, humour compilations were not a Wanli invention, and it is hard to know just how many humour compilations and sections were floating about on the Wanli scene. As is often the case with late-Ming publications, we can assume that a great many have not survived. Hu was part of the new generation of celebrity publishers who had come of age just prior to the Wanli reign, and Hu's life as an active writer and publisher around modern-day Hangzhou would certainly have let him witness first-hand the many vicissitudes and developments in the publishing fields which occurred during this time. He would certainly have been aware of other humour compilations and their prefatory content.

[81] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 115–9.

Indeed, as discussed, he had probably borrowed the idea of "jest history" anthropomorphic biography compilation from one that was already in circulation.[82]

If Hu Wenhuan was aiming to parody and call out other, unnamed, publications for aggrandising their content beyond its capacities, this would explain the all-too-blatant misinterpretation the title of the invented text *Qixie* 齊諧 to the "Jests of Qi", or even "Amalgamated Jests", in aid of the preposterous claim that "This would make 'jests' father of the written tradition",[83] and the outrageous mimicry of Confucius's disciple Zi Gong in "The *Odes* say, 'given to being playful and jibing, yet ne'er to excess'. I suppose this is what it is trying to convey?".[84] Are we witnessing an exaggerated mockery of the propensity of other humour compilers to aggrandise their funny, best-selling publications as part of hallowed, ancient tradition, then? Our representative for that approach here would be Guo Zizhang, who, all in the first breath of his preface had already established the links of his "Jesting Words" to the *Shijing*, *Analects*, *Shiji* and *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. And the fact that Guo Zizhang seems entirely earnest here only makes Hu Wenhuan's claims appear all the more ridiculous, to the point of parody.

Understood in this way, "But if they were merely intent on jesting, and without literariness to savour, without principles to heed, enclosing no lessons to be learned and with unaffecting emotivity, then why would they be worth picking up?",[85] is less of a sincere

[82] See section 2.2.4.

[83] 然則諧之為書傳之父矣.

[84] 《詩》曰：「善戲謔兮、不為虐兮」其斯之謂歟?

[85] 使其一於諧，而無文之可味、理之可聽，規鑑之弗寓、感格之弗興；何足取哉!

statement than a sarcastic remark on the insistence of other publishers that their humour compilations brim with usefulness, properness, benignity, didactic and literary worth. Hu Wenhuan seems to be pointing out their hypocrisy, yet, whether intentionally or not, through his own exaggerated parody, the preface itself has instrumentalised humour as a didactic means in a way we could even call comparable to what we see in the "Biographies of the Comics". So, who knows what he actually thinks about the matter?

Throughout the preface, Hu Wenhuan has avoided expressing own judgement on the matter. The closest we come to a direct statement is "I was about to release it to the world as nothing but an aid for the venting of moods".[86] Here, perhaps, the mask slips. As publisher, this was his intention for the book: something for light amusement, yet due to age-old stigmas of humour without didactic worth or other qualities, he had to face not merely the predictable criticism of the second guest, but also the violation of his original aim in favour of the aggrandised one foisted upon the work by the first. That is to say, this publisher's frustrations lie not just with his critics, but his overzealous supporters, since both criticism and praise are tethered to the same ideals which are the true source of his frustration. By mockingly exaggerating them and parodying other humour prefaces, Hu Wenhuan has refused to play the game. But the very fact that he has done so points to the wider phenomenon: those great many publishers who did. Several further Ming humour prefaces will make an appearance in the coming chapters, and I encourage readers to keep Hu Wenhuan's sceptical assessment of the field in mind as they do.

[86] 將以公諸世為遣興一助已耳.

Chapter 3 – A Wandering Persuader in Wanli: The Satirical Tradition of Aizi

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has illustrated how Ming compilers made great use of historical materials by cherry-picking humorous anecdotes from past dynasties and collating them into humour sections. This direct mode of sourcing pre-existing material for a new compilation was far from exclusive to humorous publications. On the contrary, the selection and collation of pre-existing texts according to a thematic rationale was ubiquitous within the Ming publishing world and formed the basis for a great many publications. Likewise, the mention of historical precedent in prefatory material was also completely standard, even if the above humour sections invoke them in a more pressing manner. Of course, that other themes received similar treatment in the late Ming does not diminish the significance of the fact that humour became the object of these compilers' attentions.

But there were also ways in which compilers engaged with historical material which we could indeed call exclusive to humour compilations. This chapter will explore one example of this: the humorous tradition which revolved around "Aizi" 艾子 ("Master Ai"). Ming compilers had inherited the fictional character of Aizi, together with the original Aizi humour compilation, from the Song dynasty (960–1279). The popularity of the character is marked not just by Aizi-themed entries being a common sight in anecdotic humour collections (including the aforementioned *Tongue Flowers* and *Words in Six*), but by even

more invested forms of engagement, namely, the fact that the concept of Aizi was borrowed for at least two extant Ming Aizi 'sequel' humour compilations. The Aizi tradition therefore represents a distinctive feature of humour compilations, which supplies further backing for our treatment of this group of publications as a category of their own.

Besides this, the historical nature of these being Ming sequels of a Song compilation brings the long-standing Chinese tradition of humour compilations into view. Humour compilations were, of course, not a new concept in Wanli. While we have more surviving Ming examples (a common phenomenon on account of the printing boom and relative proximity to the present), the Wanli iterations were part of a long-standing tradition. The earliest known example seems to be *Forests of Laughs* (*Xiaolin* 笑林) attributed to the Three Kingdoms period (220–280).[1] As much as Ming humour compilations might present themselves as novel in some way (e.g. "Further Sayings", "Unofficial Sayings" in this case), Ming humour compilers expressed keen awareness of what had come before, and into which tradition they were placing their own publications. This, too, invites us to view them as a connected, almost inter-identifying, group of texts.

This chapter will look at in which ways the textual tradition of Aizi was invoked and compiled during the Ming. It will take the 1608 humour compilation *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* (*Wuzi xiece* 五子諧策), a particularly elaborate riff on the theme, as its starting

[1] Specifically, the *Forest of Laughs* is the earliest example of a "jestbook". There may be earlier texts than that according to my broader 'humour compilation' criteria, but I leave that to early and early medieval China specialists. For an overview of the *Forest*, see Giulia Baccini, "Approaching Jokes and Jestbooks in Premodern China", 207–11. For a more in-depth discussion, idem, "The *Xiaolin* as a *Paiyou xiaoshuo*", 157–79.

point and use its prefatory material as a means to explore how the Warring States setting and satirical functions of Aizi were particularly pertinent to Ming readers and thus represented safe bets for Ming compilers in their publishing activities. It will also situate the compilations within the broader scope of late imperial responses to the Warring States world and the Han-collated text *Stratagems of the Warring States* in particular, with a mind to demonstrate how humour compilations branched off from the intellectual currents of the times.

3.2. "Master Ai": The Basics

The main reasons the Aizi tradition has not received its due attention in scholarship are that it has been known as a humorous text or "jokebook" (hence of little academic interest) along with its dubious pedigree on account of shady pre-modern attributions to Su Shi, which went on to be vehemently refuted in modern times.[2] Nevertheless, I suspect a further reason has been the complex premise. The three surviving Aizi compilations came to be in the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, but find their setting in the much earlier Warring States period (475–221 BCE). This means that Aizi anecdotes are by nature dual-layered texts, and reading them in the present day adds yet another chronological layer. To grapple with Aizi is to skip back and forth across over two millennia, looking back through Ming and Song texts to an imagined Warring States China constructed in accordance with the Song-Ming historical consciousness and understandings, while consciously un-remembering the latest archaeological excavations and knowledge born of more recent

[2] For more on the aspect of attributions to Su Shi, see Chapter 4 (4.4.1.).

technologies, in the hope of finding the reflections which lead us back to the Song and Ming. It is a perilous mission, and the biggest pitfall, that is, forgetting that these texts are Song and Ming in origin and to treat them as such, lurks around every corner. This section aims to cover the necessary groundwork for preparing the reader to engage with the rest of the discussion.

3.2.1. The Aizi Premise and Textual Borrowings

Aizi 艾子 ("Master Ai" or even "Master Mugwort") is an invented Warring States intellectual. Entry by entry, however, this basic identity refracts into a huge variety of signature Warring States roles and societal positions. Aizi is often shown as an academician of the famed Jixia Academy 稷下學宮 in Qi[3] and as the favoured minister of King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 (d.301 BCE), but we also find him at the court of other kings as an envoy or "wandering persuader" (*youshui zhi shi* 遊說之士; travelling consultant), or on the road for these purposes with disciples in tow, engaging in mock philosophical discussions with others, as magistrate of a jurisdiction (see Ju entry, p. 68) and so on. Across the compilations, readers are also made party to other, more personal, of his life spheres. We witness him as a teacher instructing his disciples, and meet his family, blood brothers, neighbours and goats. The experiences and travels of Aizi are hampered neither by time nor space; the three compilations see him traverse not just throughout the physical Warring States, but indeed across the Warring States period itself. Along the way, he encounters famous kings and Warring States figures, as well as utter nobodies. Aizi entries broach both historic events and

[3] For information on the historical Jixia Academy, see Meyer, "The Altars of the Soil and Grain".

everyday happenings. The texts boast a colourful cast of Warring States physiognomists, farmers and snake charmers, together with a yet more colourful selection of behind-the-scenes political manoeuvres, bribes, intrigue, and less-than-noble intentions. Since Aizi is given such a free rein throughout time, space and social spheres, the content of these collections could be said to give us a good indication of the boundaries of a 'Warring States world' as imagined in the Song and Ming.

The imagined, fictitious nature of the text brings us to important point that the Aizi entries are often intertextual in nature. Many anecdotes borrow from, or even parody, well-known anecdotes from the Hundred Schools of Thought texts (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家) and scenes from Han records of the Warring States like *Stratagems of the Warring States* 戰國策 and chapters in the *Shiji* 史記. Indeed, the amusing twists on events familiar to readers from classical texts are key to the humour of Aizi entries, particularly when it comes to Aizi's encounters and exchanges with well-known classical figures. Omnipresent as the intertextual element is in *Aizi* compilations, this chapter's focus is on uses of the Aizi textual tradition in Ming humour publications, and the intertextual element of Aizi with early texts will be broached only insofar as it becomes relevant.

3.2.2. The Ming Readership of *Aizi* Compilations: Some Speculations

There is a further difference between the 'generic' and 'anecdotic' varieties of humour entries which I did not broach in Chapter 1 because it is better described as a tendency than a defining feature, and would require a further quantitative study to properly

verify. While humour entries in the generic voice are often relayed in a style which leans towards the vernacular spoken Chinese, sometimes containing slang and dialectal influences, narratives in the entries in the anecdotic voice are relayed mostly in a style which leans towards literary Chinese, sometimes using the vernacular for reported speech (as demonstrated in the old women Aizi entry, p. 69). This tendency is intrinsically linked to compiling practices, with anecdotic entries often cribbed from pre-existing (literary Chinese) texts. In the case of Aizi entries, given that their very premise mimics Warring States texts and scenarios, only literary Chinese would be appropriate. Further, there was arguably a lot of humour for Ming readers in Aizi entries' imitation of the high-brow language familiar from the classics, particularly when it is incongruously appropriated to relay silly events instead of the familiar philosophising and weighty moral discussions.

While given the above information, some might be tempted to straightforwardly assume the generic voice as "vulgar" (*su* 俗) and the anecdotic voice to be "tasteful" (*ya* 雅) representatives of humour entries according to the oft-invoked Ming cultural binary.[4] Further, they might assume a more scholarly *shishang* 士商 readership for the latter and a less specific, so-called "popular", readership for the former. Both of these would oversimplify the situation. My argument here is that there is little we can conclude from the literary Chinese leanings of *Aizi* compilations. In the Ming China case, with its different modes of writing, and the widespread printing of vernacular literature, even when scholars narrow down the scope by specifying "vernacular literacy" or "classical literacy", this overlooks the spectrums

[4] Some humour compilers do actively invoke the concept of *ya* and specifically present themselves as such. For example, there is a compilation called *Refined Jibes* (*Yaxue* 雅謔), and Lu Cai in his *Further Sayings* preface (discussed below) does state "I selected those which were especially tasteful (*ya*)". But this is a topic for another study and is not relevant to the point above.

involved. What of a text whose grammar is mostly classical but with vocabulary that springs from the vernacular? What about the so-called "bad" literary Chinese? With regard to "classical literacy", which group of texts— and moreover, the whole text, or just the more important or famous parts? How many Tang poem allusions must one recognise? There is no clear answer, and the situation is made more complex by the fact that books, by virtue of being read, also play a role in informing the reader's language abilities; this is an aspect that must have been especially complex and in flux as books, and different kinds of books, became more and more widely available in the late Ming. On top of this, there are many ways of using and engaging with a book. Taking complete comprehension as the bar is foolhardy, and among Yuming He's multitude of wise recommendations for thinking about late-Ming book culture is the idea of "book conservancy", as opposed to inflexible understandings of literacy/illiteracy and "reading and non-reading uses of books, in favor of a looser and broader notion of conservancy with the printed page that encompasses… various sorts of 'knowing what to do with books' that might or might not include full reading mastery".[5]

It is worthwhile to take a moment to apply this idea of book conservancy to humorous content specifically. Humorous content and "jokes" have their own particularities. They are interactive texts, in that they withhold information, and leave a 'gap', which the reader must fill with their own knowledge of the world when triggered by the punchline, to comprehend the incongruity of the scenario and 'get' the joke or humour. This could be knowledge of social norms and proper behaviour, or sometimes in the case of the Aizi entries, specific

[5] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 7.

knowledge of Warring States historical events. A humour compiler likely included only those punchlines and language that he expected his anticipated readership to get and comprehend, which, given the savviness of Ming publishers, could be said to be an accurate indication in many cases. However, as the idea of "book conservancy" reminds us, there would have been different ways of using a humour compilation. It is easy to imagine, for instance, situations whereby more than one reader consumes a compilation together, with one reader explaining occasional punchlines to the other(s). Furthermore, once a publisher relinquished a book into the market, copies would have been floating around in the sea of books for decades to come, entering hands and situations ever more unpredictable at the point of publication. It is certainly possible comprehend (and enjoy) the humour of many Aizi entries without knowing much about the Warring States period or texts about the Warring States (see old women entry, p. 69). In sum, we should be wary of assuming that just because the language of the Aizi collection leans more towards literary Chinese than other comparable publications and is set in the Warring States scenario, they were intended for and consumed by a limited hyper-literate audience who would catch every classical allusion and intertextual parodic twist.

3.3. The *Aizi* 'Trilogy'

There are three extant collections which devote their entirety to recounting the antics of Aizi.

Compilation	Translated title	Dating	Compiler	No. of Entries
Aizi zashuo 艾子雜說 (alt. *zaji* 雜記, *zayu* 雜語)	The Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai (alt. Miscellaneous Records/Miscellaneous Sayings of Master Ai)	Song, possibly late Northern Song	Historically attributed to Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101)	39
Aizi houyu 艾子後語	The Further Sayings of Master Ai	Prefaced Zhengde 11 (1516)	Lu Cai 陸采 (1497–1537)	15
Aizi waiyu 艾子外語	The Unofficial Sayings of Master Ai	Preface to first extant compilation to include the text Wanli 36 (1608)	Tu Benjun 屠本畯 (1542–1622)	22

I will hereafter refer to the texts via a shortened form of the English translations: *Miscellaneous Stories*, *Further Sayings* and *Unofficial Sayings*. In referencing individual entries, the acronyms "ZS", "HY" and "WY" will be used to indicate *Aizi zashuo*, *Aizi houyu* and *Aizi waiyu*, respectively, e.g. [ZS:11] as the eleventh entry from *Miscellaneous Stories*. With regard to the character of Aizi, I have opted to use "Master Ai" in translations of the text and "Aizi" in my discussion.[6]

[6] There is debate over the precise meaning(s) of *zi* 子 in pre-unification texts (and later texts about them), and it is standard in the scholarship to discuss such figures as Zhuangzi and Laozi, without attempting to render a meaning for *zi*. I follow this in my main text. Admittedly, in Warring States and Han usage *zi* can be partly conventional, more like a 'Mister' than a 'Master'. But for Song and Ming readers it carried a particular archaic feel amongst other connotations, so I have rendered it as "Master" in translation to give some sense of that. The title of Tu Benjun's compilation ("Five Masters") and the content of its preface was another factor in this decision.

My pre-modern reference has been the Wanli 36 (1608) Dunde tang 惇德堂 print of *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* (*Wuzi xiece* 五子諧策). This was the first publication to collect all three books in sequence, and makes up fascicles 17–21 of the larger compilation *Shanlin jingji ji* 山林經濟籍.[7] For a modern, punctuated version, the reader may consult the 1967 edition called *Nine Works from "New Tales Under the Lamplight" and Others* (剪燈新話等九種), which includes all three collections.[8]

3.3.1. The Original *Aizi*: *Miscellaneous Stories*

The Aizi tradition first emerged in the Northern Song period, and *Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai* (*Aizi zashuo* 艾子雜說) also seems to be Song in origin. Ming compilations attributed it to literary superstar Su Shi. There were one or two doubts raised in the Song about the attribution of a text called *Aizi* to Su Shi, but by the Ming dynasty the text had come to be widely associated with him. As the preface to *Further Sayings* declares, "The whole world knows *Master Ai* to be the Slope Codger's (Su Shi's) playful brushstrokes". [9] Some editions of the text go as far as to incorporate his name into the title, for example *The Resident of East Slope's Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai* (*Dongpo jushi Aizi zashuo* 東坡居士艾子雜說); "East Slope" (Dongpo 東坡), being Su Shi's famous *hao*.[10] Whether or not

[7] In vol. 64 of *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan*. ZS: fascicle 17, 352–58. HY: fascicle 18, 359–62. WY: fascicle 19, 363–70.

[8] Yang Jialuo, '*Jiandeng xinhua' deng jiuzhong*. This edition provides only internal page numbers. The *Aizi* books comprise the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters.

[9] 世皆知艾子為坡翁戲筆. Tu Benjun, *Shanlin jingji ji*, 362.

[10] As in this version in the Ming compilation of 40 texts: Gu, "Yangshan Gushi wenfang xiaoshuo", 316–24.

Su Shi really was the one behind the first compilation, the attribution issue is part of a broader and deeper association in the late Ming between Su Shi as a figure and writer and humorous material. This is the topic of Chapter 4, and the attribution will be revisited in section 4.4.[11]

Authorship aside, an attempt to date the tradition and the work itself can be made using the earliest written reactions to the text. The first extant reaction to an *Aizi* work is a poem by Zhou Zizhi 周紫芝 (1082–1155):[12]

I read "Master Ai" at night and inscribed this at the end
Cast a myriad miles away to a barren coastal nook,
Eight long years resident among the Hainan Tankas
Such a pity what remained of your Golden Palace Hanlin days,
Coalesced with days of barbarian furnace and miasmic rain.
I wonder who wrote a biography for Dongfang Shuo
And his empty uses of the comic mode into Sima Qian's book.[13]
As you wove discourse of governance in normal times, who could know
Late in life you'd be composing laughs and fun for kiddies?

《夜讀艾子書其尾》
萬里投荒海一隅，八年蜑子與同居。
可憐金殿鑾坡日，渾在蠻烟瘴雨餘。
奇怪誰書方朔傳，滑稽空著子長書。
不知平日經綸意，晚作兒曹一笑娛。

This poem seems to have been written after Su's death, since Zhou is aware of the eight-year duration of his stint in exile. Su died in 1101, around a year after being recalled from Hainan.

[11] The original *Aizi* was verifiably printed several times in the Ming, but the issue of ultimate authorship falls beyond the scope of this study. What is important here is that Ming compilers presented him as such. For some arguments for and against Su's authorship, I redirect the reader to Kong Fanli, "*Aizi* shi Su Shi de zuopin" and Ahn Hei Jin, "*Aizi zashuo* zuozhe zhiyi", respectively.

[12] Zhou, "Taicang timi ji", 47. Quoted from Kong Fanli, "*Aizi* shi Su Shi de zuopin", 39.

[13] This is a reference to the fact that the *Shiji* chapter contains some additions, which have been attributed to Chu Shaosun 褚少孫. More on this in 3.4.2. For the different biographical traditions concerning Dongfang Shuo, see Baccini, "The Forest of Laughs (*Xiaolin*)", 38–48, or idem, "The *Xiaolin* as a *Paiyou xiaoshuo*".

What we can tell from this poem is that Zhou has read a text with an a Aizi theme and believes it was written by Su Shi. The *Aizi* in question is also clearly a humorous text, possibly with a veiled remonstrative (i.e., satirical) facet, as inferred from the "Biography of the Comics" *Shiji* reference.[14] All this would be consistent with the transmitted *Miscellaneous Stories*, as will become clear in section 3.4.2. Scholarship does not seem to question that the *Aizi* mentioned here is the same text (or at least one with enough shared content to be considered as such). If that presumption is correct, the transmitted *Miscellaneous Stories* may indeed be a Song text.[15] But for our purposes here, the poem at least places it beyond reasonable doubt that both the character of Aizi and the association of this character with Su Shi predate the Ming by a long way, dating between the death of Su Shi in 1101 and that of Zhou Zizhi in 1155, that is, to the late Northern Song/early Southern Song. The next set of reactions to *Aizi* come from Southern Song men, and express doubts over Su Shi's authorship over an Aizi text, while not refuting it completely.[16] With regard to the date of the text, it would be surprising that the issue was seriously up for debate among Southern Song writers if they felt that the text could not reasonably hail from Su Shi's lifetime.

As well as being the most prominent *Aizi* book in the Ming, *Miscellaneous Stories* contains the largest number of entries, at thirty-nine. The popularity the transmitted text

[14] Zhou, "Taicang timi ji", 47.

[15] Changes to the transmitted version is not something that should surprise us. In fact, in the case of *Miscellaneous Stories* there are solid hints that the transmitted version is not the only selection of entries to have existed. For example, Lu Cai's preface to *Further Sayings* mentions an entry that seems to be absent from the transmitted editions. See 3.2.2.

[16] Ahn Hei Jin, "*Aizi zashuo* zuozhe zhiyi".

enjoyed in the Ming is evidenced both by the amount of different printed editions that have come down to us and the Ming homage-sequels discussed in this chapter. The standard name in current scholarship and anthologies is "Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai" (*Aizi zashuo* 艾子雜說), and I have followed suit in this regard. However, compilers exercised some degree of flexibility with regard to the title in the Ming. In Zhao Kaimei's 1602 edition it is "Miscellaneous Records of Master Ai" (*Aizi zaji* 艾子雜記), while Tu Benjun has tweaked the title to "Miscellaneous Sayings of Master Ai" (*Aizi zayu* 艾子雜語), presumably in order to fit more smoothly in his compilation alongside *Further* and *Unofficial Sayings*. As mentioned, other imprints have additionally included the name of Su Shi in the title to indicate the attribution as part of the title.

One characteristic of the Song *Aizi* which evidently raised eyebrows among Ming readers was the fact that the entries make several factual errors and anachronistic references to later (pre-Song) periods, for instance the below pun on the name of famous Tang monk Xuanzang 玄奘:

> Master Ai was fond of drinking. Rare were his sober days. His disciples plotted amongst themselves, saying, "This is not something that can be stopped through the means of our remonstration. We can only give him a scare through a dangerous occurrence. That should be adequate warning".
>
> One day, he drank a great amount and vomited. A disciple secretly got hold of some pig intestines and put them into his vomit. Holding them up to show him, he said "Generally people can only stay alive with all five of their vital organs. Now that you have ejected one of them through drinking, you only have four vital organs. How are you going to live?" Master Ai inspected them closely, laughed and said, "Sanzang 三藏 [pun: three organs 三臟] of the Tang survived just fine. So I'll certainly be alright with four!" **[ZS:5]**
>
> 艾子好飲，少醒日。門生相與謀曰:「此不可以諫止，唯以險事怵之，宜可誡。」一日，大飲而噦。門人密抽彘腸致噦中，持以示曰:「凡人具五髒方能

> 活，今公因飲而出一髒，止四髒矣，何以生耶?」 艾子熟視而笑曰:「唐三藏猶可活，況有四耶?」

Needless to say, Xuanzang (602–664), of *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) fame, was born over eight-hundred years after the Warring States period in which Aizi supposedly made this comment, and this evidently did not go unnoticed among Ming readers.[17]

3.2.2. The Ming *Aizi*s

Further Sayings of Master Ai 艾子後語

The preface affixed to *Further Sayings* is dated 1516 (eleventh year of Zhengde) by a "Lu Zhuo of Changzhou 長洲陸灼". This was the original given name (*ming* 名) of Lu Cai 陸采 (1497–1537), who was a prodigal playwright of some repute in his time.[18] While to the present day the collection itself has been reprinted under the name of "Lu Zhuo", this paper shall employ "Lu Cai", as he is better known in wider scholarship. Lu Cai was a prodigious, yet somewhat renegade constituent of an illustrious cluster of Lus around the modern-day Suzhou region. By the age of nineteen, he composed a forty-three act long *chuanqi* 傳奇 *Record of the Bright Pearl* (*Mingzhu ji* 明珠記) which may have been a joint effort with his elder brother Lu Can 陸粲. Judging by the preface date, *Further Sayings* was compiled around the same time. Thereafter, the brothers' paths diverged: while Lu Can rose to

[17] For instance, see Chen, *Zhenzhu chuan*, 69.

[18] "Lu Cai", *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin*, 566.

considerable heights in officialdom, Lu Cai sidestepped the civil examination track altogether to travel, write and enjoy all of the world's pleasures right up until his death aged 41.[19]

Further Sayings is the shortest *Aizi* compilation, containing just fifteen entries. Lu Cai appended a preface to the work which was included by Tu Benjun in his Wanli compilation. The preface sheds light on how he came to put the compilation together:

> …For my part, I have had a weakness for jibes since my youth, and when I get hold of one I am sure to make a note of it. In the eleventh year [of the Zhengde reign (1516)] I travelled to Jinling, and there was nothing to do in the guest lodgings. So, I selected those which were especially tasteful and collated them into a book, to be appended after that by the Slope Codger. It is to be used for merely playful and nothing more. And if someone says that there are hidden meanings lodged inside; well, how could I dare?!
>
> Signed, Lu Zhuo of Changzhou, that same year, at the start of the ninth month.
>
> […] 余幼有謔癖，有所得必志之。歲丙子，游金陵，客居無聊，因取其尤雅者，纂而成編，以附於坡翁之後，直用為戲耳，若謂其意有所寓者，則吾豈敢! 是歲九月望，長洲陸灼識。

While all *Aizi* compilations pay a visit to Aizi's personal and home life as well as his intellectual dealings, *Further Sayings* contains a greater proportion of such entries. This is illustrated by the sixth entry in the compilation, in which we encounter three generations of the Ai family and two very different approaches to parental discipline:

> Master Ai had a grandson of around ten years of age. He was lazy and naughty and would not study. Even when punished with the cane, he would not reform his behaviour. Master Ai's son only had this one boy-child, so he was constantly fearful that he would not be able to withstand the canings and die; any fault would without fail be pardoned through crying and snivelling. Master Ai said angrily, "How about I educate your child for you?" Master Ai would cane him even harder, and Master Ai's son was helpless to interfere.

[19] A grave inscription detailing the life of Lu Cai by his brother Lu Can may be found in: Lu Can, *Lu Ziyu ji*, 10–1 of fascicle 3.

> One morning, there was snowfall. The grandson was rolling snowballs and enjoying himself. Upon seeing this, Master Ai removed the child's upper garments and made him kneel in the snow. His coldness was manifest in shivers and shaking, but Master Ai's son did not dare speak out again. Instead, he removed his own upper garments and knelt by the boy's side. Taken aback, Master Ai asked, "Your son is at fault and deserves this punishment, but what have you done to be punished alongside him?" Tearfully, Master Ai's son said, "If you freeze my son to death, I'll freeze yours!". Master Ai laughed and let them go. **[HY:6]**
>
> 艾子有孫，年十許，慵劣不學，每加榎楚而不悛。其子僅有是兒，恒恐兒之不勝杖而死也，責必涕泣以請。艾子怒曰：「吾為若教子不善邪？」杖之愈峻。其子無如之何。一旦，雪作，孫抟雪而嬉，艾子見之，褫其衣，使跪雪中，寒戰之色可掬。其子不複敢言，亦脫其衣跪其旁。艾子驚問曰：「汝兒有罪，應受此罰，汝何與焉？」其子泣曰：「汝凍吾兒，吾亦凍汝兒。」艾子笑而釋之。

While here the events take place home rather than at court, this is a close example of the instrumentalised *Shiji*-style humour we have met in Chapter 2. Just like the courtiers, Aizi's son is afraid to remonstrate directly: "Master Ai's son did not dare speak out again", and so instead enacts the remonstration by the means of a silly, exaggerated action which places Aizi in his own shoes (that is, he freezes his son), which leads Aizi to awaken with a laugh to the excessiveness of his punishment. It is worth pointing out that, given the popularity of the original *Aizi*, Ming readers may also have been amused by the role reversal here. Aizi entries are full of this kind of "useful" *Shiji*-style humour, but typically Aizi is the one to dish it out (e.g. HY:1 below). Yet here, we find Aizi's son turning the tables on the patriarch, playing the master at his own game. In this, then, one glimpses the nature of *Further Sayings* as a sequel as opposed to the original. This is a creative form of engagement with a well-known pre-existing tradition; as compiler he riffs on it, anticipating that many readers will notice what he has done based on their familiarity with the circulating tradition.

Unofficial Sayings of Master Ai 艾子外語

Unlike *Further Sayings*, whose preface states that the aim was to affix the text after *Miscellaneous Stories* alone, *Unofficial Sayings* was compiled expressly for a collection of five Warring States-themed humour compilations. As a Wanli imprint, it is from the perspective of this compilation—*Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* (*Wuzi xiece* 五子諧策)—that this dissertation approaches the Aizi tradition. Its compiler was Tu Benjun 屠本畯 (1542–1622), native to modern-day Ningbo in Zhejiang, who began his official career under the auspices of his rebellion-quashing father Tu Dashan 屠大山 (1500–1579), of whom he was the only male offspring. In line with academic interests, Tu Benjun himself is now remembered mostly for his contributions to gastronomy. He authored several food-themed compilations, two of which are *Satchel of Tea* (*Ming ji* 茗笈), a commentary on pre-existing works on tea,[20] and *Explanatory Notes on Seafood Varieties in Fujian* (*Minzhong haicuo shu* 閩中海錯疏), prefaced 1596, which contains hundreds of annotated entries and is somewhat akin to a culinary dictionary in character.[21]

Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters as a compilation of humour compilations is placed as part of a wider compendium of Tu's compilations and writings called *Shanlin jingji ji* (山林經濟籍). The compendium was a product of his early years of retirement. As Tu describes in the "On the Genesis of This Book" (*xuji yuanqi* 敘籍原起) section, now as resident of the mountains and forests (*shanlin* 山林), that is, living an eremitic lifestyle, "I

[20] Tu Benjun, *Shanlin jingji ji*, 315–30.

[21] Tu Benjun, *Minzhong haicuo shu*.

dared not wile away my days in idleness and composed *Shanlin jingji ji*".[22] The book is designed to give the reader everything they needed to know for a life away from the constraints of society as a hermit, which tied in with fashionable ideals of the times. The book contains a variety of original writings by Tu along with his selection of texts from past dynasties. There are four prefaces (*xu* 序), by Li Weizhen 李維楨 (1547–1626), Shen Taichong 沈泰沖 (later *ming* Fengchao 鳳超), Wang Sishi 王嗣奭 (1566–1648) and Chai Maoxian 柴懋賢, who also acted as printer-publisher in this case and was named proofreader of the majority of its sections and entries to boot. *Shanlin jingji ji* may therefore be characterised as the product of a close collaboration between Tu Benjun and Chai Maoxian somewhat akin to the 'author' and 'editor' relationship in publishing today. That is to say, although we speak of *Jest Stratagems* as Tu Benjun's compilation, to do so probably understates the level of Chai's input.

The overall compilation is categorised into five sections according to the characters in its title, specifically the "Mountain Section" (*shanbu* 山部), "Forest Section" (*shanbu* 林部), "Organisation Section" (*jingbu* 經部), "Relief Section" (*jibu* 濟部), and finally the "Books Section" (*jibu* 籍部), of which *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* is one sub-section.

As well as the two aforementioned *Aizi* compilations, *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters* contains Tu Benjun's own *Aizi* addition of *Unofficial Sayings*. He has also included two further "Master" compilations, one of which also written by Tu himself. In his own words:

[22] 吾不敢玩惕作《山林經濟籍》. Tu Benjun, *Shanlin jingji ji*, 173.

> Of the three *Master Ai* fascicles, the one by Gentleman Su the Elder of the Song is called *Miscellaneous Sayings*; the one by Lu Zhuo [Lu Cai] of the Ming is called *Further Sayings*; the one by Tu Benjun is called *Unofficial Sayings*. *Master Quan* (*Quanzi*), in one fascicle, is by Geng Chudong 耿楚侗.[23] *Master Silly* (*Hanzi*), in one fascicle, is also the playful brushstrokes of Benjun.[24]… I have connected these five *Masters* together and collated them to make a "Jest Stratagems"…
>
> 《艾子》三卷：宋蘇長公撰者，曰《雜語》；明陸灼撰者，曰《後語》；屠本畯撰者，曰《外語》。《權子》一卷，明耿楚侗撰。《憨子》一卷，亦本畯戲筆 […] 五子聯絡哀為諧策 […]

The "Five Masters" (*wuzi* 五子) in the title of the compilation, then, should be understood in reference to the texts themselves rather than their titular characters ("five *Masters*"), since three of them refer to the same "Master Ai". Tu Benjun did not supply a preface for *Unofficial Sayings* or *Miscellaneous Stories*, but he did include Lu Cai's aforementioned preface to *Further Sayings*. This chapter will discuss the preface for the overall *Jest Stratagems* compilation which addresses the *Aizi* compilations as a group.

3.4. Warring States Material as a Ming Vehicle of Satire

3.4.1. Aizi as a Ming Satirical Inheritance

In the extract from Lu Cai's *Further Sayings* preface in Section 3.3.2., we have already come across his mock assurance at the end that there is no intended satire of Ming

[23] Geng Chudong refers to Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596). For his *History of Ming* biography, see Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, fascicle 221, 5816–7. Of Tu Benjun's two borrowed Ming works (*Further Sayings* and *Master Quan*), *Master Quan* was the more recent, possibly also put together during the Wanli reign.

[24] Tu Benjun took the *hao* of "Mr. Silly" (Han xiansheng 憨先生) in his later years, so there is perhaps an autobiographical element at play here.

affairs. This, of course, points to the very opposite. The former half of the preface discusses the satirical origins of the original *Aizi*, attributing it to Su Shi:

> The whole world knows *Master Ai* to be the Slope Codger's playful brushstrokes, yet it is not known *why* he wrote it. From the look of the "Asking about Crabs" [ZS:2], "Asking about Rice" [ZS:26] and "Riding a Donkey" [ZS:?][25] stories, they are to mock rulers and ministers. And the "Xiezhi" [ZS:22], "Rain dragons" [ZS:35], "Moving the Clock" [ZS:38] stories are to mock the chancellor of the time. Given this intended purpose, isn't it most likely written about Mr. Wang [Anshi]?[26] The Slope Codger was ordinarily fond of using his words and writings to remonstrate against the governance of the times. This, too, seems to be an instance…
>
> 世皆知艾子為坡翁戲筆，而不知其有為作也。觀其問蟹、問米、乘驢之說，則以譏父子; 獬鷹、雨龍、移鐘之說，則以譏時相。即其意指，其殆為王氏作乎? 坡翁平日好以言語文章規切時政，若此亦其一也 […]

This sentiment brings to mind the famous "Crow Terrace Poetry Trial" (*Wutai shian* 烏臺詩案), in which the prosecution built evidence against Su Shi by interpreting alternative meanings in his writings which could be subversive and traitorous, and quoting them as evidence against him.[27] Albeit with differing motives, here we observe Lu Cai apply a similar approach. After all, the Trial was not without basis; it is in fact widely accepted that Su's writings do deploy humour and subversive remarks to criticise the governance and the Wang Anshi reforms, or as Lu Cai puts it, that he was "fond of using words and writings to

[25] This entry is absent from the transmitted *Miscellaneous Stories*. However, there were indeed brushnotes (*biji*), some humorous, about Wang Anshi riding a donkey near Jinling during his retirement, including one in which he hides from his brother in the house of an old commoner lady. See also note 26.

[26] Mr. Wang here is Wang Anshi 王安石, Grand Chancellor of the Song between 1069–1076. He is best known as the architect of a comprehensive set of reforms covering land policy, education, defence, finance, and much more besides. The New Policies (*xinfa* 新法) drew a huge amount of criticism and resistance from civil servants and public figures from conservative camps and factions.

[27] On the poetry trial, see Hartman, "Poetry and Politics in 1079". Lin Yutang gives it his own treatment in *The Gay Genius*, 166–207.

remonstrate against the governance of the times". The Trial only served to formally consolidate a noticeable (and indeed, celebrated) aspect that permeates many of his writings.

What Lu Cai does in his preface is cast the Aizi-themed humour as long-standing tradition of borrowing the Warring States setting and figures to satirise the present. Pointing out how it was used in the Song to satirise Song affairs, Lu practically announces his intention to take it up once more to satirise Ming matters. With the ending line of the preface, "And if someone says that there are hidden meanings lodged inside; well, how could I dare?!", Lu feigns surprise at the mere notion that there might be satire of current affairs in his compilation. But this, of course, is a signal to the reader to look out for precisely that. In fact, the very first entry of *Further Sayings* is a clear example of satirising the Ming:

> A gentleman of Qi, Zhu Shifu, plotted a rebellion. King Xuan put him to death, and was intent on extinguishing his entire clan. Zhu's clan was large and widespread. They gathered together and hatched a plan, saying "The King never listens to what other people say. Only Academician Ai can put forth his argument and remain in good favour. How about we go and implore him to intervene?"
>
> The entire clan went to kneel in Master Ai's courtyard, where crying and snivelling, they begged him. Laughing, Master Ai said, "This is no trouble. Gentlemen, all you must do is prepare a rope and bring it to me, and you will be able to escape this misfortune in no time". The Zhus took these words to be playful, yet dared not inquire further. They retreated to procure the cord to present as a gift to Master Ai.
>
> Carrying this rope of a length of three *chi*, Master Ai entered his audience with the King and said, "The intentions harboured by Zhu Shifu were malignant. It was right of my King to "expose his corpse in the marketplace [as a warning to others]". However, the one who did that was Shifu alone and nobody else. What guilt do his ancestors and descendants have for my King to annihilate every last one? If there is no guilt, this is not the thinking of a benevolent ruler".
>
> King Xuan said, "This was not your King's own idea. It is a clear instruction from the laws of the Former Kings. The *Statutes of Governance* say, 'As for those who share the ancestry of a rebel, kill them and spare none'. This being so, your King cannot

> presume to bend the rules to pardon them, and thereby do damage to the model set by the Former Kings".
>
> Master Ai kowtowed and said, "Even I, your servant, am aware that my King's hands are tied in this matter. Unworthy as I am, I have a suggestion of my own. In years gone by, Prince Wu surrendered Handan to Qin. Was he not my Great King's brother of the same mother?[28] To speak from this perspective, Your Majesty is also the clansman of a rebel minister, and in accordance with this principle you must be punished. I have a short rope of three *chi*, and presume to offer it to you with which to do the deed. Great King, I implore you to end it on this very day! Do not cherish this body of yours at the expense of disobeying an order from the Former Kings!" The King laughed, rose to his feet and said, "Enough for now, my Academician. Your King shall spare them". **[HY:1]**
>
> 齊大夫邾石父謀叛，宣王誅之，欲滅其族。邾之族大以蕃，聚而謀曰：「他人之言王必不內，惟艾先生辨而有寵，盍往祈焉？」舉族拜於艾子之庭，涕泗以請。艾子笑曰：「是不難，諸公但具一繩來，立可免禍。」邾氏以為戲言，亦不敢詰，退而索絢以饋。艾子懷其三尺以見王，曰：「邾石父包藏禍心，王肆諸市，當矣。然為之者石父一人耳，其宗族何辜，而王欲盡殲之？無乃非仁君之用心乎。」宣王曰：「此非寡人意也，先王之律有明訓也，政典曰：『與叛同宗者殺無赦。』是以寡人不敢曲宥，以傷先王之法。」艾子頓首曰：「臣亦知王之不得已也。竊有一說，往年公子巫以邯鄲降秦，非大王之母弟乎？以是而言，大王亦叛臣之族，理合隨坐。臣有短繩三尺，敢獻於下執事，請大王即日引決，勿惜一身而傷先王之命。」王笑而起曰：「先生且休，寡人赦之矣。」

As King Xuan of Qi accurately points out here, the extinguishing of the entire clan (*miezu* 滅族, *zuzhu* 族誅) had been sanctioned as a punishment for treasonous behaviour long before the Warring States. However, the issue loomed particularly large in the Ming: the Ming founder ordered it several times in the process of consolidating his power, and the third Ming monarch, the Yongle 永樂 emperor (r. 1402–1424) made extensive use of it to purge and dissuade dissent about the manner in which he had taken the throne from his nephew, the Jianwen 建文 emperor, in 1402.[29] The Yongle emperor had even famously expanded the

[28] There are a few discrepancies with traditional historiography here, see below discussion. *Mudi* 母弟 could be as rendered, or a "younger brother of your mother".

[29] For an English-language overview of the Yongle controversy, see Hok-lam Chan, "Legitimating Usurpation: Historical Revisions under the Ming Yongle Emperor".

liable clansmen from the usual "nine kinships" to "ten kinships" in the case of Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357–1402), minister of the Jianwen emperor.[30] Given that the subsequent Ming emperors were descended from the Yongle emperor and their legitimacy hence rested on the rightfulness of his inheritance of the throne, this remained a controversial and taboo topic for centuries. The mention of the Handan event seems to be a deliberate masking, since only a rebel or usurper in the family would slot into Aizi's line of argument here. Meanwhile, this family's relatively rare family name Zhu 邾 is conspicuously close in both sound and form to the Zhu 朱 of the Ming ruling clan. Something else that would have underscored the connection for many readers was that there been a better-known familial usurpation story with regard to King Xuan. The *Stratagems of the Warring States* relate that King Xuan's brother, the Lord of Jingguo (Jingguo jun 靖郭君) had in fact righteously refused a proposal to oust King Xuan while still official heir in favour of another brother, Tian Jiaoshi 田郊師.[31] This created a thematic link, and the fact that it ended in the opposite result may well have, conversely, strengthened the connection to Ming examples. In short, the theme of this entry is all-too-reminiscent of the Yongle controversy. So, this is likely intended to satirise the hypocrisy and excessive cruelty of those emperors who had descended from the Yongle emperor in ordering the extinguishing of clans. However, there were plots and treason attempts by enfeoffed imperial relatives throughout the Ming, so the Yongle emperor is not the only possibility for the indicated family member.

Another entry in *Further Sayings* with a strong Ming feeling is the thirteenth:

[30] Fang's students and peers were included as the tenth kinship.

[31] For this *Stratagems* entry in English, see J.I. Crump, trans., *Chan-kuo ts'e*, 170–2.

> Master Ai kept two goats in a pen. The male goat was fond of fighting, and whenever it encountered a stranger it would chase and butt him. When Master Ai's disciples came over, they would find this extremely disturbing. They implored Master Ai, saying "Master, your goat is male and strong. Please get him castrated, so that his temper will reduce and he will become more docile". Master Ai laughed and said, "Don't you know that nowadays those without male genitals are even more savage?!" **[HY:13]**
>
> 艾子畜羊兩頭於圂，羊牡者好鬬，每遇生人，則逐而觸之。門人輩往來，甚以為患，請於艾子曰:「夫子之羊，牡而壯，請得閹之，則降其性而馴矣。」 艾子笑曰: 「爾不知今日無陽道的更猛裏。」

While the modern reader would be forgiven for interpreting this as a sexist joke about women, anyone familiar with Ming history would immediately guess that the intended butt of the punchline is eunuchs. This is what makes the entry strongly Ming in character. While eunuchs, 'good' ones and 'bad' ones, far pre-dated the Ming as a feature of China's courts and there had always been some level of ambivalence towards them among the scholar classes upon whose records we are mostly reliant, it was arguably in the Ming, with the rise of the Embroidered Uniform Guard (*Jinyi wei* 錦衣衛), often described as a "secret police", and court factions like the Eight Tigers led by Liu Jin 劉瑾 (1451–1510), that eunuchs began to wield and sustain power in ways that went beyond the roles in short-lived incidents of court intrigue we see in earlier times.[32] As a result, mistrust and animosity towards eunuchs impressed itself strongly in the cultural productions of the mid-to-late-Ming; this Aizi entry represents just one instance.

The "nowadays" (*jinri* 今日) in Aizi's reply—"Don't you know that nowadays those without male genitals are even more savage?!"—serves to emphasise this recent quality and

[32] The most infamous 'evil Ming eunuch' was probably Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627), but he lived after *Further Sayings* was compiled. This *would* mean, however, that the punchline remained relatable for readers of the 1608 *Jest Stratagems* recompilation.

pertinence to the present day. But almost paradoxically, it is placed in the voice of Aizi, which reaffirms the Warring States setting and pushes the exchange long into the past. The idea of "using the past to discuss the present" or "borrowing the past to indirectly criticise the present" (*shuogu tanjin* 說古談今; *jiegu fengjin* 借古諷今, etc) is a familiar concept in discussions of late imperial Chinese literature. To push further than simply pointing out the obvious presence of this literary device in Aizi-themed humour compilations, however, one could ask: what was it about the Warring States in particular that equipped it as such a popular vehicle of satire for Song and Ming society and politics? To answer this question, we can look towards Tu Benjun's preface to *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters*, the first compilation to bind all three *Aizi*s together into a single compilation.

3.4.2. *Shiji*-style Remonstrative Humour in *Aizi* Compilations

Part of the reason the Warring States made itself so amenable to this purpose was due to the inescapable association with the remonstrative humour in the *Shiji* "Biographies of the Comics" chapter, which we have already come across in Chapter 2. Each biographical anecdote in the chapter demonstrates how a courtier's indirect silly remark or comically exaggerated enthusiasm enabled an obstinate ruler to realise his own wrongdoing, particularly in cases whereby direct remonstration had proven ineffective or been forbidden on pain of death. What the *Shiji* model of remonstrative humour provided was a flat-pack formula, a fill-in-the-gaps format which lent itself to the subversive criticism of Song/Ming powers-that-be via the stand-in of a Warring States king, articulated through the borrowed

voice of a fictional Aizi. The 'rope' entry in the previous section 3.4.1. (HY:1) has already provided a prime example of this. While not present in every Aizi entry, the 'useful' remonstrative humour à la "Biographies of the Comics" appears frequently, and was viewed as integral to the Aizi tradition. The Ming preface writers draw great attention to its presence, and it had already been pointed out several centuries earlier in the above poem by Zhou Zizhi.

After all, the character of Aizi is a Warring States intellectual employed at court to present his thoughts and opinions (i.e., "disputations", *bian* 辯) on matters, which places him right in the shoes of the biographized comics. Sima Qian discussed Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 (Warring States Qi), Entertainer Zhan (You Zhan 優旃; Warring States/Qin), Entertainer Meng (You Meng 優孟; Springs and Autumns Chu). The *Shiji* chapter also includes additions by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫, namely Ximen Bao 西門豹 (Warring States Wei), along with Member of the Suite Guo (Guo sheren 郭舍人),[33] Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, Academician Dongguo (Dongguo xiansheng 東郭先生), and Academician Wang (Wang xiansheng 王先生), all of whom were figures the court of Emperor Wu of (Western) Han (r. 141–87 BCE).[34] Chu also supplies a further Chunyu Kun anecdote. Ming humour compilers do not seem to mark a distinction between Sima and Chu's subjects of biography, although the Song Zhou Zizhi poem (see 3.3.1.) shows explicit awareness of it.

[33] Here I borrow from Baccini and Barenghi, trans., "The Witty Courtiers, Memoir 66", 149–95.

[34] For an outline of Chu Shaosun's additions, see Qu Jingyi, "'Shiji guji zhuan' siti", 5–6 (of chapter). This was not Chu's only addition to the *Shiji*. For a discussion, see Hans van Ess, "The Late Western Han Historian Chu Shaosun".

Chunyu Kun in particular deserves a special mention, since his example exhibits the strongest parallels with the character of Aizi. Chunyu Kun was also a Jixia Academician at the court of the King of Qi. We can rule out Aizi as a stand-in for Chunyu Kun, however, as Chunyu himself appears and interacts with Aizi in ZS:3, ZS:27, and HY:12.[35] In *Unofficial Sayings* (WY:4) we even find an entry which is premised on Aizi having heard about his humorous remonstration of King Wei's (King Xuan's father) over-indulgence in alcohol relayed in the *Shiji*, ending with Chunyu admitting Aizi's superiority in the realm of drinking: "If this is [your level], I cannot compare to you. I'll cede top spot to you, Academician Ai".[36]

The aforementioned 'rope' example is just one of several entries in which Aizi plays the role of *Shiji* remonstrative humourist *par excellence*. His skills in the persuasive arts are repeatedly acknowledged by other characters along the way, for example "As for persuading [King Hui of] Liang, nobody but Master Ai will do" [WY:12],[37] "King [Xuan] never listens to what other people say. Only Academician Ai can put forth his argument and remain in good favour" [HY:1].[38] In his preface to *Jest Stratagems of the Five Masters*, Tu Benjun places a great emphasis on the "Biographies of the Comics" connection:

> …This unofficial historian from the Ming says: The *Historical Records* outlines seven maestro Comics: Chunyu Kun, Jester Zhan, Jester Meng, Academician Wang, Dongfang Shuo, Member of the Suite Guo, and Sima Xiangru.[39] With "words of

[35] On how Chunyu Kun went down in history, see Oliver Weingarten, "Chunyu Kun: Motifs, Narratives, and Personas".

[36] 「是則髡之所以不如也。讓艾先生居右。」

[37] 說梁，非艾子不可.

[38] 他人之言王必不內，惟艾先生辨而有寵.

[39] As mentioned above, the transmitted version of the *Shiji* covers eight comics, not seven, and did not include Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c.179–117BCE). The unmentioned comics are Academician Dongguo and Ximen Bao. This could be based on a different edition, a simple error, or an intentional switch. Intriguingly, in early times we sometimes even see the figure of Sima Xiangru being used as a foil for the comic figures, as noted in Baccini, "The *Xiaolin* as *Paiyou xiaoshuo*", 163–4. In any case, counting the central comics is not a

> banter which indirectly strike a chord", they broaden the obstinate minds of rulers, mock the flawed governance of their times, and chronicle the treachery and vulgarity of common customs. They can laugh and banter, caution and admonish. This is not something which today's playful laughsters can imitate. Aizi importunes the lords of Qi, Chu, Zhao and Wei in a way that is comparable to those scholars who rushed from afar. His quick-wittedness and wisdom compares with that of the seven maestros, and his polished diction compares with that in the *Stratagems of Persuasion* (*Duanchang ce* 短長策).[40] As a result, its readers have suspected that it has been deliberately used to lodge messages inside[41]… Although *Master Quan* and *Master Han* are a little different to *Master Ai*, in the way that meaning has been inserted into them they are actually the same. In short, they broadly analogise the ugly things in this world, and the jesting retorts of the comic enable others to realise natural principles by themselves. In this, they are equal. I have connected and collated these five *Masters* together to make a "Jest Stratagems"…
>
> […] 明外史氏曰： 史記載滑稽者七家：淳于髡、優旃、優孟、王先生、東方朔、郭舍人、司馬相如。談言微中，廓人主之褊心，譏當時之弊政， 紀民情之險鄙。 可笑、可談、可警、可戒。非今之戲笑者所可彷彿也。其干齊楚趙魏之君，似結靳馮軼之士，其機智似七家，其鑄詞似《短長策》。由是讀者疑其有為而託之於寓言也 […] 《權子》、《憨子》雖稍異艾子而託意實同。揔之，博諭醜類，滑稽之應諧使人自暢於天，鈞也。五子聯絡裒為諧策 […]

Adopting the guise of an "unofficial historian from the Ming" (*Ming waishishi* 明外史氏), as befitting of the compiler of *Unofficial Sayings* (*waiyu* 外語), Tu Benjun devotes much of his preface to detailing how the character of Aizi compares favourably to the comics extolled in the *Shiji*. Not only does Aizi roam the same world of "Qi, Chu, Zhao and Wei", but his approach is the same: just like them, his disputations do not just elicit "laughs and banter" but simultaneously "caution and admonish", leading Tu to place Aizi's "quick-wittedness and wisdom" on par with the *Shiji* comics. The *Shiji* model of remonstrative humour provided a ready-made formula, a fill-in-the-gaps format which lent itself to the subversive criticism of Song/Ming powers-that-be via the stand-in of a Warring States king, articulated through the

straightforward matter: Baccini and Barenghi also include Lady Wang (Wang furen 王夫人). Baccini and Barenghi, trans., "The Witty Courtiers, Memoir 66", 163, n57.

[40] This refers to *Stratagems of the Warring States*. See 3.5. for a full discussion of this alternative name.

[41] The wording mirrors Lu Cai's preface. It is plausible that Tu Benjun is nodding towards Lu Cai's above discussion of Su Shi's intentions, which he has appended after *Further Sayings*, but this could also be a more general observation.

borrowed voice of a fictional Aizi. This was something to which later times could not lend themselves to as easily, since the precise set-up was associated with Western Han at the latest.

3.4.3. The Imagined 'Warring States World' and Ming Humour

One remark from the *Jest Stratagems* preface that is particularly pertinent here is: "This is not something which today's playful laughsters [or, today's playful laughs (*xixiaozhe* 戲笑者)] can imitate".[42] On the one hand, this is a ringing endorsement of the Aizi tradition. On the other hand, however, Tu has in effect raised Aizi to the detriment of the humour of his day: that is, late-Ming humour, and by extension, the very compilations and compilers which comprise the focus of this dissertation. One reason was of course the admonition through laughter discussed in the previous section, the 'useful' *Shiji* humour. But was there something else besides this that the Warring States setting could offer that made Ming jests and humour entries seem inadequate by comparison?

At this point, it is helpful to take a step back and remember the overwhelming significance this specific time period held in the minds of people of later dynasties. Through a long process of periodically reaffirmed canonical transmission, Warring States texts and Warring States-presenting texts were then (and remain) among the first points of access for learning literary Chinese. Given the pre-modern pedagogical emphasis on rote learning and

[42] 非今之戲笑者所可彷彿也.

memorisation, for the majority of readers, certainly those of the exam-taking class, a verbatim copy of multiple Warring States texts existed in the minds to be quoted or discussed at will. Our Ming publishers were well aware that these texts were a cultural currency which they could be sure were shared regardless of regional, social and hierarchical differences.

The emphasis modern scholarship places on the abstract philosophical content of Masters texts and its interpretation and application in political and moral systems over the centuries sometimes leads us to overlook the simple fact that these ideas are relayed via discursive exchanges which are heavily grounded in the socio-historical context in which they took place. In other words, part and parcel with the issues under discussion came the impetuses behind these exchanges and the specific social roles of people involved in them—this vivid backdrop of a Warring States world of battles, sieges and alliances with multiple monarchs, state envoys and philosophising consultants with varying loyalties travelling from court to court, situated within time-specific social structures such as master-disciples groups, huge retinue communities and state-patronised scholarly institutions like the Jixia Academy. In short, as readers in later dynasties absorbed and memorised the Warring States canon, a 'Warring States world' hitchhiked into their minds on the back of the ideas under discussion.

This is part of the answer to the inevitable question of why it was the Warring States, as opposed to any other given time period, that so readily lent itself to Ming satire. Fundamentally, the period had to be familiar enough to be understood by all anticipated readers, and possess a richness of well-known figures, stock characters and events for a writer or compiler to flexibly explore and play around with. However, another important

factor in setting up the requisite parallel for this kind of ventriloquist satire was that the time period had to be sufficiently different in terms of historical context.[43] From the large, centralised entities of the Song and Ming, this world of many courts must have seemed like a very distant, detached reality. The unification of the states by the First Emperor in 221 BCE was indeed the end of an era in that, despite the fact that several subsequent periods saw his territory splinter into multiple states, the wandering consultant 'persuader' figure which was ubiquitous in the literature from and about the Warring States, essentially ceased to exist. Yet, the aforementioned canonisation of Warring States material ensured a space was reserved for him in the imagination of later dynasties, and he was not forgotten entirely. Instead, as a figure exclusive to a by-gone age, yet known well by all in subsequent times, he occupied a rare zone that was ripe for fictional twists and instrumentalization to satirical and humorous ends. Further, given that after the unification, pre-modern historiography had often been partisan in its intent to trace a legitimate line of succession, criticism of the pre-unification era with no agreed legitimate monarch was probably less complicated in its implications, given that satire via a past setting often necessitated criticism of a past ruler. In sum, then, the Warring States scenario was a very fitting choice for Ming humour compilers. Not only did it enable the use of a ready-made vehicle for satire from the *Shiji*, which doubled as an argument for the acceptability of its content, but it represented what we might call a 'familiar unfamiliarity', far removed enough to play around with without untoward consequences, yet familiar enough for the humour and satire to resonate deeply with Ming audiences, and thereby ensure the viability of the publication.

[43] The distance in temporal proximity alone (i.e., that it was a long time removed from the present) is likely not the key qualifying factor here, since after all there were plenty of other possible earlier and later settings.

A final point to make here is that the Warring States guise probably did not offer much realistic protection when it came to getting into trouble for subversive content. While the satirical function is certainly a key facet, we should be wary of overstating it by casting the Aizi enterprises as being intended primarily subversive vehicles. After all, these prefaces, and the content itself would certainly not survive a Crow Terrace-esque trial. The compilers do not seem especially reticent about the satirical content, and if anything, their prefaces exert considerable effort to ensure the reader notices its presence. If the association of the likes of Aizi and "Biography of the Comics" with indirect criticism were indeed as solidly established as the humour prefaces explored in this dissertation suggest, then if there was a realistic risk of repercussion, a savvy publisher would do well to avoid the area completely.[44] So it would be going too far (and perhaps naïve) to mark these compilations as a *bona fide* attempt to lodge subversive content in the Warring States setting to escape censorship or punishment. Rather, I am inclined to read the emphasis on satire more simply; as a promotion of the content of the book. This tells us something about the late Ming readership, because it reflects an awareness on the part of publishers that satire on social and current affairs would prove popular material, Tu Benjun's creative reengagement with the inherited Aizi tradition can thus be viewed as a deliberate repurposing of an existing tradition to find a new angle on a familiar theme in this competitive market of endlessly shifting tastes. Satire sold, and compilers and publishers knew that.

[44] The precise explanation for this falls beyond the scope of this study into the complex and murky issue of the levels of control on late-Ming publishing. For example, it could stem from a lack of the realistic prospect of control and surveillance, the absence of any one clear and specific target of satire, the popularity of satirical content outweighing any envisioned risk, Tu Benjun's (and Chai Maoxian's) self-perceived levels of influence, so on and so forth.

3.5. Aizi and Contested Late Imperial Appraisals of the Warring States World

Tu Benjun's prefatory praise of the Aizi tradition is very high indeed. Certainly, the *Jest Stratagems* preface reads like a toned-down version of the sentiment expressed by Hu Wenhuan's first guest from Chapter 2: "Why just for venting moods?! The literature can be savoured and the principles heeded. There are lessons to contemplate and emotivity to absorb. In this lives on very much what the Grand Historian had in mind".[45] This similarity is unsurprising considering that Hu Wenhuan's "Jesting Histories" and Tu Benjun's *Unofficial Sayings* share the facet of being active Ming appropriations of the *Shiji* biographical legacy, albeit of different aspects. This means that, on top of the ambivalent status of humour content, these two compilers had to contend with the additional criticism of being an unworthy derivative production, that is, of being a "Handan steps" failed imitation (see section 2.3.2. of the previous chapter). Hu Wenhuan addressed this directly through the voice of his second guest, while Tu Benjun tackled it by padding out the connection with earlier precedents and explicating precisely how they are linked.[46] And the precedent Tu Benjun seems to feel is most pertinent to his *Five Masters* compilation is the *Stratagems of the Warring States*. Evidently, he was so committed to the similarity that that he has borrowed its title for his own compilation, *Jest Stratagems*. This title raises the textual precedent up as the very characteristic which binds these five texts together. The following section will explore

[45]「詎特遣興乎哉？文可味，理可聽，規鑑可觀，感格可籍。深有太史公之意存焉。」

[46] As for Lu Cai, he does not draw attention to the *Shiji* connection.

how the Aizi humour compilations can be read as a Ming form of reader response to the *Stratagems of the Warring States*.

The previous section has placed an emphasis on the Masters literature (including "Hundred Schools of Thought" texts) and the *Shiji*, but these were not the only textual origins through which this 'Warring States world' took shape in the minds of people in the Song and Ming. The *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) is a collection of discourses and anecdotes from the era, most taking place at the courts of the various states. Its compilation is attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) during the Western Han. The passages which comprise the transmitted version recount centuries' worth of political manoeuvres and decision-making processes behind the interaction and battles between states. The volatile multi-state system of the times created a situation whereby their leaders placed great value on intellectuals that could offer expert advice on governance, international relations and warfare, which gave rise to a class of "wandering persuaders" (*youshui zhi shi* 游說之士) and "consultant scholars" (*ceshi* 策士), who would travel from court to court, much like mobile consultancy firms. Mencius himself could well be counted among their ranks, as may our invented Aizi. There were also some attempts keep talent within state borders through patronage systems, like the aforementioned Jixia Academy, to which Aizi is also affiliated. Envoys from other states would frequently reside for extended periods at foreign courts, as Aizi is also shown to do. Another oft-discussed feature of the *Stratagems* that appears from time to time in the Aizi collections are its analogies *yuyan* 寓言, commonly rendered in a shorthand translation as "fables", but more literally "words with lodged

[meaning]".[47] These stories were often voiced by the persuaders in their audiences with kings as an analogy for the issue at hand. Notably, many of these involve talking animals. This appears from time to time in Aizi entries, such as in WY:6 in which Aizi pays witness to a superiority contest between a talking tiger and snake. While the idea of the *Stratagems* having been intended as a textbook of model persuasive speeches has emerged in the recent past,[48] it is hard to tell if this was a prominent way in which readers engaged with the text throughout the ages.

Our Wanli compiler Tu Benjun has appropriated the legacy and popularity of *Stratagems of the Warring States* for the sake of his humour compilation. He has shaped the content of his *Unofficial Sayings* with the *Stratagems* in mind and taken the additional, bold step of naming the overall compilation *Jest Stratagems*. In effect, this both cements the link and posits the similarity to *Stratagems* as the stand-out characteristic of these five texts. It is a staunch advocation, but is this a defensive, protective strategy like those we have seen in Chapter 2? Is the aim to raise humour content up to the level of the *Stratagems*? Perhaps not. As we shall see in the remainder of this section, in the Ming and early Qing the *Stratagems* was often viewed as entertainment reading, and it flourished with the late-Ming publishing boom. This, combined with the dubious moral actions of its characters, made its popularity a cause for concern for early-Qing Cheng-Zhu Confucianists as they looked back on the Ming. So, while we can understand Tu Benjun's prefatory invocation of the *Shiji* as in a similar mode to the Chapter 2 prefaces, his nod to the *Stratagems,* which far surpasses the *Shiji*

[47] I have used the idea of 'lodging meaning' in the prefaces which refer to the concept as a more direct translation.

[48] J.I. Crump, *Legends of the Warring States*, 2. Also, Paul Goldin, *After Confucius*, 77–9.

connection in dominance due to its place in the title, is probably an advocation along different lines.

3.5.1. Naming Stratagems

Right from its transmitted origins, the attributed compiler of *Stratagems*, Liu Xiang, had proffered and justified *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) as a title, among several others, to best describe the character of his compilation.[49] This title went on to receive continuous sanctification, most notably through Bao Biao's 鮑彪 1149 Song edition, which also reassembled the chapters into the state-centred format readers are familiar with today, organising the entries into "Stratagems of Qin 秦策", "Stratagems of Chu 楚策", and so on. This re-compilation had the effect of placing an even greater focus onto the states and incidentally served to further affirm Liu Xiang's chosen title. Importantly here, it was versions of this edition which were most widespread in the Ming.[50]

Stratagems of the Warring States is a name of quite some historiographical weight. It is even thought that the Warring States period itself was named after the text, as opposed to the text being named after the period as one might assume.[51] Just as *The Springs and*

[49] Liu Xiang, *Zhanguo ce*, 1195. He even lists a *Duanchang* among the six texts, or six types of text, in the imperial archives which yielded material for his compilation before proposing the title, which could be said to in effect rule out "*duanchang"* as the primary naming possibility!

[50] Tsien, "Chan kuo ts'e", 7.

[51] Ibid., 1.

Autumns Annals (*Chunqiu* 春秋) lent its name to the former part of the Eastern Zhou (722–476 BCE), it was supposedly the name of the *Stratagems* that was borrowed for the latter part, which accordingly became known as the Warring States period. Despite the gravity of this title, however, this is not how Tu Benjun refers to the work in his preface. Rather, he chooses to call it "*Duanchang ce* 短長策", translated here as "Stratagems of Persuasion": "[Aizi's] polished diction compares with that in the *Stratagems of Persuasion*". Tu namedrops this title with no further clarification. From this we can infer that he expected his readership to know exactly which text he meant, so it may be safely assumed that this was a nomenclature known widely among his Ming readers.

The term "*Duanchang shu* 短長術" ("the art of *duanchang*") refers to the persuasive rhetoric employed by ministers at court to win over the ruler. In a gloss to an in instance of the word in the *Shiji*, the Tang dynasty's Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (679–732) remarked as follows:

> [*Duanchang shu*] refers to when one desires to make something seem advantageous, therefore one explains/persuades for it advantageously, and when one desires to make something seem disadvantageous, therefore one explains/persuades for it disadvantageously. For this reason, *Stratagems of the Warring States* is also called the "Book of *Duanchang*".[52]
>
> 言欲令此事長，則長説之；欲令此事短，則短説之。故《戰國策》亦名曰「短長書」是也。

It should be noted that it was not frighteningly uncommon for alternative names for a text to be in circulation in pre-modern China. The Qing novel *Story of the Stone* (*Shitou ji* 石頭記), or *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), is perhaps the most well-known example of this in the West. Casually interchangeable as they may have been, the existence

[52] Sima, *Shiji*, 3213. This gloss doubles as evidence that pre-modern readers also viewed "*Duanchang ce*" as a nickname, as opposed to an interchangeable name of equal status: it is implicit through "also called" (*yi ming yue* 亦名曰).

and usage of alternative names is still historically significant. How people chose to refer to a text, in different situations and time periods, can tell us important things about how it was perceived and presented. In this case, Tu Benjun has chosen to characterise his *Jest Stratagems* along the lines of "*duanchang*", as opposed to along the lines of "Warring States". And this is made doubly significant through his own title choice, which, as discussed above, strongly underlines the connection.

To refer to the text as "*Duanchang ce*" is to perceive such persuasions as the chief focus of the book, which pulls the spotlight onto the persuaders, and arguably comes close to lauding them and their actions.[53] However, as particular Confucianist ideas and worldviews became increasingly dominant and institutionalised, the Warring States persuaders had found themselves on the wrong side of history (writers), due to the fact that they were deemed lacking in moral substance. I propose that the conspicuous avoidance of the term can be interpreted as a reluctance by official productions to place undue focus on the persuaders themselves. As the preface by scholar-official Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019–1083) to a Northern Song edition states:

> Now in the times of Confucius and Mencius, several centuries had already passed since the beginnings of the Zhou dynasty. Long had it been since the models of old were lost and the customs of old had perished. These two men alone knew the Way of the Former Kings... but this was not so for the wandering scholars of the Warring States. They did not know the reliability of the Way [of the Former Kings], and instead took pleasure in their persuasions being easily met with [a ruler's] agreement… they discourse on the convenience of deceit while concealing the

[53] To my mind, "*Zhanguo ce*", most literally 'stratagems of states at war', given that the text preceded the era-name, is a surprisingly vague nomenclature considering the content of the transmitted version. While the states were indeed at war, and several of the court discussions are related to this aspect, the most obvious feature that binds the transmitted text together is certainly the discussions and persuasions themselves. Perhaps this was even one reason why its attributed compiler made a point of justifying the name in the first place!

> damage it does, speak of the advantages to making war while masking the calamities it causes…
>
> 夫孔、孟之時，去周之初，已數百歲，其舊法已亡、其舊俗已熄，久矣。[...] 戰國之游士則不然，不知道之可信，而樂於說之易合。[...] 故論詐之便而諱其敗，言戰之善而蔽其患 。[...]

This is a clear, firm moral criticism of the act of *duanchang*, even if Zeng does not employ the term itself. This was the preface affixed to aforementioned 1149 Bao Biao version, which seems to have been the most widespread edition in the Ming.

In fact, it seems the late-Ming publishing boom and the widespread popularity of the work and its characters seems to have spurred on even more striking and explicit articulations of the sentiment of moral unease expressed in Zeng's preface. Most notably, in early Qing, Cheng-Zhu Confucianist Lu Longqi's 陸隴其 (1630–1692) fears that the persuaders in the text had become a corrupting force on the youth of his day compelled him to produce "*Stratagems of the Warring States" with the Poison Extracted* 戰國策去毒 (hereafter *Poison Extracted*). The goal of the book was to sanitise the *Stratagems* by attaching annotations of selected extracts which guided the reader in their moral understanding of the text. Lu Longqi expresses wholehearted agreement with Zeng Gong's Song preface, stating that that "The preface by Nanfeng (Zeng Gong) speaks to their defects in the most detail, so I have appended it together [with this book's contents]".[54] Following this, he affixes his own "authorial note" (*ziji* 自記) which outlines his own motivations as compiler:

> This book, Stratagems of the Warring States, is mostly comprised of the speech of the Coalition Advisors (*zonghengjia* 縱橫家). While the marvels of their diction are such that can delight people's ears and eyes, the craftiness of their fickle plots is such that can bring ruin to their heart's designs. When read by members of the younger generation whose knowledge and experience have not yet been established, few do not become gradually tainted by it. In those times (i.e. the Warring States period),

[54] 夫南豐一序言其病最詳，故並附焉.

> only that one man Mencius stood eminent amid the sweep of the waves… He probably viewed the likes of [Su] Qin and [Zhang] Yi[55] as no less than flavourful delicacies which contained a grave poison within. I am just afraid that students will be swept up and submerged in [the waves], unable to get out…
>
> 右《戰國策》一書，大抵皆縱橫家言也。其文章之奇，足以悅人耳目，而其機變之巧，足以壞人心術。子弟識見未定而讀之，其不為漸染者鮮也。當時惟孟子一人卓然於波流之中。[…] 蓋其視秦儀輩不啻如厚味之中有大毒焉。惟恐學者陷溺其中而不能出也。[56]

There is a sense of realistic urgency in Lu Longqi's 1692 authorial note that is absent from Zeng's Northern Song preface. Zeng's preface functions no more than a warning label on an official edition, which could conversely be said to *approve* it for reading, caveats notwithstanding. On the other hand, Lu Longqi's annotation approach is an involved and practically thought-through one; the book seems to have been designed in earnest to achieve its stated goal of preventing the text from corrupting the youth. Further, at two relatively thick fascicles, *Poison Extracted* also represents a considerable investment in resources. This is to say, somewhere along the line, these poisonous persuaders from a bygone age and their crafty persuasions had become a real threat; so dangerous in Qing scholar Lu Longqi's eyes as to warrant such an enterprise.

The phenomenon of the late-Ming publishing boom must have been a vital factor here. Its broadening of the accessibility of books likely resulted in the *Stratagems* reaching more readers than ever before, which not only meant Lu's morally-corruptive 'persuader problem' played out on an unprecedented scale, but also that the *Stratagems* were being consumed in less controlled educational environments. Also, the rapid and unfiltered reproduction of books that sold in this competitive market probably also meant less rigid

[55] Two persuaders given a prominent treatment in *Zhanguo ce*.

[56] Lu Longqi, *Zhanguo ce qudu*, 514.

editing, quality control, and the marketing of the book as entertainment reading rather than moral-damaging content. Indeed, it is this kind of entertainment-only usage that is Lu's main concern: he places great emphasis on the deceptive power of the texts' aesthetic qualities—"While the marvels of their diction are such that can delight people's ears and eyes… [the Warring States persuaders are] no less than flavourful delicacies which contain a grave poison within". This aspect does not seem to have caused much concern for Zeng Gong back in the Northern Song. But the issue is certainly present in our late-Ming *Jest Stratagems* preface, which states: "[Aizi's] polished diction compares (favourably) with that in the *Stratagems of Persuasion*".[57] Tu Benjun presents the similarity to the *Stratagems* straightforwardly and unproblematically as a selling point for the Aizi compilations, and there is no trace of potential moral contentiousness. To take up Lu Longqi's own analogy, Tu Benjun is serving up poison-filled delicacies and neglecting to properly inform consumers of their contents. If the context was such that late-Ming publishers could get away this easily with such an omission, then it is no wonder that Lu Longqi is concerned that impressionable youths might begin to admire and emulate the persuaders.

But this is more fairly described as a difference in judgement over the persuaders than a sinister move on the part of Tu Benjun, who probably did not think the *Stratagems* content to be "poisonous" or harmful in the first place. The different naming choices explored in this section—*Stratagems of the Warring States* versus *Stratagems of Persuasion* (*duanchang*)—

[57] 其鑄詞似《短長策》. For transparency's sake, I should point out that the "*wenzhang* 文章" from *Poison Extracted* and "*zhuci* 鑄詞" from *Jest Stratagems* here have come out closer in translation than in the original Chinese. But even if translated using separate English words, they are talking along very similar lines, so the wider point on aesthetic qualities for entertainment purposes still stands.

are emblematic of a palpable divide which emerged between officially-sanctified, institutionalised or 'orthodox' readings of the *Stratagems* (à la *Poison Extracted*) and alternative receptions and uses of the text which arose within its readerships, especially in the late Ming, which included the Aizi tradition. In this light, it is worthwhile and very interesting to juxtapose *Poison Extracted* with Aizi compilations like those collected in *Jest Stratagems*. While at first these may seem extremely disparate and incomparable publications—a book of moralising appraisals and the adventures of a fictional joke master—both can be understood as reactions to the same textual tradition of the *Stratagems*. Even more precisely, they are different reactions or responses to the continued and prevailing popularity of the *Stratagems*. Also, both chose the publishing world as their playing field. Going by preface alone, they are separated by eight decades including the tumultuous Ming-Qing transition. However, we should remember that the preface date represents a 'start-date': *Jest Stratagems* would presumably have been in circulation and read for at least a few decades thereafter, which pulls the two publications closer together. The separation in time is also analytically useful, in that it enables us to look back on the late-Ming publishing world that is the focus of this dissertation. While we can never know whether or not Lu Longqi knew of the Aizi tradition, the tradition sprung from and formed part of the same swirling phenomenon that provoked later publications like *Poison Extracted*. The following section will explore how these two publications engaged with the *Stratagems* and the Warring States world that existed in the minds of late imperial readers.

3.5.2. Master Ai, Amid the Sweep of the Waves 「艾子」 在波流之中

In his authorial note for *"Stratagems of the Warring States" with the Poison Extracted*, Lu Longqi proclaims "In those times, only that one man Mencius stood eminent amid the sweep of the waves".[58] In other words, in Warring States times, only that one sage was able to uphold the true Confucian Way amongst those swathes of crafty persuaders and their *duanchang*. Throughout the note, he props up Mencius as a figure with whom to compare, or rather *contrast*, the persuaders and their persuasions. In fact, this aspect is the most fundamental tenet of his annotative and appraisal strategy:

> …Nowadays, there are many who read the Stratagems of the Warring States. Did they ever even weigh them up according to the Way of Mencius? I have come to fear the poison taking hold of people. Therefore, I have identified the pluses and minuses for today's literary scholars to read together with it, to enable students to understand in which ways [the Stratagems figures] differed from Mencius, in the hope that they may savour the flavour without being stricken by the poison…
>
> […] 今之讀戰國策者多也。亦曾以孟子之道權衡之乎? 余懼其毒中於人矣 。故取今文士所共讀指其得失，使學者知其所以異於孟子者。庶幾嚌其味而不中其毒也。 […] [59]

Mencius was, of course, a Warring States man himself. Mencius does appear in the transmitted *Stratagems*, and moreover, he was a contemporary and associate of the *Stratagems* figures, several of whom also appear and interact with him in the *Mencius*. Many of these same figures also appear in the Aizi tradition. Despite professed differences in worldview and motivation, this was a man who operated within and engaged with the same system, and when invited for an audience at court, presented his case to the ruler in persuasive speeches not dissimilar to *duanchang*. Even in his own day, Mencius had to fend

[58] 當時惟孟子一人卓然於波流之中. As quoted in the previous section, Zeng Gong likewise brought Mencius into his discussion of the persuaders to point out that this was far from a golden age.

[59] Lu Longqi, *Zhanguo ce qudu*, 515.

off accusations of being "fond of disputation" (*haobian* 好辯).[60] While Mencius excuses himself on that account in the *Mencius* itself, without regular explication the potential for this misunderstanding surely still hung in the air, especially at times when the *Stratagems* figures were particularly prominent due to the popularity of the text. This is the lurking anxiety in Lu's preface and the specific motivation of the overall *Poison Extracted* project: "Did they ever even weigh them up according to the Way of Mencius?" His fear is that those "members of the younger generation whose knowledge and experience have not yet been established" would equate Mencius with the other intellectuals of his historical surroundings, which would effectively drag the man and his words down to their level, not to mention raising *them* up to *his*, as a model for emulation. *Poison Extracted* can thus be viewed as an attempt to resolve anxiety and potential for confusion regarding an apparent contradiction that one of the originators or self-professed rediscoverers of the Way, of 'right' and 'wrong', upon whose momentous words an entire late imperial legal, bureaucratic and moral system was supposedly built, was also of this class of persuaders and mingled amongst them in this chaotic and immoral world of warring states. It was perhaps a little too close for comfort. And Lu Longqi's solution to the potential for confusion is an unelaborate one: "In those times, Mencius alone stood eminent amid the sweep of the waves".[61]

And if there ever was evidence for a conflation of the persuaders and the sage, as Lu Longqi seems to fear, it is the Aizi tradition. True to its choice of title (*Jest Stratagems of the*

[60] *Mencius* 6:14. Gongduzi said, "The outsiders all say you are fond of disputation/argument. Dare I ask why?" Mencius said, "Me, fond of disputation?! I have no choice [but to make disputations]…". 公都子曰：「外人皆稱夫子好辯，敢問何也？」孟子曰：「予豈好辯哉？予不得已也…」

[61] 當時惟孟子一人卓然於波流之中.

Five Masters), the character of Aizi is depicted as a confusing, mixed entity between trickster persuader and a sage-like 'Master' figure. Aizi often appears as a wandering persuader travelling through other states with disciples in tow or partaking in (mock) philosophical discussions. Very often, the entries end with Aizi taking a further step in infringement of Confucian and Mencian territory by exhorting his disciples, along with an eavesdropping Ming readership, of what may be learnt from the episode they have just witnessed, encapsulated into a single remark:

> Master Ai said, "…At first one deceives other people, but once it is kept up for a while one will be deceived oneself. Disciples, note it! Take care not to be deceived!" **[WY:19]**
>
> 艾子曰：「…始為人欺人，久之自欺矣。弟子記之，慎毋自欺哉！」
>
> Master Ai said, "If you rely on the influence of others to pretend to be mighty, the glory may last for a moment, but eventually you will receive the consequent misfortune. Be warned of it!" **[WY:6]**
>
> 艾子曰：「倚勢作威，榮施一時，終獲後災，戒之！」

But the similarities run deeper than this. Despite his various occupations and functions, one sustained aspect of Aizi's character is that of the sole sane and enlightened observer who traverses the Warring States world eyes fully open to absurdity that surrounds him. In the simplest cases, these absurdities, which double as the setup for the humour, spring from pure stupidity:

> Yu Ren was an old friend of Master Ai. He had a daughter that was two *sui* old, and Master Ai suggested he promise her to his son.
> Ren said, "How old is your worthy descendant?"
> Master Ai replied, "Four *sui* old".
> Angrily, Ren said, "You want me to marry my daughter to an old geezer?!"
> "What?!", said Master Ai, who could not comprehend what he meant.

> Ren said, "Your worthy descendant is four *sui* old, my daughter is two. That is double her age! Say my daughter marries at twenty, your worthy descendant will be forty. And it would even more unfortunate if she marries at twenty-five: then your worthy descendant will be fifty! Is that not marrying an old geezer?!"
> Master Ai realised he was stupid and desisted. **[HY:11]**
>
> 虞任者，艾子之故人也，有女生二周，艾子為其子求聘。任曰：「賢嗣年幾何？」答曰：「四歲。」任艴然曰：「公欲配吾女於老翁邪？」艾子不諭其旨，曰：「何哉？」任曰：「賢嗣四歲，吾女二歲，是長一半年紀；曰若吾女二十而嫁，賢嗣年四十；又不幸二十五而嫁，則賢嗣五十矣。非嫁一老翁邪？」艾子知其愚而止。

But a key characteristic of Aizi entries, as a consequence of the Song/Ming-facing satirical aspect discussed earlier in this chapter, is that so much of the absurdity is drawn not from simple stupidity but rather from moral and kingly vices and follies, like bribery, greed and short-sighted policy making. In these cases, the incongruity is drawn from a world being so far from what it morally *should* be. This is unexpectedly reminiscent of Zeng Gong's remark that, "Now in the times of Confucius and Mencius, several centuries had already passed since the beginnings of the Zhou dynasty. Long had it been since the models of old were lost and the customs of old had perished".[62] In these entries, Aizi is no longer just the clear-minded observer swept up in a world of absurdity and stupidity, but doubles as the clear-minded, centred sage of stable morals in a world of corruption and immorality. Hence, Aizi's position draws unexpected parallels with Lu Longqi's central conviction that "In those times, Mencius alone stood eminent amid the sweep of the waves",[63] as well as Zeng Gong's remark that, "the wandering scholars of the Warring States were not like [Confucius and Mencius]".[64] It could even be said to present a challenge to such convictions, through the

[62] 夫孔、孟之時，去周之初，已數百歲，其舊法已亡、其舊俗已熄，久矣。
[63] 當時惟孟子卓然於波流之中。
[64] 戰國之游士則不然…

creation of a fictional persuader who blurs the boundaries between the two camps. The prevalence of a character like Aizi is reflective of a perceived grayzone in the clear-cut distinction of Lu Longqi's solution that "that one man Mencius stood eminent", and show that Lu Longqi's concerns that readers might confuse the two could be said to be somewhat justified. The title of this section—"Master Ai, amid the sweep of the waves 「艾子」 在波流之中"—is a remark on this conflation.

This aspect is nowhere more evident than in those entries that push Aizi's dual role of persuader and sage onto a collision course. These sometimes see Aizi deploy the *duanchang*-like persuasive techniques to push for Confucianist moral norms, thereby (dangerously, according to Lu Longqi) conflating the position of the Master and the persuader. The eighteenth entry in *Unofficial Sayings* revolves around a situation whereby a local power attempts to buy Aizi's persuasion skills in return for putting a roof over his head in a time of need:

> Master Ai was travelling through Zhao and ran out of provisions. Nangong Ziyou took care of him, saying, "Away from court and without support, your hearth has ceased to smoke. Has this made 'your followers fall ill?'[65] Let's rely on each other: [I'll take care of the Academician] and he can talk to the Lord of Pingyuan for my sake, how about that?"
>
> "Agreed", said Master Ai.
>
> The next day, Nangong Ziyou spread word throughout the area, saying, "Academician Ai is a first-rate scholar. When he makes an argument, the listener becomes wise. He can straighten out those of corrupt principles and when he opens a passage for the slow-moving it will definitely pass through. He is here as an honoured guest of the Lord of Pingyuan. Why not make a request of him?"

[65] This is an allusion to *Analects* 15:2, as will be discussed below.

There was a man who had violently killed someone. He came carrying silver requesting weapons. Upon arriving at the Lord of Pingyuan's gates, Master Ai said, "He is guilty of a violent, grave crime and I shall not spare him." He turned his carriage around and declined the silver.

There was an official who had not been transferred in a long time. He offered money to request that the transfer be pushed through. Upon arriving at the Lord of Pingyuan's gates, Master Ai said, "His corruption is notorious. The rightful thing to do would be to strip him of his position entirely". He turned his carriage around and returned the money.[66]

There were several people with shady private wishes. They presented Master Ai with pearls and jade disks asking for these to be fulfilled. Upon arriving at the Lord of Pingyuan's gates, Master Ai said, "This would do great harm to the heavenly principles, and would be sure to beckon extraordinary misfortunes". He turned his carriage around and gave back the disks.

Displeased, Nangong Ziyou said, "I came to your service and you even said you would make an endeavour. Why have you been repeatedly reaching the Lord of Pingyuan's gates and turning back your carriage?"

Master Ai said, "I saw the Lord of Pingyuan. At first, before I had spoken, his expression was palpably mild and dignified. But as soon as I began to make the request, his expression turned harsh and he seemed contemptuous to the extreme. At this, my mouth stuttered and my feet shuffled, and hence I turned my carriage around".

Nangong Ziyou said, "You really are too much!"

Master Ai said, "In the presence of that person, how dare I carry out such deceit?"

Nangong Ziyou asked who that was, to which Master Ai replied, "Lin Xiangru".[67]

Nangong Ziyou said, "Lin Xiangru is a renowned figure of a previous generation. How could you sleeptalk like this?!"

"We've been sleeptalking from the start", said Master Ai. **[WY:18]**

艾子遊趙絕粮。南宮子猶唁之曰:「子門張羅，子突無烟，而令從者病乎? 吾為輔車，先生緩頰於平原君，可乎?」艾子曰:「諾。」明日，南宮子猶遍告域中

[66] Depending on punctuation, there is a chance that these three remarks are voiced by Lord of Pingyuan, not Aizi, but this would not affect the later point about Aizi choosing not to deploy his persuasive powers to the best of his abilities here.

[67] Lin Xiangru was an earlier Zhao official, who was renowned for his honesty. A relevant story here was his defusing of a ploy by the then King of Qin to seize a famous jade disk in the possession of Zhao. At the Qin court, he threatened to smash it against a pillar, then secretly had it sent back to Zhao.

> 曰:「艾先生天下士也，辯而有智，理枉能直，導滯必通，來為平原君重客。盍祈諸?」有殺傷人死者，挾白鏹求武。艾子至平原君門曰:「狂且重辟，罪在不赦。」迴車而卻其鏹。有宦久不調者，餉青蚨求通。艾子至平原君門，曰:「彼墨狼藉，議在褫識。」迴車而返其蚨。有許人陰私者，餽珠璧求達。艾子至平原君門，曰:「大傷天理，必召奇禍。」迴車而復其璧。南宮子猶不悅曰:「吾事先生，亦云勤矣。胡屢及平原君門而迴車乎?」艾子曰:「吾見平原君矣。始未言，而溫雅之容可掬；纔啟齒，而翹厲之色甚倨。是以口嚅嚅,足蹜蹜。故迴車。」南宮子猶曰:「其余哉!」艾子曰:「有人在坐，何敢行欺!」問為誰。答曰:「蘭相如。」南宮子猶曰:「蘭相如前代聞人也。君豈說夢耶?」艾子曰:「原是說夢。」

The entry opens by drawing an obvious parallel between Aizi and Confucius by closely mimicking the language and situation recounted in *Analects* 15:2, in which, similarly, Confucius runs out of provisions while travelling with his disciples in a foreign state, and his followers are weakened to the point of exhaustion. To their exasperated outcries, Confucius responds that while the petty man or *xiaoren* 小人 might resort to debased means in such a situation, the true gentleman, the *junzi* could in no instance be pushed to lose sight of his principles. To any Ming reader, this would clearly foreshadow that Aizi is about to be tested in a similar regard. Nangong's own remark, "has this made *your followers fall ill*?", a direct quote from the *Analects* episode, immediately before making a corrupt offer of shelter for persuasive services, would not just strike readers as opaquely ironic, but also sets up the entire joke: it is the very idea of Aizi repeatedly feigning to accept the proposal under a premise which implies he is morally obliged to decline that is so ludicrous here. Three times, he pretends to accept illicit bribes to persuade for some outrageously immoral purposes, before ostensibly changing his mind and returning the bribe. Something has to snap, and in the end Aizi delivers the punchline, which I have rendered as "We've been sleeptalking from the start" (*yuan shi shuomeng* 原是說夢), in one breath forcing Nangong to face up to the absurdity of his original proposal, which is incongruous with moral norms.

One thing to note here is the unquestioned assumption by other characters that Aizi is a pay-per-persuade service with a price tag attached to his morals. Certainly, in the Warring States world as depicted by *Zhanguo ce*, bribery is rife, with one memorable episode depicting the King of Qi praising his academician Chunyu Kun for doing well by his state while managing to make a tidy profit out of a bribe to boot![68] Here, too, Aizi clearly has no intention to keep up his side of the agreement—at least not at the expense of what he views as morally upright—and merely goes through the motions to bide his time in wait of the eventual challenge by the disgruntled Nangong. Nangong Ziyou's vain attempt is just one example of many, by various parties, to attempt to buy or trick him into using his skills for their own ends. The issue of bribery also underlies HY:1, the above entry (3.4.1.) in which Aizi persuades the King of Qi out of extinguishing the entire bloodline of a rebel:

> …The entire clan went to kneel in Master Ai's courtyard, where crying and snivelling, they begged him. Laughing, Master Ai said, "This is no trouble. Gentlemen, all you must do is prepare a rope and bring it to me, and you will be able to escape this misfortune in no time". The Zhus took these words to be playful, yet dared not inquire further. They retreated to procure the cord to present as a gift to Master Ai… **[HY:1]**
>
> […] 舉族拜於艾子之庭，涕泗以請。艾子笑曰：「是不難，諸公但具一繩來，立可免禍。」 邾氏以為戲言，亦不敢詰，退而索绚以饋。[…]

In entreating Aizi's assistance, this large, prominent and presumably aristocratic family had surely been prepared to pay a heavy price, and are thus understandably nonplussed when Aizi responds, "all you must do is prepare a rope and bring it to me". As the reader will remember, this rope 'bribe' is used by Aizi to great effect as comic prop in court which secures their

[68] Oliver Weingarten, "Chunyu Kun", 509.

release. Therefore, this entry presents a good point of comparison with the Nangong Ziyou entry (WY:18). There, Aizi does not allow bribes of value—the silver, money, pearls and jade disks—to push him into using his persuasive powers for the sake of immoral outcomes. But here, in HY:1, when it comes to using them for moral purposes, Aizi requires no more than a near-worthless length of rope. Yet in both entries—at least initially—he does accept bribes.

Further, Aizi is regularly shown to express frustration, irritation and outrage at the immoral workings of the Warring States waves that surround him: "The cries of a beast coming out of a man's head! How dare he do such things?!",[69] he exclaims in one entry that sees him involuntarily caught up in an extremely complex web of machinations, bribery and conflicts of personal interest between five gentlemen in the leadup to Aizi's eventual persuasion concerning a retraction of an acceptance of an offer of land. From their view, "As for persuading [King Hui of] Liang, nobody but Master Ai will do" [WY:12].[70] Here, Aizi treads on the toes of Mencius once again, who was also successful in his persuasions of this very King, and famously so.

In sum, *Jesting Stratagems* infuses our stock persuader figure with a Mencian, moral quality. Whenever Aizi is placed in the role of persuader, in those situations in which he must employ his *duanchang* skills, he uses them for the forces of morality, sometimes putting himself in danger to point out what is immoral or absurd. Rather than getting swept up in the

[69] 人頭畜鳴，胡敢爾爾!

[70] 說梁，非艾子不可.

Warring States waves of chaos, corruption and absurdity, Aizi tends to act as an enlightened sage who stands upright according to his principles and envisioned moral Way. This is all too reminiscent of the image of the singular Mencius standing "eminent amid the sweep of the waves" propounded by Lu Longqi in his authorial note. The problem with Aizi, presumably, it that he takes an alternative and unexpected route around and within the existing system to do what he views as righteous or humane. Rather than playing the onlooker who stands detached and eminent and in outright and righteous rejection of the corrupt world around him, Aizi opts to work with the system, coming all too close to immoral conduct, getting his hands wet—accepting bribes (returned or otherwise), telling his ruler to go kill himself, and so on—as he dives in and amongst the waves. "Nowadays, there are many who read the *Stratagems of the Warring States*. Did they ever even weigh them up according to the Way of Mencius?",[71] Lu Longqi ponders as he looks back on the Ming and early Qing. Maybe not. Or perhaps they did, and the persuaders weighed up a little too close to him for Lu's liking.

It is not entirely irrelevant that this staunch Cheng-Zhu Confucian Lu Longqi went on to be posthumously described by a younger contemporary with the same cliché he himself had used for Mencius: "[Lu Longqi] stood eminent as a great *ru* ('Confucian') of the entire age".[72] Furthermore, just as Mencius is swept up amid but does not get carried away by the persuader waves of Lu's own metaphor, Lu Longqi himself hailed "from [Wang] Yangming's heartland yet was not tainted by the fashions of the times and the views of the

[71] 今之讀戰國策者多也。亦曾以孟子之道權衡之乎?

[72] 卓然為一代大儒. Lu Longqi, *Du Zhu suibi*, 1. This description is found in the preface to a collection of Lu's writings on Zhu Xi's thought, by Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1651–1725), another Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian.

masses".[73] After all, while *Poison Extracted* is a Qing work, Lu Longqi was born in 1630, fourteen years prior to the standard Ming end-date and a mere decade after the end of Wanli. This was certainly no glorious moment in the history of Cheng-Zhu Confucianist ideals, and alternative ideas, particularly those which spung out of the thought of Wang Yangming, had swept the field, hence the above praise of Lu Longqi for sticking to the correct path irrespective of his surroundings being "Yangming's heartland" and for "standing eminent as a great *ru* of the entire age". In this chapter, we have already considered one late-Ming/Warring States parallel through Wanli eyes: in how the comparative element provided an 'familiar unfamiliarity' which offered Ming jokesters a satirical vehicle through which to deride the ills of their day and the powers-that-be. Here we find a parallel of a different sort, whereby the Ming zeitgeist itself becomes a corrupt Warring States which has lost its path, containing just one or two virtuous men clinging to the correct Way, or "standing eminent" as Lu would have it. Still reeling from the Ming onslaught of Yangming thought and the publishing boom, for Lu Longqi the Warring States situation probably felt like a closer personal reality. At its heart, *Poison Extracted* aims to equip young readers with skills of critical assessment; to train them to pick out the correct moral way of doing things in a situation whereby the majority of people are acting differently. In this way, the Warring States world functions as a practice simulation of these skills, readily transferable to the parallel situation in their early-Qing reality, to prepare them too for a life of standing alone and eminent amid the sweep of the waves.[74]

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[73] Lu Longqi, *Du Zhu suibi*, 1. 於陽明之鄉而不為時風眾勢所染. "Yangming's heartland (or, native place)" seems to mean the area in Zhejiang around the mouth of the Qiantang 錢塘 river. Lu Longqi hailed from Pinghu 平湖, while Wang Shouren (Yangming) was from Yuyao 餘姚, between Shaoxing and Ningbo.

[74] This simulative pedagogical element of *Poison Extracted* is an interesting facet of the book that I explore more deeply in a forthcoming article in the Spring 2022 issue of *Sulla Via del Catai*, published by the Centro

3.6. Conclusion

To conclude, Tu Benjun's *Jest Stratagems* preface is certainly keen to promote its humorous content, and while it does draw a strong comparison with the "Biography of the Comics" remonstrative humour, it does so in a quite different mode to the over-compensating, defensive one found in the Chapter 2 prefaces. Tu Benjun seems very aware that satirical content would prove popular with his envisioned audience. *Shanlin jingji ji*, the overall compendium that housed *Jest Stratagems* was most certainly a commercially-oriented publication, judging by the number of commissioned prefaces, some of which cut in a decorative, personal cursive script, and the way it presents itself as a 'how-to' guide for the eremitic lifestyle, with direct relevance to the trends and fashions of the time.

As discussed in the previous chapters, there has been much discussion on the emphasis on 'novelty' or 'freshness' in the Ming publishing world. Something that the Aizi tradition has highlighted is the complexity of this process. Just as the title choices—"Further Sayings" and "Unofficial Sayings"—suggests, these were not just 'new' compilations, but also riffs on the well-known tradition of Aizi, as well as on a well-known Warring States world which existed to be accessed at will in the imagination of a wide group of readers. We

Studi Martino Martini. The issue will appear on the following webpage in due course: https://www.martinomartinicenter.org/sulla-via-del-catai-rivista.html. Accessed 26 October 2021.

should keep in mind that, often, the goal was more nuanced than simple novelty. It was novelty within familiarity; novelty through pivoting on an established tradition or genre in a way that enabled publishers to capitalise on both the 'new' and the 'old'. While humour content perhaps leans more heavily on the familiarity than other content as it assumes a shared knowledge that enables the reader to get the joke, this point is probably one of broader relevance to the study of late-Ming compiling and publishing practices in general.

This chapter has demonstrated how humour compilations manifested the intellectual currents of the late Ming, as publishers engaged with and repurposed pre-existing content to respond to market demands and in the process reflected the trends and desires of their own times for the benefit of the historian. The next and final chapter will deal with a similarly reoccurring trope in the publication of humour, this time that of the image and writings of Song literatus Su Shi. Unlike the character of Aizi, however, which was something exclusive to humour publications, Su Shi's appearance in humour compilations is just one branch of an enormous late-Ming preoccupation with Su Shi throughout the publishing world which I have termed the 'Dongpo vogue'. Indeed, Aizi's association with Su Shi was another key factor in the success of *Aizi* publications beyond those outlined above. Chapter 4 will further illustrate how humour compilations were products of the wider publishing world: while until now the dissertation has aimed to isolate humour compilations as a group of texts in their own right, the following chapter serves as a reminder that this group of texts should still be understood as part of the wider context of the Wanli and late-Ming publishing fields.

Chapter 4 – Wanli Humour Compilations and the 'Dongpo vogue'

4.1. Introduction: The 'Dongpo vogue' of the Late Ming

When the time came for unconventional writer Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1568–1610) to name his writing study, he opted for an unconventional one: the "Bai-Su Studio" (*Bai-Su zhai* 白蘇齋). Zongdao was the eldest of the three Yuan brothers, popular writers whose lives spanned the entirety of the Wanli reign.[1] This trio were no strangers to the humour publishing scene. We have already come across the youngest, Zhongdao, via his preface to *Record of Tongue Flowers* in Chapter 2. They also consorted regularly with figures like Jiang Yingke 江應科 (1553–1605),[2] who was compiler-writer of several humour compilations, and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), an integral figure behind the compilation that will be discussed in this chapter.

The "Bai" in the studio's name stands for Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), the Tang poet renowned for his straightforward, unadorned and less allusive writing style, while "Su" is for the central figure of this chapter, Su Shi. During the Ming, the question of naming one's studio was not a private, inconsequential choice. On the contrary, it was a decision which

[1] The "Three Yuans of Gong'an" (*Gong'an san Yuan* 公安三袁) were central figures in the so-called Gong'an School 公安派, which has a special place in the history of Chinese literature as a literary movement which advocated ideals such as expressivity and spontaneity in writing. For more information, see Chih-P'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*.

[2] For a summary of Jiang's collections to the Yuan brothers and some translations of his humorous writings, see Allen H. Barr, "Jiang Yingke's Place".

could shape perceptions of one's identity as a writer and one's life work for all of posterity, given that one common formula for the naming of the collected works of a writer was 'The Collected Works from XX-Studio'.[3] And importantly for this dissertation, it was also ascribed a heavy significance in the publishing world. A renowned writer's studio could flexibly take on the facet of what we now might think of as a publishing house,[4] with its name given prime position as part of the title of publications, which in the case of this studio is demonstrated by *The Bai-Su Studio Categorised Collection* (*Bai-Su zhai leiji* 白蘇齋類集), which, incidentally, is not a humour compilation.

The reason I call the name "Bai-Su Studio" unconventional is because at this time, the name choices for a studio tended to be classical/poetic allusions or location references. Naming it for another person, and two writers in this case, with all the implications of admiration and aspiration entailed thereby, was much rarer; and being rare, a much bigger statement.[5] The name Yuan selected for his studio is just one manifestation of a late-Ming surge in popularity of Su Shi's image and writings which I term the 'Dongpo vogue'. Yuan was by no means alone in literary and publishing circles in his admiration for Su Shi. The Song literatus was openly idolised by many publishers and writers, one example being the

[3] Although some collections received their name after the author's death, this practice of a writer's collection being named after his studio was fully underway during the Ming, and writers would have been distinctly aware of the possibility, even if the decision itself was made by his descendants or other parties.

[4] Separating writer-compilers' studios, publication houses and even bookstores is not a helpful way to conceptualise the institutional framework of the late-Ming publishing world, which was more fluid than the rigid categories suggest. As mentioned in the Historical Background 0.1., block-carving and printing was often an outsourced affair rather than an in-house production, hence anyone with the means could purchase the raw materials, hire personnel and 'publish' a text. See Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 59–64.

[5] For a second-hand speculation by Yao Shilin 姚士麟 (b.1559) on why the studio was named for these two men, see the preface to *Bai-Su zhai leiji.* Yuan Zongdao, ed., *Bai-Su zhai leiji*, 524–5.

influential poetry critic Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574–1625), who published an anthology of Su's writings in 1620.[6] Meanwhile, a number of affectionate or admiring nicknames passed around which sprung from his *hao*, Dongpo (lit: "East Slope"), like "Slope Codger" (*poweng* 坡翁), "Immortal of the Slope" (*poxian* 坡仙), etc. In the context of the publication boom, Su Shi's works were recompiled and printed continually, while his life was dramatized in novels, stories and opera.[7] Indeed, by this point he had become the very standard for celebrity, with other popular writers finding themselves labelled "even as famous as Dongpo".[8]

This chapter can broach but a small section—"jokes" and humour—of this Dongpo vogue, an underexplored phenomenon which manifested itself a multitude of different ways, of which the above has offered but a sample. Why exactly did Su Shi and his persona resonate so much with ideals in currency among writers, readers and publishers of the late Ming? I believe one reason is that his perceived attitudes towards irreverence and humour provided an acceptable precedent for ideals and currents of thought which were ever growing in prevalence at that time. And if that is the hypothesis, then humour publications are the natural place to start the search. In addition to serving as a preliminary investigation into this wider trend which has hitherto received limited scholarly attention, this chapter will demonstrate how particular themes and motifs (in this case that of Su himself) tied this genre together, as well as how the group of humorous publications studied in this dissertation was deeply interconnected with the intellectual and cultural currents of the time.

[6] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 131.

[7] For example, Su Shi features in several of the stories in Feng Menglong's *Sanyan* 三言 trilogy.

[8] Jamie Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru*, 203.

4.2. Su Shi in Humour Compilations

The presence of Su Shi must have been keenly felt by the reader over the course of this dissertation. This has not been a deliberate orchestration on my part: Su Shi's stature in Ming humour publications is simply of such prominence that it is inevitable he should crop up from time to time in any of study of humour in the Ming, unless, perhaps, the study focused solely on compilations of the generic voice variety. Accustomed as we are to finding Su Shi championed by various forms of late-Ming literature, in humour compilations he is a true superstar. It is difficult to overstate this; suffice to say that one is hard pressed to find a compilation of the anecdotic voice subset that does not contain at least a few entries about him.

Ming humour compilations made great use of records of humorous exchanges and other antics from Su Shi's lifetime, as well as creating their own. It is clear that he was extremely popular as subject matter for humorous content. But something that sets him apart from other regularly appearing figures, as well as his surpassing them in sheer frequency of appearances, is that Su Shi was also popular as a humour writer in his own right. His writings are often found as entries in Ming humour compilations, and as the reader will remember from Chapter 3, he was widely believed to be originator of the joking tradition of Aizi, as author of *Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai*.

The phenomenon of Su Shi's popularity in humour publications ties together two key aspects of this thesis. Chapter 3 has explored how a fondness for and familiarity with historical topics laid the foundation for jokes and humour in later times. While the subject matter there was the much earlier period of the Warring States (ending 221 BCE), the case of Su Shi likewise allows us to observe how figures and events hailing from or attributed to a time much later but nevertheless separated from the Wanli reign by half a millennium, supplied the thematic basis and creative inspiration for late-Ming humour publications. Earlier, Chapter 2 showed how, at least in prefaces for humour sections in wider compilations, there was an anticipation on the part of the compiler of pushback among readers, which manifested itself in a mild defensive quality in their prefaces. This leads to the question of whether or not Su Shi is being used in a comparable manner to the *Shiji* and *Shijing* in the Chapter 2 prefaces, that is, as a sort of 'acceptable precedent', with mentions of his person and attributions of texts to him being used to vouch for the acceptability of a publication's content.

The following section will provide an overview of Su's stature in the field, both as subject matter and originator of content. The remainder of the chapter will take a look at an example of a Wanli compilation themed wholly around Su Shi, before proceeding to discuss its compiler's verdict on why Su Shi's particular brand of humour was so resonant in the late Ming.

4.2.1. Su Shi as Subject Matter

The prevalence of brushnotes literature during the Song—or more precisely, the well-preserved corpus thereof—furnished Ming humour compilers with a wealth of materials. Their typical format of brief anecdotal snapshots from the lives of particular literati figures, combined with the informality permitted by the genre, gave rise to a large number of records of humorous incidents and joking exchanges. Humour compilers lifted anecdotes from existing collections and transferred them, with or without minor edits, into Ming humour collections.

Of the humour sections familiar from Chapter 2, Guo Zizhang's "Jesting Words" from *Words in Six* (details 2.2.1.) demonstrates this compiling process most clearly, thanks to its neat arrangement of entries by dynasty and under source text titles. When the chronologically-ordered compilation reaches the Song, there is an abrupt rise in the amount of entries per dynasty, devoting the fifth and sixth fascicles (of a total of seven fascicles)[9] to Song entries, the vast majority attributed to Song brushnotes collection sources.[10] And within these ranks, Su Shi features prominently. We find him young and old, in positions of power and in exile, and in a variety of professional and social situations. A great many of the anecdotes recount instances of wordplay and poetic games, whereby Su deploys his literary

[9] Bar a single Yuan entry at the end of the second Song fascicle. An image of that entry is found in Chapter 2. To put this into perspective, the third fascicle covers the many (post-Sima Jin) states of the Period of Disunity and the Sui dynasty, while the fourth fascicle covers the Tang and Five Dynasties periods. Then come the two Song fascicles, followed the final seventh fascicle, which consists entirely of "Great Ming" entries.

[10] For example, *Brushnotes from the East Veranda* (*Dongxuan bilu* 東軒筆錄), by Wei Tai 魏泰, and the *Recorded Hearsay from Official Travels* (*Huanyou jiwen* 宦遊紀聞), by Zhang Shinan 張世南.

talents to put a witty spin on a given situation. He partakes in exchanges with contemporaneous figures such as his brother Su Zhe 蘇轍, chancellor Wang Anshi 王安石 and the monk Foyin 佛印, who will be discussed later. The most prominent associate in this compilation happens to be Su's companion in art and literature, Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105). Several pages are dedicated to an otherwise lost Song collection called *Su & Huang's Comic Copybook* (*Su-Huang guji tie* 蘇黃滑稽帖).[11] The text is comprised of short quips, alternating between "Slope and Valley" (Po-Gu 坡谷), as its colophon nicknames them.[12]

This phenomenon is mirrored in *Record of Tongue Flowers* (details 2.2.2.). In the "Jesting words" (*xieyu* 諧語) section, Su appears in 7 out of 86 entries (8.1%). Given that the vast majority of figures only make a single appearance, this makes him the most frequently appearing figure by far, with second place going jointly to Emperor Wu of Han and Dongfang Shuo, who appear 4 times in the same 4 entries (3.4%). There are only two figures in joint third place with 3 entries.[13] Similarly, in "Jibing words" (*xueyu* 謔語), the second humour category, he appears in 6 of a total of 108 entries (5.5%), placing first by a large margin again, with second place jointly held by Sui dynasty figures Yang Jie 陽玠 and Lu

[11] While modern anthologies have assumed this to be the entire work, we cannot know whether Guo Zizhang cherry-picked certain anecdotes from *Su & Huang's Comic Copybook* or reproduced it in full. Nevertheless, his selection is certainly long enough to have been the entirety of a short collection and he follows the selection with a Song colophon to the collection by Yang Wanli 楊萬里, which is also found in the *Complete Works of Song* (*Quan Songwen* 全宋文). This would be a non-standard compiling procedure for *Words in Six*, and does indicate that the selection here is the whole *Copybook*.

[12] On account of Huang's *hao*, the "Daoist of the Mountains and Valleys" (*Shangu daoren* 山谷道人).

[13] Shi Dongtong 石動筒 of Northern Qi, and the Sui dynasty's Hou Bai 侯白.

Sidao 盧思道 with only 4 entries each (3.7%). Again, these entries see Su Shi enjoying drinking games, making witty retorts and commenting humorously on poetry.

However, the popularity of Su Shi went beyond appearing frequently in collections of humorous anecdotes, as evidenced by several examples of late-Ming humour publications themed entirely around Su Shi. One significant Wanli work in this regard is the *Compilation of Poking Jibes* (*Tiaoxue bian* 調謔編). It was compiled by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), as one section of the wider collection the *Unofficial Chronicles of Gentleman Su the Elder* (*Su zhanggong waiji* 蘇長公外紀), prefaced Wanli 24 (1596). The collection consists of a chronological biography (*nianpu* 年譜) followed by 19 categories which contain writings and anecdotes from the life of Su. Some categories are generic literati themes, such as "The Art of Governance" (*zhengshu* 政術), "Discussions of Poetry" (*shihua* 詩話), "Calligraphy and Painting" (*shuhua* 書畫), while others are specific to Su, like "The Poetry Trial" (*shian* 詩案). The section "Poking Jibes" (*Tiaoxue* 調謔) contains a variety of humorous anecdotes and quips from the life of Su Shi, and was popular and marketable enough to be reprinted as part of other Ming compilations without an overall Su Shi theme.[14]

4.2.2. Su Shi as Humour Originator

For Ming humour compilers and readers, Su Shi was not just popular as subject matter, but also as the composer of humorous content selected for compilation. Firstly, in Hu

[14] For example, it appears separately in the Tao Ting 陶珽 120-fascicle edition of the *Shuofu* 說郛. Available at https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/chinese-rare-books/49-990067026630203941, seq. 66–75.

Wenhuan's "Refined Compilation of Jest Histories" from Chapter 2, three of a total of 47 contributions are by Su Shi. In this he is beaten only by Hu Wenhuan himself with 4 contributions, and there are only a handful of other contributors with 3 or 2 pieces.[15] And as well as containing many entries *about* Su, as discussed above, Guo Zizhang's "Jesting Words" also includes some of Su's own attributed anecdotes about others.[16]

Of course, it is also highly significant that Su was thought to be the creator of Aizi and the author of *Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai*, a character and compilation whose popularity had sparked several sequels, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Despite brief expressions of doubt in the Song and in recent times, in the Ming this seems to have been a strongly held belief. The traces of Ming readers contesting Su's authorship of *Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai* are vague, related second-hand (and perhaps even in jest themselves), but crucially, they seem to have been based on the idea that Aizi had genuinely existed in the Warring States, and hence was not the invention of Su Shi.[17] As such, they differed fundamentally to the arguments in circulation nowadays, which argue the work was by someone other than Su, but nevertheless at a similar timing.[18]

[15] Namely, they are Lin Jin 林金 3; Tao Ze 陶澤 3; Zhi Rushi 支汝時 2; Lu Guizhang 陸圭章 2; Hu Guangsheng 胡光盛 (co-compiler) 2.

[16] Guo Zizhang, *Liu yu*, 364.

[17] Chen Jiru, *Zhenzhu chuan*, 69.

[18] For example the 2016 chapter by Ahn Hei Jin, "'Aizi zashuo' zuozhe zhiyi", 129–39. Tellingly, Guo Zizhang's compilation *Words in Six*, which lists entries by state or dynasty over a period spanning both Warring States and Song, places its Aizi entries in the Song category.

The popularity of the text's author was likely a major driving force behind the popularity of *Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai* and its spin-offs. It has been noted in scholarship that in the Ming (just as in the present day) when giving a publication its title, a circumscribed amount of space was used for the greatest effect,[19] and the fact that many prints of the work underscore the association by including his name in very title of the work, such as *Resident of East Slope's Miscellaneous Stories of Master Ai* (*Dongpo jushi Aizi zashuo* 東坡居士艾子雜說) indicates that the association held a reputation which was considered valuable from a marketing perspective. Indeed, at the height of the Dongpo vogue it would appear that the hunger for more Su Shi material had even outstripped the prolific corpus he had managed to produce in his lifetime. This gave rise various dubious attributions, many of which widely rejected today and perhaps done knowingly on the part of the publisher. This intriguing phenomenon was particularly rife in the field of humour publication, as the emergent genre found its feet in the equally emergent late-Ming publishing world. This issue will be discussed further through the example of the *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* (*Wenda lu* 問答錄), a collection of humorous exchanges between Su and his monk friend Foyin 佛印.

[19] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 138.

4.3. Foyin the Monk and the *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* 問答錄

Perhaps, the best illustration of Su Shi's popularity comes not from looking at the man himself, but those around him. Su's immense stardom carried up with him those figures with whom he had interacted. These were not just other well-known contemporaneous figures like Chancellor Wang Anshi and friend Huang Tingjian, but indeed figures entirely specific to Su, like the invented Su Xiaomei 蘇小妹, his younger sister, along with her equally fictional marriage to Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), Su's historical protégé. All of these make frequent appearances in stories, dramatic texts, and indeed, humour compilations, almost exclusively in connection with Su. This section will focus on another notable example: a monk acquaintance named Foyin.

4.3.1. Foyin in Humorous Literature

Foyin had been making appearances in drama and vernacular tales at latest since the Yuan dynasty.[20] Farcical stories of Su Shi's various attempts to seduce Foyin into returning to secular life had been in circulation for centuries and remained popular in the late Ming, as demonstrated by a 1627 story in Feng Menglong's "Three Words" trilogy (*Sanyan* 三言) whereby Su Shi tests Foyin's Buddhist commitment by sending a household girl into his sleeping quarters at night. The tale also offers a backstory in which Foyin visits the capital as a talented young scholar to take the civil service examinations, but through an almost

[20] For earlier dramatic appearances of Foyin, see Wilt L. Idema, "Poet versus Minister and Monk: Su Shi on Stage in the Period 1250-1450".

slapstick series of events whereby Su persuades him to dress up as a novice to sneak a peek at the emperor, Foyin winds up taking the tonsure by imperial decree.[21] The humorous overtones are obvious throughout.

In humour compilations, too, Foyin makes a frequent appearance: exclusively in connection with Su, and typically where the entry relates to Buddhist ideas. Here is one example, taken from Guo Zizhang's "Jesting Words":

> Dongpo asked Foyin, "Why is it that pictures of the fires of hell do not depict monks?"
> Foyin replied, "Humanity may be afraid of Yama, but Yama is afraid of monks".
> Dongpo said, "What about you is he afraid of?"
> He replied, "When Yama commits a transgression, even he needs a monk to perform repentances to get rid of the bad karma".
> Dongpo laughed loudly and said, "Good one!"[22]
>
> 東坡問佛印曰:「鑊湯獄圖如何不畫和尚?」 佛印對曰:「人間怕閻羅,閻羅怕和尚。」 坡曰:「怕你甚麼?」 對曰:「若使閻羅有犯亦要和尚懺除。」 坡大笑曰:「好說好說。」

This entry, which presumably hints the cost and hassle of hiring monks to perform services, could have been cracked between any two people, but its Buddhist theme means it was fitting to place it between the famous monk-literatus comic duo. Below is another example, from the *Compilation of Poking Jibes*:

> "Roasting Pork"

[21] For a translation, see Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World*, 242–50. Another of his stories (1620), which is also a retelling of an oft-dramatized pre-existing plot, positions Su and Foyin as reunited reincarnations of two abbots, explaining the career misfortunes encountered by Su as karmic retribution for transgressions committed in his previous life as an abbot. For a translation, see Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 517–35. For more on the reincarnation story, see Zhu Gang and Zhao Huijun, "The Past Lives of Su Shi: Stories of Truth and Adaptation". Both these storytelling traditions to show Foyin successfully persuading an initially unenthusiastic Su of Buddhist ideals, albeit in different ways.

[22] Guo, *Liu yu*, 363.

> Dongpo delighted in eating roast pork. When he went to Jinshan Monastery, Foyin would always roast a pig in preparation for his arrival. One day, it was stolen and eaten by someone. Dongpo composed a playful little poem, which went:
>
> The monk Huiyuan bought wine for Tao Qian,
> And Foyin roasted pork to treat Zizhan.
> After gathering from a hundred flowers to make honey,
> He knew not who enjoyed the sweetness of his labours.
>
> 燒豬。東坡喜食燒豬，佛印住金山時，每燒豬以待其來。一日，為人竊食，東坡戲作小詩云:「遠公沽酒飲陶潛，佛印燒豬待子瞻; 采得百花成蜜後, 不知辛苦爲誰甜。」

Su Shi has borrowed the final two lines nearly word for word from the famous poem "Bee" 蜂 by Tang poet Luo Yin 羅隱 (833–910). That poem uses the hard work of bees and an unspecified human's enjoyment of their honey as a metaphor for how certain groups in society reap the benefits of the day-to-day toil of others. Here, the humour comes from the incongruous misplacement of Luo's earnest lament in this more trivial situation, the comparison of Foyin to a disheartened honeybee, and of course the incongruity in the premise of the supposedly vegetarian monk preparing a meat feast. As discussed by Rao Xiao, the meat-eating monk had been a regular trope in literati humour for centuries.[23]

Records of the historical Foyin, and of his association with Su Shi, date right back to the Northern Song period. According to the *Chanlin baoseng zhuan* (禪林寶僧傳, "Biographies of the Jewels of the Sangha in the Forest of Chan"), compiled by Huihong 惠洪 (1071–1128), his worldly name had been Lin Liaoyuan 林了元.[24] Much like Su, Foyin had

[23] For a discussion of the complex uses of Buddhist vegetarianism in Northern Song literati humour, see Rao Xiao, "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment", 105–21.

[24] For translated extracts of Huihong's biography of Foyin, see Rao Xiao, "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment", 137–9, 169–170.

been a prodigal scholar as a child, after which his life took a different direction: upon encountering the Śūraṅgama Sutra (*Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經), he "adored it and relinquished the entirety of his former studies" to enter monastic life.[25] Talented in calligraphy and writing, his monastic life often bridged with the scholarly one he had left behind: "Of the outstanding figures within the gentlemen class, there were many who went travelling with him".[26] Of these, the most emphasis is placed on Su Shi, and their conversations are highly prominent in the biography. But the biography also recounts other encounters with a variety of famous literati of the day. This appears to be in line with the wider textual record. In agreement with Beata Grant, who draws mostly upon Su Shi's writings,[27] Rao Xiao, drawing upon a wider range of both secular and Buddhist Northern Song texts, has characterised Foyin as a "Buddhist monk who was well known for his literati lifestyle".[28] This being the case, it is even more striking that Foyin should come to be associated exclusively with Su.

It is clear that the textual image and record of Foyin was intimately bound to his encounters with the historical figure of Su Shi, but to be even more precise we could say that it was tied to their humorous exchanges specifically. Already by the timing of this biography, this phenomenon was significant enough for Huihong to note "Dongpo was comic (*guji* 滑稽) in his brush and ink, and his playing around with Foyin is acclaimed. The world takes delight in passing it on".[29] And it would appear that society continued to take delight in these humorous stories and exchanges for a very long time. Huihong's remark, substantiated by the

[25] 愛之盡捐舊學.
[26] 縉紳之賢者, 多與之遊.
[27] Beata Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*, 102–3.
[28] Rao Xiao, "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment", 169.
[29] 東坡滑稽於翰墨、戲為之贊. 世喜傳…

various anecdotes about Foyin which we find circulated and recirculated in Song brushnotes collections,[30] is an early testament to the existence of a humour tradition that was very much alive and well by the Ming Wanli period.

4.3.2. The *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues*

One major Wanli compilation in this regard was the *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* (*Wenda lu* 問答錄), which is entirely dedicated to exchanges between and involving the pair. Notably, this is a publication that combines Su Shi in both of his guises: here he assumes the role both as the book's subject matter, and that of its author/compiler, albeit via a fairly brazen Ming attribution. There are two existing pre-modern copies of the text, a 1620 Wanli print and an earlier manuscript edition,[31] which not only informs us that versions of the text were in circulation prior to the Wanli edition,[32] but also pays testament to the widespread popularity it enjoyed.

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[30] Hu Lianyu has provided a useful survey of Foyin anecdotes and the collections in which they appear. See "Su Shi, Foyin gushi zai xiqu xiaoshuo zhong", 26. And as pointed out by Yu Shihua in his survey of Su Shi's writings to and about Foyin, there are even examples of Su's own writing which back up the humorous image. See Yu, "Su Shi yu Foyin jiaoyou kao", 107.

[31] For a reproduction of the manuscript, see vol. 2 of *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng di wu ji*, 1–37. For a comparison of the minor textual differences in the extant editions, see Huang Tung-yang, "Yanyi de fengliu", 3–4.

[32] Versions of the text may have been in circulation in the Northern Song, and *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* is widely referred to as a Southern Song text in scholarship. However, a closer look at the cited evidence reveals it to be inconclusive: a Southern Song text which cites a line of poetry from a *Recorded Sayings of Dongpo and Foyin* (*Dongpo Foyin yulu* 東坡佛印語錄). The line in question does indeed appear in the transmitted versions, and one of the names attached to the manuscript is *Recorded Sayings of the Inquiry and Responses of Dongpo and Foyin* (*Dongpo Foyin yulu wenda* 東坡佛印語錄問答). So the Song text does seem related to the Ming texts, but to brand the entire transmitted text as Song based on this is too bold, especially given the propensity of Ming compilers to re-compile and re-edit. Sun Kaidi's 1932 estimation that it contains some Song content and was meddled with and added to in the Ming seems very reasonable to me, but this has been largely ignored

The received version of *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* is one fascicle in length and comprised of 27 entries. The name *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* is a reference to Chan discursive practices of posing questions to provoke Buddhist realisations. Well-known among these varieties is the practice of *gong'an* 公案, which may be more familiar to Western readers as Japanese *kōan*.[33] Several Chan masters had produced their own records of "Inquiry and Responses". But the tongue-in-cheek irony of the title choice becomes clear when what is asked and answered by Su and Foyin throughout are in fact riddles, word games and drinking game challenges, alongside exchanges of joking and teasing. Many of these do touch upon Buddhist themes in some way, but not all. The following example is fairly representative in the former regard:

> "Asking Foyin a Riddle"
> Dongpo took a piece of paper, and drew a monk. In his right hand there was a fan, and in his left a long-handled strainer. He told Foyin, "Have a go at this riddle."
> Foyin muttered to himself for a good while, and said, "Could it be the line from "'Guanju' [from the *Airs* in the *Shijing*]?"
> Dongpo said, "How does it go?"
> Foyin said, "[As for the *Airs*, they are teachings.] To stir them with the *Airs*, is to transform them with teachings". [Pun: Move it with the wind; convert them with the strainer].
> Dongpo, "My teacher, you are the real deal".

since Cheng Cheng-lang declared it "unevidenced" (*wuju* 無據) in 1947. As for Chang's own "*shuo canqing* 說參請" theory, another argument for the Song origins, I would agree with Huang Tung-yang that it is overstated. For more information on that all-important poem, see Huang Tung-yang, "Yanyi de fengliu", 3. For the rest, Sun Kaidi, *Riben Dongjing suojian Zhongguo xiaoshuo*, 257; Chang Cheng-lang, "Wenda lu", 2.

[33] While it does not touch upon *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues*, Rao Xiao's recent PhD thesis has supplied a thorough examination of the intersections of humour and Buddhist discursive forms. Rao Xiao, "Tales Of Wit And Enlightenment: Laughter And Humor In Northern Song (960-1127) China". One broad takeaway point from Rao's study is that Chan texts were by no means adverse to including humour and laughter. It follows that while there is certainly some irony in the title due to the overall humorous nature of *Inquiry and Response Dialogues*, we would be mistaken to present it as a straightforward parody of the genre. Indeed, one Ming publisher was of the view that its content in fact transcended religion. See 4.4.2., *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* preface.

> They laughed together and that was the end of it.[34]
>
> 與佛印商謎。東坡即拾一片紙，畫一和尚，右手把一柄扇，左手把長柄笊籬，與佛印云:「可商此謎。」佛印沈吟良久:「莫是〈關雎〉序中語歟?」東坡曰:「何謂也?」 佛印曰:「風以動之，教以化之，非此意乎?」東坡曰:「吾師本事也。」相與大笑而已。

As guessed correctly here by Foyin, the answer to the riddle lies in the Mao 毛 commentary to the *Shijing*, which asserts the *Airs of the States* (*guofeng* 國風) are a vehicle for educating the people. With that, through a layer of pun, Su Shi's sketch of a monk turns out to be brandishing a strainer with which he intends to bring all living beings closer to enlightenment.

Huang Tung-yang has noted how this entry makes use of literary references in a way that transcends the pair's clashing identities of scholar-official and monk.[35] As such, this is an example of what we might consider 'high-brow' content in the collection. To give a fuller representation of the compilation, however, I should point out that another facet of the collection that has raised eyebrows among readers, at least from the Qing onwards, was its 'dirty' humour. Indeed, the collection is peppered with sexual innuendos and scatological humour. A good example is the fifth entry, "Foyin Takes on Dongpo's Drinking Game Challenges" (*Foyin na Dongpo ling* 佛印納東坡令), which over a series of gatherings broaches topics such as cows, farting women, and extramarital affairs with monks.[36] As we shall see, this portion of the content would in later times be invoked as the key justification for ruling out any actual involvement by Su Shi.

[34] Su Shi, *Chen Meigong dingzheng wenda lu*, 533.

[35] Huang Tung-yang, "Yanyi de fengliu", 14.

[36] Su, *Chen Meigong dingzheng wenda lu*, 531–2.

4.4. Attributions to Su Shi in Humour Publications

4.4.1. Problematising Attributions: Ming Practices of Misonymy

Yuming He has drawn attention to the contemptuous attitude shown towards late-Ming popular publications by the Qing *Siku quanshu* compilers, adding that this "eighteenth-century condemnation of Ming book culture has had undeniably real and lasting consequences... [the] Qing valuation of these texts has 'stuck' in subsequent generations, albeit largely by default".[37] Indeed, many later studies of the Ming publications have, consciously or unconsciously, reproduced the Qing chauvinism, and nowhere is this more evident than when late-Ming book culture collided with an exalted Song literatus. The trajectory is well illustrated by the case of the *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues*. In the late 1700s, the compilers of the *Siku quanshu* branded the *Record* as "extremely obscene" (*jiwei weixie* 極為猥褻), and "…taken from the writings of ignobles of the twisted alleyways. It is one of the most base examples among bogus books".[38] From this to a 1932 summary, "not worth looking at… probably the work of some busybody during the Ming";[39] to a 1947 re-examination, "That this book is not by Dongpo, anyone of classical literacy can tell, and the words of the [*Siku*] Abstract settle the matter";[40] to a 1988 study of editions, "Nowadays people sometimes quote and propound the idea, which I find ludicrous, and also deeply

[37] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 6.

[38] 亦出委巷小人之所為. 偽書中之至劣者也. Su Shi, *Chen Meigong dingzheng wenda lu*, 538.

[39]無足觀也… 蓋明以來好事者之所為. Sun Kaidi, *Riben Dongjing suojian Zhongguo xiaoshuo*, 257.

[40] 此書非東坡所撰凡讀書人能辨之, 提要之言可定論. Chang Cheng-lang, "Wenda lu", 1.

slanderous of the Gentleman of the Slope";[41] to a more measured 2012 estimation: "Owing to the content being excessively obscene, they surmised it not to be of Su Shi's hand, and rather the work of 'ignobles of the twisted alleyways'; [I find] this adheres to reason".[42]

But if this is so blindingly obvious to modern readers, are we to suppose that it was not disputed by its readership at the time? Are we perhaps naïve in assuming outlandish attributions were like this were casually bandied around and uncritically accepted? And in assuming this was not the case, are we manifesting the haughty attitude towards Ming book culture all over again? On the other hand, it should also be said that the Ming contrast reflects back upon us and our own attitudes: how much of the modern excision of the attribution springs from more recent and pervasive ideals concerning the way in which we expect an exalted literary figure *should* be, specifically that the very idea of them producing humorous material, especially that of a low-brow variety, feels incongruous? In any case, the practices of attribution in the Ming publishing world were surely more complex than the above quotes would suggest. In attributing a work, publishers expected the correct interpretation of the attribution by the reader, who had full access to the contextual information of how things were done at the time.[43]

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[41] 今人时有征引宣扬者，甚觉荒诞，亦厚诬坡公矣. Liu Shangrong, *Su Shi zhuzuo banben luncong*, 162.

[42] 館臣由內容過於猥褻，直斷非出於蘇軾之手，而是民間的委巷小人所作，自是合理. Huang Tung-yang, "Yanyi de fengliu", 3. However, it should be said in Huang's defence that his article is an even-handed and detailed examination of *Inquiry and Response Dialogues*. While he concurs with the *Siku* verdict in this aspect, his was the first (and currently only) study to put the censure to one side and give the text a full treatment on its own terms.

[43] In my opinion, the simple fact that the entire collection takes a direct third person perspective in an anecdotic style points very strongly to that it was not written or compiled by Su Shi. This was unusual for a self-written/compiled piece at the time and must have seem quite strange for Ming readers too. Much of this rests on the precise functions and connotations of the word "*zhuan* 撰" in the Ming publishing world, which is a topic deserving of a close linguistic analysis. I have translated it throughout this dissertation as "by" to avoid

To be very clear, this dissertation takes no interest in whether the attribution itself was right or wrong, which is besides the point. Rather, it is the intricacies of the practices of misattribution that can give us a richer idea of late-Ming book culture and its humour publication scene. Given Su Shi's ubiquity in humour publications, does the attribution take on a special significance in the context of the emergent Ming humour corpus? As Chapter 2 has shown, this was a new group of texts which were of ambivalent standing when it came to acceptability and reader response. Judging by how carefully humour publishers crafted their prefaces to support the acceptability of their work, it would be surprising if they were any less strategic when it came to their (mis)attributive practices.

Before entering such a discussion, however, we must be careful about applying our modern ideas of authorial authenticity, derived from a world in which copyright issues are omnipresent, onto the Ming. Ming readers may not have been as affronted by false attributions as modern, or even Qing, bibliophiles; indeed, people may have cared very little. Even more fundamentally, pre-modern Chinese concepts of fact and fiction were not as clear-

artificially selecting a solid implication like "written by" or "compiled by", when the original term could refer to either or both. We could speculate, perhaps, that the scope of use of the word was looser in the Ming than in the Qing. Perhaps it had refracted into different meanings, spurred on by the various ways it was used in the publishing world, before moving to a more constricted usage in later times. It is plausible that in the late Ming it was acceptable for a book to use *zhuan* for a text which bore any link or connection to the figure in question, with the expectation that Ming readers, familiar with the reasonable scope of contextual use and interpreting accordingly, would not take the word to mean what we nowadays assume. For an analogy from today, Hollywood celebrities frequently publish memoirs and auto-biographies under their own name, with overwhelming contributions from a ghost-writer, whose name is usually buried in the acknowledgements or publishing information. The practice is now so normal that it would take a very naïve consumer to think the celebrity in question had written it entirely themselves. In doing so, we interpret the paratextual attribution on the page correctly because we are fully conversant with our own historical context, but technically there is nothing on the page from which a future historian could infer that.

cut as the modern historian would perhaps have them. Late-Ming book culture was bursting with "unofficial histories", and "historical romances". As Wilt Idema has put it, the emphasis was often on "Truth" with a capital T, that is, the precise factual details mattering less than the didactic truths of nature and the human condition.[44] That is to say, perhaps as long as a text was in the spirit of Su Shi, the association could be considered valid in some ways. Thus, it could be a misstep to assume that just because Su Shi did not personally compose or compile a given text, Ming people conceptualised it entirely separately to his person, writing and ideas.

Despite these thorny issues, I believe that it is still possible to have a meaningful discussion. After all, attributions are a tangible marker that can take us straight to the crux of Su Shi's popularity, and those which have been presumed false might prove even more telling in that regard than the genuine ones. In *Publishing, Culture and Power,* Kai-wing Chow discusses the widespread practice of attributing false names in late-Ming book culture, which he terms "misonymity". His conclusions on this phenomenon are chiefly drawn from the misonymisation of contemporaneous Ming authors, compilers and publishers, so not all of them apply in cases of Su Shi misonymity. For example, although there copyright laws and regulations did exist in the Ming (*banquan* 版權 "the right to blocks"), as Chow notes, there was no routine regulation of copyright, and investigations were initiated only when a publisher or living relative had actively filed a complaint.[45] It follows that, in practice, such procedures existed for the sake of Ming figures and their descendants, and not for figures of

[44] W. L. Idema, *Chinese Vernacular Fiction*, 55.
[45] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 139–42.

the distant past. In other words, this meant fewer tangible concerns for a publisher in misonymising a Song writer like Su Shi. Nevertheless, many of Chow's conclusions do remain apt the case of Su Shi, like "misonymity was a practice regulated by the principles of the book market. The reputation of a writer was first established by the recognition of his name in the market, and the marketability of his name resulted in misonymization".[46] Certainly, the misattribution and over-emphasis of Su Shi's name on late-Ming publications cannot be entirely separated from its market power.

Nevertheless, this obvious answer of 'to increase book-selling potential' would be an oversimplification of the matter. While this undoubtedly played a role, this particular marketing stamp had the potential to elicit different reactions from different sections of the readership, some of which would be very undesirable from a book-selling perspective. Plus, as Chow also points out, "credibility" was an important aspect in practices of misonymy. Names were not assigned haphazardly: "If publishers decided to misonymize a book to a famous writer, they had to make a plausible case by selecting the appropriate author in the genre in which the book would be recognized".[47] This remark should relate to the readership as a whole, not just potential plaintiffs. These publications were entering an environment in which they could expect some level of scrutiny, so treating it as a straightforward ploy to sell the book risks overlooking the complexities of late-Ming book culture and its reading publics. The "plausible case" aspect is one of the reasons we find a cluster of false Su Shi attributions among Ming humour publications. Given the omnipresence of Su Shi in the

[46] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 206.

[47] Ibid., 205. This remark is made in the context of a discussion on copyright infringers but what it implies about the reading publics still applies in the Su Shi case.

humour genre demonstrated above, the attribution of a humour publication to Su, while perhaps overtly 'false', may not have seemed overly outlandish in the Ming reading context, even if in later reading contexts it was considered ridiculous. This brings the special position Su Shi held within the genre, as well as the humorous facet with which he was imagined at this point in time, even further into relief.

The extant 1620 Wanli print of *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* is a reprinted version of an earlier Wanli edition, with a 1601 preface by Zhao Kaimei 趙開美 (1563–1624).[48] That edition seems to have been published as part of a set entitled *Five Assorted Works by Dongpo* (*Dongpo zazhu wuzhong* 東坡雜著五種), effectively making this a double-layered misonymisation: both on the individual fascicle itself, and again by virtue of the grouping of texts in which it was placed—on the 'front cover', so to speak. It is relevant to mention that from today's perspective, Zhao Kaimei's collection was a mixed bag of false and genuine attributions. It contained undisputed Su Shi works like the *Dongpo zhilin*, but also *Miscellaneous Records of Master Ai* (*Aizi zaji* 艾子雜記), *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* and *A Fisherman and Woodcutter's Idle Chitchat* (*Yuqiao xianhua* 漁樵閒話),[49] all of which are now considered dubious in origin. When taken as part of such a collection, the Su Shi attribution could be characterised as a kind of 'bonus' appellation: a Dongpo-themed humour collection which would have been enjoyed by the fans who had added the overall collection to their libraries. The attribution of the name is partly to fit in neatly amongst the other works

[48] In his later years, Zhao Kaimei changed his given name (*ming*) to Zhao Qimei 趙琦美. Some biographers list his details under that name. The majority of studies refer to him as "Kaimei".

[49] This is a two-fascicle tongue-in-cheek philosophical consultation between a fisherman and a woodcutter.

as a consummate whole, as opposed to as an appendage. Ming consumers may have been accustomed to such practices and interpreted it accordingly.

However, the attribution then went on to a new life outside of this context, when it was reprinted, slightly edited, as part of the 1620 instalment (that is, the *puji* 普集) of *Secret Satchel from Baoyan tang* (*Baoyan tang miji* 寶顏堂秘笈), an eclectic compilation strongly associated with Chen Jiru.[50] While we must be wary of attributions to Chen on account of his celebrity, in this case we can be fairly sure of direct involvement.[51] He is listed as joint "proofreader" (*jiao* 校), together with another famous late-Ming literatus Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635). One thing that is beyond doubt, is that as part of a *Secret Satchel* instalment, *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* would have seen very extensive circulation indeed. That the re-edited version removed the attribution from its existing collection and perpetuated it afresh in a separate collection is a statement of its own. The Shen 沈 brothers at the helm of the *Secret Satchel* projects have gained some notoriety as profit-seeking publishers. Indeed, even Chen Jiru, who was involved to varying extents with all the instalments and composed the entirety of the first, grumbled in later years how they had exaggerated his input in the subsequent ones by placing his name in the title.[52] Depending on how much say the surviving

[50] Chen Jiru's name held a great deal of prestige and selling power in the late Ming. While it is certain that he was heavily involved in the initial *Satchel* project, in later instalments his involvement was overstated by their publishers the Shen brothers. For Greenbaum's unpicking of the *Satchel* enterprise in its various guises, see Jamie Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru*, 192–5.

[51] That Li Rihua is the partner in this case should be fairly conclusive according to Jamie Greenbaum's estimation, see *Chen Jiru*, 194. To this I add that Chen's other documented partnerships with the previous publisher Zhao Kaimei also point towards actual involvement.

[52] Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru*, 194.

Shen brother and his team had in the matter, it would be surprising if they were any more reticent about using Su Shi's name in a similar manner.

Regardless, something shared by both editions was Zhao Kaimei's 1601 preface. We should remember here that retaining the preface represented a deliberate choice on the part of the 1620 imprint. Unlike many Ming prefaces, it is not an outline of the concept and format, nor an explanation of the circumstances and motivations which led up to the production. Instead, it presents one compiler's musings on the question of Su Shi's enduring comic popularity, and could also be read as a kind of pre-emptive strike against critics both in terms of the content and the attribution. Perhaps it was this aspect that prompted the 1620 compilers to retain the preface.

4.4.2. Publisher Zhao Kaimei on Su Shi's Place in Humour Publications

The first known publisher of *Inquiry and Response Dialogues*, Zhao Kaimei, was born into a successful political family whose father had already amassed an impressive library. Zhao continued to actively add to the library, and it grew to be renowned as one of the largest collections of its time. Based on this library, and a symbiotic, fruitful partnership with celebrity literatus Chen Jiru, he went on to become an extremely prolific publisher. Zhao Kaimei published an enormous variety of texts, from medicinal guides to annotated classics, but even among his eclectic titles it is possible to detect a certain partiality for the works of Su Shi. For example, he published the currently definitive Wanli editions of Su's brushnotes

collections *Dongpo zhilin* 東坡志林 and *Qiuchi biji* 仇池筆記 alongside several other works.[53] Notably, in Wanli 30 (1602), he printed a "Mr. Dongpo's Miscellaneous Records of Master Ai" (*Dongpo xiansheng Aizi zaji* 東坡先生艾子雜記), an edition of the original *Aizi*, as well as *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* in 1601. This makes him an active compiler of humour, even if it was far from his mainstay as a publisher.

Zhao can therefore be characterised as a key proponent (and beneficiary) of the Ming "Dongpo vogue", who happened also to be deeply professionally involved with compilers of humour and himself a participant in the publication of humour. With this in mind, we now turn to the 1601 preface he composed for *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues*:

> Opening Remarks to "Record of Dongpo's Inquiry and Response Dialogues"
>
> Dongpo used the norms of the mundane world (*shifa* 世法) to joke about the norms of Buddhism (*fofa* 佛法, i.e. the Dharma). Foyin used the norms of Buddhism to joke about the norms of the mundane world. But at heart the pair of gentlemen fundamentally had no norms, thus they were not bound by [any] norms. They did not regard that which adheres to and that which contradicts [the norms] to be respectively sharp and blunt. Frankly, they are the supermen among the comics (*guji*). As for the others—the Court Entertainers and [Chunyu] Kun—the way I see it that is lacking in basis. I [hereby] carve the *Record of Dongpo and Foyin's Inquiry and Response Dialogues*.
>
> On the ninth month of the twenty-ninth year of Wanli (1601),
> Zhao Kaimei, the Clear and Constant Daoist of Haiyu[54]
>
> 東坡問答錄題辭。東坡以世法遊戲佛法。 佛印以佛法遊戲世法。二公心本無法,故不為法縛。而詼諧謔浪不以順逆為利鈍。直滑稽之雄也。彼優髡視之失所據矣。刻東坡佛印問答錄。萬曆辛丑九月日。海虞清常道人趙開美識。

[53] Qian Chaochen, *Zhongguo yishi renwu kao*, 333. For more of Zhao Kaimei's Su Shi publications, see Chang Cheng-lang, "Wenda lu", 1.

[54] Su Shi, *Chen Meigong dingzheng wenda lu*, 527.

The spectre of some kind of reader pushback looms behind Zhao's wording here, just like that in the humour section prefaces in Chapter 2. While brasher in approach, these "opening remarks" are not entirely devoid of the defensive quality observed there. In a way that is reminiscent of the two opinionated "guests" from Hu Wenhuan's preface, Zhao has essentially demarcated two camps: those readers that appreciate the content and those that do not. This is implicit in his remark on the idea of "norms" (*fa* 法; rules/doctrines/models): "They did not regard that which adheres to and that which contradicts norms (specifically, orthodoxies and heterodoxies) to be respectively sharp and blunt (that is, useful and useless/insightful and dull/correct and incorrect)".[55] Since any type of criticism fundamentally stems from the critic's acceptance of particular normative ideas—the way things are or *should* be—either one accepts the worldview and the content or finds norm-based criticism. That is to say, in Zhao's opinion the group of potential critics simply lacked the proper mindset to comprehend and appreciate Su Shi, Foyin, and the work itself. Thus, while Hu Wenhuan at least puts on the pretence of hearing his more critical guest out, Zhao Kaimei steamrolls through with a staunch advocation of Su Shi and Foyin, rejecting the validity of potential criticism altogether.

The preface, however, carries a veiled criticism of its own. As well as expressing great esteem for the joking duo, it raises them up at the expense of the workings of the world surrounding Zhao, which, to extrapolate a little, he perhaps finds excessively governed by norms and doctrines of all kinds. This comment is valuable as a Ming compiler's view of humour itself. For Zhao Kaimei, top-level humour and joking was something completely

[55] 而詼諧謔浪不以順逆為利鈍。

untrammelled by the all-encompassing moral requirements of society (*shifa*) and religion (*fofa*). This is particularly striking when read against the Confucian prescriptions for humour discussed by Weihe Xu, that "proper humour, seen from the Confucian perspective, means a form of private, moderate, good-natured, tasteful and didactically useful mirth".[56] Through his rejection of "norms" altogether, Zhao Kaimei circumvents each and every one of these, and in doing so, refutes them fundamentally. Zhao has freed humorous content from any restrictions whatsoever.

This is truly a departure from the sentiment in the Chapter 2 prefaces. As the reader will remember, those prefaces' espousal of humour remains constantly tethered to these ideals. Indeed, that is even the case in the intentionally exaggerated enthusiasm of Hu Wenhuan's first guest. Zhao Kaimei's most explicit and astounding rejection is his offhand remark at the end which discards the *Shiji* archetypes of 'useful' remonstrative humour: "Frankly, [Su Shi and Foyin] are the supermen among the comics (*guji*). As for the others—the Court Entertainers and [Chunyu] Kun—the way I see it that is lacking in basis".[57] While the Chapter 2 prefaces took the *Shiji* chapter as an unassailable standard and selected it as precedent to promote their own acceptability, Zhao dismisses Chunyu Kun and the court entertainers (*you* 優) Meng and Zhan, Sima Qian's own chosen subjects of biography, as inferior to his Song dynasty jokesters.[58] To be sure, this is an usurpation: the *Shiji* comics

[56] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 70.

[57] 直滑稽之雄也。彼優旀視之失所據矣.

[58] Note that Zhao Kaimei aims straight for the comics selected by Sima Qian himself, and not even the later additions by Chu Shaosun, which were considered by some to be questionable in standing, as we can infer Zhou Zizhi poem in 3.3.1. When we take that overall context into account, it brings the sheer precision which Zhao aims his critique into relief and shows this all the more to be a dismissal of Sima's idea of 'useful' humour itself.

find themselves removed from their pedestal in favour of Su Shi. This speaks both to the stature of Su Shi in the late-Ming sea of books and what this person stood for in these times.

Of all the prefaces we have encountered in this dissertation, it is Zhao Kaimei's that comes closest to advocating for "playing the comic emptily" (*kong xi guji* 空戲滑稽), or "humour for humour's sake" as rendered by Weihe Xu.[59] And what is pertinent to this chapter is that it is Su Shi (together with Foyin) that he has chosen to deploy as his demonstration to back this up. Using Su Shi's comic persona and the content of *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* as his substance, Zhao moulds an audacious alternative definition for the age-old concept of the "comic" (*guji* 滑稽), one which, crucially, excises its connotations of 'usefulness'. We may even be witnessing *guji* begin to morph into the *huaji* with which we are familiar from modern Chinese. In any case, Zhao Kaimei's preface gives us an indication of the diversity of ideas surrounding humour, its acceptability and restrictions on its use that were floating about at the time, just as was the case for many other issues in the late Ming. Certainly, they were in flux, and not as clear-cut and flat-packed as some studies have suggested. Ming compilers had a variety of textual influences and models at their disposal, not just from the distant past but also from nearer periods like the Song, which they used to vouch for humorous content and even reshape the very definition of 'humour' (in this case the *guji* variety).

[59] Weihe Xu, "The Classical Confucian Concepts", 68.

4.5. Conclusion

It is no surprise that the facilitator of the usurpation of the *Shiji* comics should be a Ming compiler-publisher. Prolific figures like Zhao Kaimei were active players in the dissemination and circulation of ideas in late-Ming China. Theirs was an influential position, as it was not just up to them what information got published and thereby entered circulation, but to an extent also how this information was interpreted and processed, given the role prefaces and other paratextual materials could take in guiding and shaping understandings of the material. Zhao Kaimei gives his take on the idea of *guji* in the 1601 edition, which further down the publishing track would find itself reaffirmed and perpetuated among further audiences by virtue of being reprinted in later publications like the *Secret Satchel*. And given the importance attached to reputation in publishing and the commissioning of prefaces,[60] and interest among the readership as to what these people had to say that this importance implies, then the opinions of this preface could be very influential. Long-established ideas about and concepts of humour and joking were diversifying and changing in the late Ming, and were doing so in a way that was closely intertwined with the humour publications and publishers surveyed over the course of this dissertation.

In a similar way, the Qing-onwards resentment towards late-Ming book culture, if nothing else, is an implicit acknowledgement of its influence. Affordable and accessible, publications like *Five Assorted Works by Dongpo* and the *Secret Satchel* compilation had a wide reach when it came to the spread of ideas. After all, one major reason why the Qianlong

[60] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture and Power*, 110–2.

emperor's *Siku quanshu* project of standardisation proved unprecedented in terms of scale was the way publications had proliferated in the late Ming: there was now a whole sea of books to be forced through a narrow funnel. As a consequence, it encountered challenges in standardisation that previous enterprises like the *Yongle dadian* (永樂大典, the "Great Canon of the Yongle Reign") had not. The *Siku* project was constantly back-pedalling from the plethora of books and ideas spawned by the late Ming: just as Yuming He memorably describes Ming compilers as "as curators, or even stage managers… reworking, organizing, and maximizing the audience appeal of a fluid repertoire of textual and visual resources… editors of different book projects competed to produce novel and distinctive versions of widely popular textual genres",[61] *Siku* compilers busied themselves with pruning and weeding the resulting sea of books by categorising and circumscribing, rebuffing and refuting. On this note, the recurring criticism of attributive practices we find in *Siku* Abstracts as demonstrated in 4.4.1., and disparagement of late-Ming publication practices in general (see 1.2.1.) is perhaps not devoid of a kind of bureaucrat's catharsis, which takes advantage of the assigned space for critique to vent resentment against the works in question. After all, Ming publishers had not made their job easy. Further, the task of the *Siku* editors was likewise one of compiling, and perhaps they recognised Ming publishers' status as a predecessor of sorts. The parallel experience must have made the compilership norms of their respective times and contexts contrast all the more sharply: the *Siku* regimented and regulated state-led approach against the organic, competitive and market-driven practices of the Ming. More broadly, the example of late-Ming compilership represented a demonstration of alternative approach, one that could even be said to mount a challenge to how things were

[61] Yuming He, *Home and the World*, 74–5.

done in the *Siku* project. So it is no surprise that we so often see the easy targets of tangible compiling norms such as attribution, source-citing and categorisation get pilloried in the Abstracts.

On the topic of "norms", when taken against the *Siku* accusations of obscenity and unregimented content, bound as they are to a rigid set of normative ideas, there is a spooky, almost prescient ring to Zhao Kaimei's attempt to place *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* above criticism. His "at heart the pair of gentlemen fundamentally had no norms, thus they were not bound by [any] norms",[62] could be said to convincingly deflect critique of his two principal characters and the content. The only one left unprotected is Zhao Kaimei himself, who finds himself shoved among the brazen ranks of the "ignobles of the twisted alleyways" (*weixiang xiaoren* 委巷小人) whose content he has published. Whether Zhao Kaimei would likewise place himself within their company is an interesting question. Judging by the worldview expressed in his preface, perhaps he would have celebrated such an association.

To return to Su Shi himself, this chapter has illustrated the wide variety of ways in which the character or works of this Song dynasty literatus were used in the late-Ming publication of humour. Obviously, this could only happen on account of the popularity of Su Shi in the Ming, but it is important to remember that when this popularity was thrown into the mix with the publishing world it became a self-perpetuating phenomenon, growing in popularity as Su Shi-content was published and circulated ever more. Importantly, we have also seen how Su became a pawn in the publishing world as a selling point for humour

[62] 二公心本無法, 故不為法縛.

publications, and even, in the case of the *Inquiry and Response Dialogues* preface, for theorising about humour. In positing Su Shi as a "superman among the comics" (*guji zhi xiong* 滑稽之雄), Zhao relies to an extent on his readers' background knowledge of humorous Su Shi material,[63] which is also to rely on the many pre-existing Su Shi publications available at the time. While there is much more to explore on the connections between Su and Ming humour, it is nonetheless clear that he was a key figure in this area, whose frequency of appearance made him integral to humour compilations and consequently the ever-changing ideas about and response to humorous content.

[63] This point stands more for the 1620 *Secret Satchel* edition than the earlier *Five Assorted Works by Dongpo* edition, which would have supplied some supplementary humorous context.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

5.1. Summary

Taking the Wanli reign period as its starting point, this dissertation has conducted an investigation into the humorous publications of late-Ming China. It has taken a historical, as opposed to a literary studies approach, with the aim of understanding how such publications were viewed by those both behind and in front of the page: people in the Ming who (re)produced and consumed them. To achieve this, it has analysed a primary source base comprised chiefly of prefaces and other paratextual materials, written by the compilers and publishers who created or recompiled these books.

Before looking at examples of humour publications in detail, it was necessary to draw the boundaries around a genre—or more humbly, reconnect a connected group of texts—that subsequent categorisation systems had obscured. While the terms *xiaohua ji* 笑話集 and "jokebook"/ "jestbook" are analytically useful and certainly do apply to many examples of Ming humour, our modern notions of the term exclude certain examples that were understood as part of this group in pre-modern times. Thus, to select for "jokes" or *xiaohua* risks misrepresenting these books as they were viewed by those who compiled, published and consumed them. Towards a different approach, this dissertation has proposed the complementary category of 'humour compilation' along the lines of *xie* 諧, *xue* 謔 and *xiao* 笑. This does not intend to supersede or replace the notion of jokebooks/*xiaohua ji*, which could be said to form one variety under this overarching category. To substantiate this, Chapter 1 has provided examples of commonalities shared by these publications with regard

to their content, title conventions and prefatory introductions. This framework hopes to better equip scholars to conceptualise the Ming humour publishing landscape on its own terms.

Based on this foundation, the dissertation then focused in on some issues pertinent to this group of texts. Chapter 2 covered the different manners in which humour sections appeared in wider compilations that also contained non-humorous sections. This enabled us to examine how humour was perceived to fit in among other published topics. The chapter found that the position of humour was an ambivalent one, that some forms of it were understood to stand counter to certain prescriptive ideas, and also explored publishers' attempts to defend their editing choices. Chapters 3 and 4 dealt with two major tropes in this group of texts. The first was the Aizi tradition, which was exclusive to humour compilations, and demonstrated how this group of texts had come to have its own set of tropes and characters. The second was the life and works of Song dynasty literatus Su Shi. This showed how humour compilations also reflected interests shared more widely on the Ming publishing scene.

Over the course of the chapters we have encountered a variety of examples of late-Ming humour publications and the kinds of humour they contained. This has included humorous entries which employ what I have termed as the 'generic voice' and 'anecdotic voice', as well as more elaborate formats such as the anthropomorphic biography, or "jest histories" (*xieshi* 諧史) as described by Ming compilers. We have also met a range of different Ming figures involved in the compiling and publishing of humour. These men hailed from different areas of the country and a range of political, social and familial

backgrounds, with varying levels of involvement and stature in the Wanli publishing scene. They all express a strong awareness of the humorous content of the past, and engage with the inherited tradition in various ways: some cherry-picked from the writings of the past to form their own compilations of humour, while others engaged with it in more involved and creative ways, even writing entire sequels to past examples, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Something all compilations explored in this dissertation have in common, however, is that they all reshape and repurpose the humour of the past to suit Ming society, current affairs, fashions and the marketing strategies of the publishing scene in some way or other. These publications self-identify as successors to a long textual tradition, and this underscores the point that their publishers saw them as a closely related group of texts.

Further, in their prefaces, these compilers have provided us with their own takes on their content and on textual humour in general. Through a focus on the paratextual materials as spaces where compilers communed with their faceless, envisioned readers, we have been able to trace how these men conceived of their publications' content and how they wished to present it to society at large, or at least those who could be expected to pick up their book. From their anticipation of how the readership would react, it has been possible to make inferences about how these humour publications would have been received and consumed. This has revealed an ambivalence surrounding humour content, which was seen to run counter to particular prescriptive ideas inherited from previous times. In their prefaces, humour publishers grappled with and countered the negative perceptions of humour and certain kinds of humour in their own individual ways. In Chapter 2, Guo Zizhang argued them away by the means of a structured treatise, while Hu Wenhuan mocked and trivialised

them through parody. Tu Benjun from Chapter 3 channelled the kind of humour that was considered acceptable and drew attention to the fact he had done so in his preface, while Zhao Kaimei brashly dismantled any negative conceptions by rejecting their fundamental premise in Chapter 4. All these approaches the confirm the ambivalence surrounding textual humour, but by the same token reveal the diversity of views on humour that it was possible to have at this time. If there is one key takeaway from this dissertation, it is that perceptions of humour in the late Ming were unfixed and diverse. While the prescriptive ideas inherited from earlier times were clearly well-known and influential, the very fact that there was room to make a case for humorous content tells us that they were not binding or upheld by all. Likewise, the decision of so many humour publishers to publish ambivalent content in spite of them tells us of how much (or little) weight was actually attached to the prescriptions against humour. As pointed out in Chapter 2 (2.5.1.), these compilers' actions of publishing regardless speak louder than their words.

5.2. Limitations

There are two major limitations to this dissertation, both of which were consequences of the need to restrict the parameters of this study to a manageable scope within what is a relatively understudied area.

The first is the fact that this study only deals with imprints from the Wanli reign period. The reasons for this were outlined in the "Timing Rationale" (0.3.1.). Here I reiterate

that while the Wanli period was clearly a busy time for the publication of humour, it was not my intention in selecting this period to single it out as necessarily more significant in the historical trajectory of humour publishing than any other, either before or afterwards. Of course, the focus on Wanli imprints has ramifications for the applicability of this study's findings. As is widely acknowledged, the late Ming was a time of rapidly shifting ideologies and fashions. On the one hand, this means that it makes a great deal of sense to take a snapshot in time as a case study, as has this dissertation. On the other hand, this reduces the applicability of the resulting findings to subsequent periods of time. Without future in-depth research on the subsequent publications, it is difficult to say which findings are broadly representative of the late Ming as a whole and which were specific to this period. On a more minor level, the singling out of any reign period risks arbitrariness when the dates in question are not directly related to the topic being studied. While the death of an emperor and the resultant power handover certainly did impact upon all levels of society and various aspects of life in many ways, it is rare that the start- and end-dates of a reign period or dynasty represented a rupture so large that starting a study at this point suggests. Therefore, selecting any reign period carries the risk of obscuring continuities. With regard to humour compilations, our case in point, the earliest compilation studied in depth here is *Mr. Hu's Refined Compilations* (prefaced 1593), which means it would be more apt to describe this dissertation as a study of the latter three decades of Wanli. In light of this, it is difficult to make the case that the publications of the subsequent Tianqi reign (1620–1627) differed significantly enough not to be included in this study, despite the fact that they have been excluded here.

The second major limitation pertains to the dissertation's restrictive definition for a humour compilation. It was outlined in the Terminology section (0.3.2.) that for a compilation to be considered a 'humour compilation' in this dissertation, *all* of its entries must possess *some element of humour*, and for a 'humour section' within a wider compilation, *all* the entries in the section must possess *some element of humour*. As briefly indicated already, the restrictive nature of this approach means that it cannot take into account all forms in which humour was published. These humorous texts are part of a wider phenomenon which was both textual and oral in nature. Many of the entries which appeared in these compilations will have appeared in other, less regimented ways across all kinds of publications, like writings, dramatic texts and daily-use encyclopaedias throughout the late Ming, and indeed during the Wanli reign itself. An investigation of the corpus of humour compilations is nevertheless a good place to start, and I hope this study will both encourage and aid future research on the broader manifestations of humour in the Ming. With time, such studies will help to accurately contextualise humour compilations within the literary and cultural scene of the day.

5.3. Future Research Directions

These two major limitations can of course be remedied through future in-depth studies: on 1) the humour publications of different time periods; and 2) the other forms humour took both in the Wanli period and the late Ming overall. These are my biggest

recommendations for future research. Further to this, the findings and theories of this dissertation have given rise to other issues that would benefit from a closer look.

In Chapter 1 (1.1.), I outlined two distinctive varieties of humour entries: the unspecific 'generic voice' and the specific 'anecdotic voice'. Although the chapter did furnish the idea with a few elaborations and clarifications (see 1.1.3.), it was not a central goal of this study to conduct an analysis of the content of humour compilations, and this observation was made merely to substantiate the cohesiveness of this group of texts. Hence, the two varieties remain tentative suggestions. Firstly, there is much scope for future research to verify these observations with a more systematic, quantitative approach. With what frequency and in what proportion did the two varieties appear in publications over time? Further, the Wanli compilations studied in this dissertation have overwhelmingly been of the anecdotic variety, so given the popularity of Feng Menglong's compilations later on in the Ming (see 0.2.4.), which tended to be in the generic voice, do we perhaps see a gradual rise in the generic voice throughout the late Ming? How did fluctuations in the publishing of the two types reflect the changing preferences and concerns of readers and publishers? To what extent were the two varieties aimed chiefly at different audiences?

In addition, the generic and anecdotic categories themselves are broad churches, as suggested by the ease with which Ming entries fit into either variety. Hence, they could no doubt benefit from further fine-tuning. Research into the kind of sub-categories that existed within the two types would furnish them with greater levels of analytical usefulness, while deepening our understanding of the various themes and forms taken by pre-modern Chinese

textual humour. Such a study would require a literary or linguistic approach, rather than the historical one applied in this dissertation.

The 'Dongpo vogue' (see 4.1.) as a phenomenon, as well as the role that the humorous image of Su Shi played in his Ming popularity, is something else that deserves further study. While Chapter 4 has illustrated that humour was a celebrated facet of Su Shi in the way he was imagined in the late Ming, the *Siku* critique of *Record of Inquiry and Response Dialogues* (see 4.4.1.) has also demonstrated that this later ceased to be the case. While bawdy humour was something that could be plausibly attached to the work of Su Shi in the late Ming, in the Qing it was reason to deny any connection. This brings into view the onwards trajectory of the changing connotations attached to the ideas of humour, for which the paratextual materials studied in this dissertation have shown, were diverse, as well as occasionally fraught and controversial. The specific ideas of types of humour and their acceptability, such as the instrumentalised remonstrative humour outlined in Sima Qian's "Biographies of the Comics" (see 2.4.1.) and the benign humour of the Martial Duke of Wey in the *Shijing* (see 2.4.2.) had a long history, but this does not mean they were static concepts or were used in the same way over such a long stretch of time. Existing research like that of Giulia Baccini has covered earlier periods of time, and this dissertation has provided a Wanli summary. But there remains much scope for other studies to fill in the gaps in between and afterwards. These concepts and definitions of humour are not just pertinent to the study of humour itself, but would also help us better understand and measure the role and influence of these hallowed textual sources within intellectual history as a whole.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

Over the years I have spent preparing this dissertation, several people have expressed confusion about the wording of my title, "Good Wood on Crowdpleasers". The innocuous English word "good" refracts into a wide array of senses, and here it is intended not in the sense of "high quality", or of "worthy of approval", but rather "suitable for some purpose".[1] As the reader will remember, the title of the dissertation was taken from the remark of Hu Wenhuan's disapproving second guest: "You're making excuses for [decorative but] empty words, wasting good wood for the sake of crowdpleasers! (*tuowu maiwen, zaimu meishi!* 託物舞文，災木媚世！)". At the heart of this remark—with "wasting good wood" more literally rendered "bringing trees to ruin" (*zaimu* 災木)—lies not a lament that the trees should have to be felled, but rather a resentment that the resulting wood found itself used for the purpose it did, that is, to print a humorous book. Up until the point Hu Wenhuan had them carved into "Refined Collection of Jest Histories", such woodblocks were still good to be carved into *other* books; perhaps even books that in the eyes of the second guest would have made better use of those felled trees. That is why the remark is so pertinent to the topic of this dissertation, and the reason I have translated it as I have: it taps into some overarching concerns and uncertainties of what role the written word should take in this new age of rapidly proliferating books that were becoming available on an unprecedentedly wide scale.

[1] "As a general adjective of commendation, implying that the thing described is ~~of high or satisfactory quality~~, suitable for some purpose, ~~or worthy of approval~~". *OED Online*. "good, adj., n., adv., and int.", sense A.I.1a. The *Dictionary* also states "a very specific context makes the nature of the quality, purpose, or approval in question implicit in the use". The context is absent from my title, which is the root of the aforementioned confusion.

How should we use those trees brought to ruin for the sake of printing woodblocks? Were "crowdpleasers"—"enthralling society" (*meishi* 媚世)—an acceptable use, or should there be a deeper purpose to literature, as had often been stipulated in earlier times? What reading material should be printed, and what information should be circulated, as the power to decide this fell into the hands of a different class of men—large professional publishers just like Hu Wenhuan—whose intentions were perhaps more easily swayed by the wills and fashions of the market than their sense of social responsibility? Humorous content, with its dubious pedigree born of an inconclusive mixture of classical promotions and prohibitions, was a battleground across which these anxieties played out, and therefore perhaps even a proxy for more fundamental concerns about what had become of the world. The matter was an undecided one, as illustrated vividly by the various contrasting opinions expressed in Hu Wenhuan's preface. In any case, one thing is clear: in the late Ming, the concept of humour was far from the tangential and trivial subject one might have assumed before reading this dissertation. Rather, it was entangled with ideas of morality, social roles, and many other central issues that defined the world, society and era into which these men released their publications. Our publishers likely knew this to be the case, and for this reason compiled and argued all the more ardently and artfully in humour's defence.

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