

The Transformation of Xia Tradition: Xia Imagery in the Wei-Jin Period

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The xia (俠) image in the Shi Ji (史記) is half historical and half fictional. Based on his own personal experience, Sima Qian (司馬遷) idealized the xia while consciously striving to preserve an authentic record of his beloved heroes. His literary inclination was further developed in non-official historical works such as Wu Yue Chunqiu (吳越春秋) and Yue Jue Shu (越絕書) in the Late Han. During the Wei-Jin era, the historical factuality of xia was no longer of concern to readers. Instead, literary values became increasingly central and were extensively exploited. In this article, the main carriers of xia literature, such as the novella Yan Dan Zi (燕丹子) and the yuefu xia ballads (俠樂府), are summarized and analyzed to show how the transformation of the tradition took place.

Transformation from history to literature: the *Yan Dan Zi*

Although history was greatly romanticized in both the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu*, the two authors believed, and also wanted their readers to believe, that they were writing history instead of fiction. Firstly, in the *Wu Yue Chunqiu*, a rigorous time frame is provided throughout the whole work, reminding the reader of the historicity of the stories. The only exceptions are Chapter One and Chapter Five, where the legendary origins of Wu and Yue are introduced, as many previous historians had done when dealing with the origin of a ruling family or the birth of a ruler. If we examine the romanticization of history in the two works from a different perspective, we find myths and folk tales historicized, an approach Chinese historians commonly used, though with restraint and prudence, when historical evidence was lacking. Secondly, both works are complete history. The *Wu Yue Chunqiu* is the history of the rise and fall of two neighboring states, while the *Yue Jue Shu* is a regional history centering on the re-establishment of Yue. Thirdly, the authors of the two works were highly concerned about cause and effect in the flow of events, so that the lessons of history might be made manifest. For this reason the two works have been classified as history since the Tang Dynasty. However, they also provided a model demonstrating that history could be successfully romanticized to educate and entertain its readers. In this regard, the first Chinese *xia* novella, the *Yan Dan Zi* (燕丹子), may be cited.

The concept of fiction, *xiaoshuo* (小說) in Chinese, is first exhibited in the work of Zhuangzi (莊子 fl. 4th century B.C.). In his *Wai Wu* (外物), Zhuangzi wrote that "using *xiaoshuo* to seek official preferment from a county governor is far from discussing the great matters of state."¹ In this context, *xiaoshuo* means "petty thoughts." In the Early (Eastern) Han dynasty, *xiaoshuo* came to be seen as a narrative type. Ban Gu described this in the *Han Shu* (漢書) as follows:

The school of *xiaoshuo* was probably created by those junior officials whose office duty was to collect town gossip and street talk.²

Many scholars believe that "town gossip and street talk" referred to folklore of the time. Although the concept of *xiaoshuo* in the passage is still not exactly what we call fiction in later times, the close relation of *xiaoshuo* to folklore is no doubt the most characteristic feature of the earliest Chinese fictional writing. We can observe this in the *Yan Dan Zi*.

Opinion has been widely divided upon when the *Yan Dan Zi* was composed. There are three principal positions. The Ming scholar Hu Yinglin (胡應麟 1551-1602) wrote in his *Shaoshi Shanfang Bicong* (少室山房筆叢):

From my reading of the book, I have found that its colorful writing is impressive, and its style is similar to that of the Eastern Han. It might be written by a certain writer in the later Han, who based the story upon Sima Qian's *Biography of Jing Ke* and added to it a few fantasies.³

The Qing scholar Sun Xingyan (孫星衍 1753-1818) wrote a preface to his edition of the work, claiming that it was "an ancient work of pre-Qin time". He came to his conclusion based on similarities between the *Yan Dan Zi* and other pre-Qin works like the *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳) and *Zhanguo Ce* (戰國策). He found the writing style of these works identical in regard to "skillful narration and well-versed language".⁴ The editors of *Siku Quanshu* (四庫全書) based their conclusion as to the possible time of composition on textual evidence. The *Yan Dan Zi* was never mentioned in later Eastern Han works such as the *Lun Heng* (論衡) and *Fengsu Tong* (風俗通), both of which quoted heavily from earlier writers and even mentioned anecdotes appearing in the *Yan Dan Zi* but without alluding to the work. Thus the composition of the *Yan Dan*

Zi could not predate the later Eastern Han period. And since the *Yan Dan Zi* was first quoted by an early Tang literary commentator, it must have been written before the Tang dynasty.⁵

My own investigation finds that in fact the first passage of *Yan Dan Zi* was quoted in the *Bowu Zhi* (博物誌) of Zhang Hua (張華 232-300).⁶ It is therefore likely that the work was composed sometime between the late Eastern Han and early Western Jin (西晉 265-316), in other words between about 150 and 300 A.D. The more significant matter is that the *Yan Dan Zi* is the first complete work in which historical events were successfully fictionalized to form a full novella. The appearance of *Yan Dan Zi* started a stream of works of historical fiction. In them, the historicity of the story was of less importance than literary imagination. Since the Tang dynasty the *Yan Dan Zi* has been catalogued under the category of fiction. Hu Yinglin credited it as "the originator of fiction and fictional biography in history." (古今小說雜傳之祖)⁷

The *Yan Dan Zi* differs from the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu* in the following two ways. First, the *Yan Dan Zi* shows no interest in conveying any historical lesson. It is the story of a noble *xia* and a *xia* assassin, and of heroism and revenge. The author (or authors) was entirely occupied by the protagonists' determination to extract revenge and their courage in defying their monstrous enemy. Secondly, the *Yan Dan Zi* breaks through the framework of historical biography by focusing upon the main plot and omitting the dull parts of the original story, such as the background and subsequent history of the protagonists, which both the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu* routinely introduce whenever a new character is brought into the story. While the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu* ushered in a long series of works in the historical romance genre — the *lishi yanyi* (歷史演義), which usually preserved many of the original historical events — the *Yan Dan Zi* created a new literary genre of historical fiction, the *lishi chuanqi* (歷史傳奇), whose fictional component far outweighed its historical content.

The *Yan Dan Zi* adopts a linear progression through three major episodes. The first episode: humiliation and plans of revenge. The Crown Prince Dan of Yan was made a hostage in Qin and was humiliated by the King of Qin. He managed to flee to his home state and immediately started planning his revenge. He sought help from his mentor Ju Wu (鞠武), who disagreed with the prince's revenge plan and introduced a

former *xia* named Tian Guang (田光) to the prince to formulate an alternative. After a careful three-month inspection, Tian found that none of the warriors retained by the prince could execute the plan. He then recommended his friend Jing Ke (荆軻) to the prince, claiming Jing as the only person who was capable of the task. The second episode: the relationship between the prince and Jing. The crown prince tried every possible means to win over Jing Ke, who finally promised to take revenge on the King of Qin. The last episode: the revenge plan in action. Jing Ke went to Qin as an envoy pretending to pay tribute on land. When he was received by the king, Jing Ke pulled out a hidden sword and seized hold of the king. He reprimanded the king for his cruelty towards the world and threatened to kill him if he failed to follow what was commanded. The King of Qin, however, managed to get himself free and then attacked Jing Ke and killed him.

As Hu Yinglin indicated, the story of *Yan Dan Zi* came basically from the biography of Jing Ke in the *Biographies of Assassins*. But the author of *Yan Dan Zi* adjusted the original story to present it tragically, in a unified plot. He trimmed some anecdotes in the biography from the original story. For example, he omitted Jing Ke's encounters in his travel around the states. He also omitted the Qin army's military pressure on the Yan borders.

The author also rearranged the story and added to it a number of folk tales to enhance the fantastic effect of the story. Jing Ke, in the original story in the *Shi Ji*, had already been in Yan for a while when the crown prince returned home. In the *Yan Dan Zi*, Tian Guang made a specific trip to Jing Ke's native state Wei (衛) to invite him. This change obviously tries to highlight the fame Jing enjoyed at the time. The Crown Prince is described in the *Shi Ji* as having urged Jing Ke repeatedly to embark upon the mission of assassination. But in the *Yan Dan Zi*, it is Jing Ke who initially asked to carry out the plan. This change may have been intended to prevent a reader of the *Shi Ji* from thinking that the prince was a self-seeking person whose only impulse was to kill his personal enemy. Certainly it also serves to show that Jing Ke was a man of purpose and determination. Jing Ke's failure in assassinating the King of Qin was suggested in his biography in the *Shi Ji* as the result of his less-than-perfect swordsmanship. In the *Yan Dan Zi* his failure was attributed to his credulousness, which allowed him to be fooled by the captured king. These twists were all aimed at highlighting Jing's noble *xia* character and his heroism. Therefore, they were adopted largely for rhetorical and

aesthetic reasons. The nameless author obviously had no intention of merely repeating the historical event. He wanted to provide a group of images to appeal to a broad readership.

The *Yan Dan Zi* can be thus viewed as a bold and successful example of the rise of folkloric literature from the territory of historiography. The creation of *Yan Dan Zi*, folklore in the garb of history, was a mixture of aristocratic history and grassroots literature. There was at least one social reason for the combination. The spread use of paper, which was invented in the Western Han, and the development of writing tools in the Eastern Han may possibly have made education and book-based knowledge reach society to a wider range than in previous ages. Although the literacy rates of the time are unknown, many biographies in the official history of the Eastern Han show that more and more people from lower social levels were entering the formerly aristocratic world of intellectuals. They brought into this world the beliefs and value systems of the lower levels of society. Literary exaggeration and free-wheeling imagination were two characteristics of folkloric thinking of the time. In the *Yan Dan Zi* the folkloric and literary components are both evident. The most important of the folkloric components are as follows.

First is the belief that a good person would enjoy the blessings of heaven. The *Yan Dan Zi* begins its story this way:

When the Crown Prince Dan of Yan was a hostage in Qin, the King of Qin treated him without courtesy. The Prince was not happy about this and wanted to return home. But the King of Qin did not take any notice of him and said mockingly, "If you can bring it to pass that the raven's head becomes white and the horse grows horns, then I will permit it!" At that Dan looked up to Heaven and sighed, and at once the raven's head became white, and the horse grew horns, so that the King, much against his will, had to set him free. However, he had a bridge built which could be treacherously opened, intending Dan to fall through it. But when Dan crossed it, it did not open, and so he arrived at night at the frontier barrier, but the customs gate was not yet open. So Dan imitated the crowing of a cock and at once all the cocks started to crow. The gate was opened, and he could escape and return home.⁸

Sima Qian, as a critical historian, was strong enough to resist the temptation of including these details in his biographies. In describing Prince Dan's escape from Qin in the *Shi Ji*, Sima Qian swept over this in merely one short sentence as "fleeing back home with resentment" (怨而亡歸). In concluding this biography, Sima Qian stated that he had not included certain stories because they strained his credibility - stories that were later to be incorporated into the *Yan Dan Zi*. Sima Qian was always skeptical of the widely accepted notion that Heaven blessed good men, as he so incisively expressed in the *Biography of Boyi* (伯夷列傳). This notion, however, was firmly believed among creators of folklore, as well as their audience. The author of *Yan Dan Zi* put all the folkloric anecdotes together to demonstrate that the prince was protected and helped by Heaven.

The use of artistic exaggeration to portray prominent personalities is another important characteristic of folklore. For instance, the author of *Yan Dan Zi* offers the following anecdotes concerning the workings of *zhiyu* (知遇), or understanding and appreciation, between a lord and his subject, in order to bring out the exaggerated characters of the Crown Prince and Jing Ke.

Some days later the Crown Prince went with Ke into the Eastern Palace, where they enjoyed the view from the banks of a pond. Ke lifted up a tile and hurled it at the frogs. At once the Crown Prince ordered someone to pass him a platter of gold pieces, so that Ke could take them to throw with. When he had thrown them all, he was offered new ones, until he stopped and said, "It is not that I want to be stingy with the gold pieces for the Crown Prince's sake, it is just my arm is hurting." On another occasion they drove out together with a thousand-mile horse. Ke said, "I have heard that the liver of a thousand-mile horse tastes delicious!" At that the Crown Prince had the horse slaughtered and the liver served to Ke. When General Fan offended King of Qin, who pressed hard for his arrest, he fled and sought asylum with the Crown Prince, who had a banquet prepared for him on the terrace of Huayang (華陽台). During the carousal the Crown Prince called forward a beautiful woman who knew how to play the zither. Ke said, "I like the zither player." The Crown Prince wanted to make a present of woman to him but Ke said, "It is only her hands that I love." At once the Crown Prince had her hands chopped off and served to him in a jade dish. The Crown Prince used to eat with Ke at the same table and to sleep on the same couch.⁹

First, in Jing's biography in the *Shi Ji*, Sima Qian described the relation between Jing and the Crown Prince in a following brief account: "Jing Ke was given a senior ministerial post and lodged in an upper lodge. The Crown Prince appeared daily at his house, supplying him with the best food and often other rare objects, and presenting him carriages, horses and beautiful women to his every wish, all in order to satisfy his expectations."¹⁰ This account was refurbished with many folkloric anecdotes in the *Yan Dan Zi* and presented in an inflated language distinct from that used in historical works.

Second, to chop off the zither-player's hands may be upsetting to modern eyes, but it was accepted by both authors and readers in ancient times, when women were regarded as merely men's property, equal to carriages and horses. Even Sima Qian accepted a possibly fictional account, in which the chivalrous Prince Pingyuan (平原君) chopped off the head of his favorite concubine just because she could not help laughing at seeing a crippled man limping along.¹¹ Sima Qian probably viewed it as a noteworthy anecdote to show the *xia* character of the prince. There were few serious complaints and critical comments made on this kind of conduct by Chinese scholars in history. Even as late as the Tang dynasty, the prominent philosopher and writer Han Yu (韓愈 768-824) still praised Zhang Xun (張巡 709-757), a loyal county governor who organized an effective resistance against the forces of the rebellious general An Lushan (安祿山 ?-757), for killing his concubine to feed his soldiers in the besieged city Suiyang (睢陽).¹² To kill one's beloved (殺所愛) and its variant form, to kill one's own or a friend's enemy (借交報仇), for a cause, later became a pair of motifs indispensable to *xia* literature.

The author of *Yan Dan Zi* also used simile and contrast to create the colorful images of the novella. For instance, the Crown Prince was described as saying, "A man is ashamed of continuing to live in this world after suffering humiliation, just like a virtuous woman who is ashamed of suffering violence and having her chastity outraged."¹³ The simile suggests the prince's burning desire for vengeance, which drove him to take immediate action. When his mentor Ju Wu proposed a long-term plan against Qin, the prince rejected it by saying, "This will drag along the road interminably, but my heart cannot wait any longer."¹⁴ It is reminiscent of Wu Zixu's metaphoric answer to a former friend, "My time is late and my road is a distant one, that is why I have to take shortcuts and move against the current."¹⁵ Contrast of images is another artistic means

often used throughout the *Yan Dan Zi*. For instance, the impetuosity of the Crown Prince's young heart is in sharp contrast to the maturity and cool-headedness of Ju Wu. Jing Ke, before appearing in the story, is described as having "courage in spirit" (神勇) and this stood in contrast to Xia Fu (夏扶), "whose courage runs in blood" (血勇), Song Yi (宋意), "whose courage is in his veins" (脈勇) and Wuyang (武陽), "whose courage is in his bones." (骨勇) During the later development of the story, Wuyang became a foil to Jing Ke's heroic character:

While the two traveled to Yangdi (陽翟), Jing Ke bought some meat from a butcher and had a dispute with him over a discrepancy in weight. The butcher insulted Jing Ke. Wuyang was about to attack the butcher but he was stopped by Jing Ke. They continued their journey westward until they entered Qin and reached Xianyang (咸陽). Through the Counselor of the Palace, Meng (蒙), Jing Ke delivered the message: "The Crown Prince of Yan stands in awe of the great King's majesty, he therefore sends you the head of General Fan and the map of Dukang (督亢). He desires to become your vassal on the northern border." The King of Qin was very pleased at this. All the assembled courtiers surrounded his seat; in front of the dais halberds were arrayed in their hundreds. In this way he received the envoys from Yan. Jing Ke carried the General's head, while Wuyang was carrying the map. Bells and drums sounded together; the whole assembly of courtiers cried out, "Long live the King!" Wuyang was so frightened that he could scarcely put one foot in front of the other and his face became deathly pale. The King of Qin was surprised, but Jing Ke looked around at Wuyang and stepped forward to apologize for him, "he is only a simple man from the barbarians on the northern frontier. He has never before seen a Son of Heaven. Pray allow him a little time so that I can bring my mission to you to an end!"¹⁶

In this passage the author inserted a few details that were not in the original story in the *Shi Ji*. The descriptions of Wuyang's boorishness and cowardice further serve to portray Jing Ke as a man of wisdom and "courage in spirit".

I regard the composition of *Yan Dan Zi* as the first known example of the departure of *xia* literature from historiography. It was the first successful union of elite history and folkloric literature. In both *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu*, the movement of history was developed in a frame of cause and effect. Events were central. In the *Yan Dan*

Zi, the emphasis was given to the characterization of its two heroes. The *Yan Dan Zi* opened up new territory for Chinese literature in general and *xia* literature in particular. The images of Crown Prince Dan and Jing Ke created in the *Yan Dan Zi* were regarded as the most important contributions of ancient *xia* literature. Liu Xianxin (劉咸忻 1896-1932), a modern literary scholar, put it this way:

The practice of the *youxia* started by the Mohists and became widespread in the later Zhou, Qin and Han. It has its own works to convey its ideas. The *Yan Dan Zi* and *Shui Hu* (水滸) are such works. The names of Jing Ke, Nie Zheng (聶政), Chao Gai (晁蓋) and Song Jiang (宋江) are so popular among the people. Is that not the contribution of the stories? Prince Dan of Yan for the *xia* was just like Chaofu (巢父) and Xuyou (許由) for Taoists.¹⁷

One might wonder whether it is fair to compare the *Yan Dan Zi* with the *Shui Hu*, the masterpiece of *xia* literature, in terms of artistic and aesthetic quality. No doubt the *Yan Dan Zi* provided later *xia* literature as a whole with a narrative model and images of *xia* heroes. Its themes of revolt and revenge against oppression and injustice were well preserved in later *xia* literature and folkloric literature. Meanwhile, the work incurred the displeasure of rulers. For instance, Emperor Qianlong (乾隆 r. 1735-1796) of the Qing ordered it to be removed from the *Siku Quanshu* for its rebelliousness.¹⁸ However, *xia* literature, starting from the *Yan Dan Zi*, survived the indifference and hostility of the orthodox literati to grow steadily and even outlive nearly all other genres of literature.

The *xia* in Wei-Jin literary anecdotes and novella

It is widely believed that *xia* literature, which was started with the *Yan Dan Zi*, reached maturity in the Tang dynasty (618-907). The period of almost five centuries in which it grew is called the Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties (魏晉南北朝), or simply Wei-Jin. The time was similar to the Chunqiu and Warring States in terms of short-lived regimes, social instability and insecurity of life. However, these were both periods of philosophical and literary dynamism.

The Eastern Han dynasty was toppled by peasant uprisings and then torn by civil wars and invasions of the northwestern non-Chinese military regimes. The old social

structure was broken with an unprecedented mass migration of population from north to south. Politically, it was a time ridden by schemes, conspiracies, usurpation, revolts and massacres. Ideological Confucianism was challenged and discredited by all kinds of philosophical and religious thought, among them Buddhism, Taoist mysticism, skepticism and hedonism. Documentary evidence suggests a resurgence of *xia* activity in society. The classical *xia* spirit, such as *xia* altruism and chivalry, could still be seen in the upper and lower levels of society. However, the trend of *xia* activity seemed to be following the Han model. The *xia* rites and codes were utilized by the powerful local families to expand their influence. The *shaoxia* (少俠), or youthful *xia*, became a prominent urban lifestyle of the young. All these elements were reflected in *xia* literature of the time.

The spread of Buddhism and Taoism doubtlessly opened up very different worlds in the intellectual life of the Eastern Han, and further stimulated the imagination of literary writers. Although the historical way of thinking remained active among writers in general, historicity of a story was no longer the first concern of writers and their readers. While historical elements in literature declined, novelty ascended. Writers of the time seem to become more aware of the difference between a historical narrative and a literary narrative.

The story of Ganjiang (干將) and Moxie (莫邪) may serve as an example in this regard. Ganjiang and Moxie are the names of two famous swords in the works of Zhuangzi, Xunzi and other pre-Qin writers. In the work alleged to the Han scholar Liu Xiang (劉向), *Lieshi Zhuan* (列士傳), or *Biographies of Great People*, Ganjiang (sometimes known as Ganjiang Moxie) became the name of a swordsmith, who made these two swords and later was killed. His son sought revenge for his death. There were other versions of the story, in which Ganjiang and Moxie became the names of a swordsmith and his wife.¹⁹ In the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu*, the story was elegantly romanticized. The *Wu Yue Chunqiu* mentioned that the couple made a pair of swords, the *yang* (陽) sword named after Ganjiang and *yin* (陰) sword after Mo Xie. For an untold reason, Ganjiang hid the *yang* sword and only presented the *yin* sword to the King of Wu.²⁰ The Jin writer Zhang Hua (張華) in his *Lieyi Zhuan* (列異傳), or *Fantastic Stories*, rewrote the story and made it more novelistic. The story was so popular among writers that decades later it was rewritten again by Gan Bao (干寶 fl. 317-322) in his work *Soushen Ji* (搜神記), or *Stories of Seeking Mysteries*. Gan Bao was a renown historian and

writer in the Jin. He reorganized the plot and elaborated on it with conversation detail. The literary merit of the story was further augmented.

Ganjiang Moxie of Chu was ordered to make swords for the King of Chu. Since he spent three years to complete the work, the king was angry and intended to kill him. Two swords were made, one male and the other female. Ganjiang's wife was about to give birth to their child, when the husband told his wife, "My work was to make swords for the king, and I spent three years to complete it. The king is angry and he will surely kill me when I go to meet him. If you happen to give birth of a son, tell him when he grows up, "Watch the Southern Mount at our door: a pine tree will be found on a stone, where a sword can also be found." He then took the female sword to meet the King of Chu. The king was greatly displeased and he sent someone to interrogate Ganjiang. It was found that two swords, one male and one female, had been made, and only the female one was presented. The angry king killed Ganjiang immediately.

Moxie's son was named Chibi (赤比). When he grew up, he asked his mother, "Where is my father?" His mother answered, "your father made swords for the King of Chu. Because he spent three years to complete the work, the angry king killed him. When he left, he told me, 'Tell your son to watch the Southern Mount at the door. A pine tree will be found on a stone, where a sword can also be found.'" The son therefore watched southward at the door. He could not see any mountain, but a pine pillar standing on a stone base. He hacked the pillar apart with an ax and found the sword. He was obsessed with the desire to take revenge on the King of Chu.

The king had a dream in which he saw a child whose eyebrows were one foot apart and who wanted to take vengeance. The king immediately offered one thousand catties of gold for the capture of the child. Moxie's son heard this and fled. He sang a sad song on his flight to a mountain, where he met a traveler. The traveler asked, "You are so young, why are you crying so sadly?" He answered, "I am the son of Ganjiang Moxie. The King of Chu killed my father and I want to take revenge." The traveler said, "I heard that the king offered a thousand catties of gold for your head. Give me your head and sword, and I will avenge you!" The child said, "Good!" He cut off his own head right away and presented it with his

sword to the traveler. His body stood there. The traveler promised, "I would not disappoint you." The body then fell to the ground.

The traveler took his head to meet the King of Chu. The king was greatly pleased. The traveler said, "This is a brave man's head, you should boil it in a big pot." The king followed his words. The head was still not dissolved after being boiled for three days and nights. Instead, it leaped from the boiling water with an angry stare. The traveler said to the king, "The head of the son has not dissolved. I wish you can come to look at it. It will be surely dissolved then." The king went to the pot. The traveler chopped off the king's head, which fell into the boiling water. The traveler then cut off his own head, which also fell into the boiling water. The three heads were all boiled beyond recognition. They were buried in three separate tombs under the one name "The three tombs of the king".²¹

As a story of revenge, it is not much different in structure from that of Wu Zixu's in the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and Prince Dan's in the *Yan Dan Zi*. However, in imagery it is quite different from the latter two, which were more or less written under the influence of historical factuality. Although literary imagination was brought into play in the *Wu Yue Chunqiu*, and especially in the *Yan Dan Zi*, the authors of the two works were still conscious of the norms of historical realism and validity. The fact that Gan Bao named his work *Stories of Seeking Mysteries* shows clearly his purpose. In the above story, Gan Bao resorted to the mythological and folkloric approaches to vitalize his heroes. When Chibi cut off his own head and presented it to the *youxia* and when his body fell to the ground only after revenge on his behalf was promised shows the zeal with which the boy wanted revenge. This theme was reinforced by the detail of the boy's head resisting dissolution in the boiler for three days and even jumping out of the boiler to stare at his enemy, the King of Chu. These descriptions of fantastic detail heightened the aesthetic and theatrical effect of the story.

The traveler is another successful literary portrait by the author. The traveler is a combination of *youxia* and assassin. Sima Qian's *xia* acted mostly out of gratitude or comradeship. They were less concerned about whether justice would be done. To carry out justice for its own sake (主持正義), or on Heaven's behalf (替天行道), is an idea which appears to be first emerging in *xia* literature of the Wei-Jin era. The traveler encountered Chibi in a mountain. He offered justice in the form of vengeance against

the killer of the boy's father and even pledged his own life. He was driven entirely by his sense of justice. Neither gratitude nor brotherhood was involved.

In Dai Zuo's (戴祚) *Zhenyi Ji* (甄異記), or *Stories of Wonders*, a *xia* monk behaved similarly in rescuing Xie Yun (謝允), who was unjustly imprisoned by a negligent county governor. Xie was kidnapped and sold to be a slave in a rebel-controlled area when he was fifteen:

When the rebellion was put down, Xie Yun went to the county authority requesting a restoration of his former status. The governor of Wushang (烏傷) not only refused to hear his case, but also imprisoned and tortured him. Xie Yun was told in a dream, "You would not easily get out of prison. Since you are kindhearted in nature, I will rescue you." When he awoke he saw a young man wearing a yellow robe outside the bars of his jail. The young man often entered the jail to talk to Xie Yun. The warders knew he was not an ordinary man and thus dared not frame a case against Xie. After he was released, Xie went to the Mount Wudang [to thank his rescuer].²²

Like the traveler in the previous story, the yellow-robed young man was a *xia* hero in that he would "draw his sword at the sight of injustice" (路見不平，拔刀相助). The story obviously inspired the author of the Tang story *Chezong Nuzi* (車中女子), or *Girl in a Carriage*. It was not by coincidence that the *xia* who brought Li Yi (李益) to his abandoned lover in another Tang story *Huo Xiaoyu* (霍小玉) also wore a yellow robe. The modern writer Zheng Zhengyin (鄭証因1900-1960) named his famous *xia* novel *Huangshan Ke* (黃衫客), or *Yellow-robed Xia*. The yellow robe almost became a synonym of *xia* in literature.

With the gradual decline of historical content came the emergence of more contemporary themes in Wei-Jin *xia* literature. Many anecdotes were aimed at illustrating the concept of *bao* (報): both as taking revenge and returning a favor. Buddhism and Taoism also added new features to the old tradition of ensuring personal justice, which lay at the core of the *xia* tradition.²³ Most of these anecdotes were set in the contemporary world of the authors. Popular stories of this sort were collected in works such as the *Soushen Ji*, *Soushen Houji* (搜神後記), *Yiyuan* (異苑), *Shuyi Ji* (述異記) and *Youming Lu* (幽明錄).

Another indication of the fading interest in historical subject matter was demonstrated by the penchant for creating images of female *xia* heroes. Since the emergence of *xia* in the Chunqiu period, both the real and the imaginative world of *xia* had been a world of men. Sima Qian did describe the bravery of Nie Rong (聶榮), sister of Nie Zheng, in his *Biographies of Assassins*, but the description was intended to enhance the heroism of her brother. At best, women were merely a decoration in the world of men. More often, a woman was blamed as the cause of a man's failure, disaster and ruin. The breakdown of Confucianism and especially the strong concern for seeking novelty and oddity changed the way of seeing the world on the part of writers of the Wei-Jin age.²⁴ A great number of women emerged as protagonists in Wei-Jin novellas and anecdotes. Female images were also created in the Wei-Jin *xia* literature and became a constant inspiration to the writers of *chuanqi* (傳奇) novellas in the Tang dynasty. *Biqiu Ni* (比丘尼), or *Nun*, in the *Soushen Houji* is an example. The ambitious Jin general, Huan Wen (桓溫 312-373), received a nun as his honored guest. The nun drew the attention of the general for the unusually long time she was spending bathing. When he ventured a look to see what had happened, he was frightened to find the nude nun wielding a sword and cutting her own belly, limbs and head. When she came out of the bath as if nothing had happened, she told the general, "If someone dares to usurp the power of his lord, his body will be treated that way." Because of this warning, the general never attempted to replace his lord even though he had the ability to do so.²⁵ We can readily find the shadow of the nun in the images of female *xia* of the Tang dynasty, such as Nie Yinniang (聶隱娘), who was especially noted for her swordsmanship and who transformed herself into a demon to defeat the assassin sent by a rebelling warlord, and Hongxian (紅線), who, in order to stop an imminent war, walked at lightning speed into a warlord's camp and stole a jewel case from his bedroom as a warning that the warlord's life was at her mercy.

The most impressive heroine created by the Wei-Jin writers is Li Ji (李寄). This is also a product of Gan Bao's *Soushen Ji*. The story took place in Yongling (庸嶺). A huge snake killed many people and caused a general panic across the area. Cattle and sheep could not satisfy the beast, which appeared in a shaman's dream and requested young girls. Nine girls were sacrificed until the local authority could not provide any more in the tenth year. Then Li Ji, the youngest daughter of the Li Dan (李誕) family, came forward and asked her parents to let her go as the tenth girl:

Ji sneaked away from home so nobody could stop her. She requested a good sword and a snake-biting dog. On an August morning, she went to the temple and waited there with her sword and dog. She first mixed several *shi* (石, a Chinese unit of weight) of glutinous rice with sweet wheat and put it in front of the snake cave. The snake began to emerge, with its head as big as a grain bin and its eyes like two-feet high mirrors. It smelled the scent of the rice and ate it first. Then Ji let go her dog to bite the snake. From behind she hacked several wounds on the snake. Burning with pain, the snake emerged fully from the cave and died. Ji entered to look at the cave. The skeletons of the nine girls were found. She took them all out and spoke loudly to them, "You were coward and weak, and thus eaten by the snake. How sad it was!" She then slowly walked home.²⁶

The girls in the village were thus saved by Li Ji from the yearly rite of feeding the evil beast. The author bestowed upon the young girl what was identified as the most distinguished *xia* character: to remove the evil and to save the weak. When the men had all resigned themselves to misfortune, it is more than heroic that a young girl had the will and wit to stop the evil.

In their fictionalization of the *xia*, the writers of Wei-Jin brought another conceptual innovation to the literature, *Wu* (武), or martialness. The martial side of *xia* was magnified. Because of their origins in the Chunqiu warrior class, military nature was born into the *xia* character. However the military side of the *xia* had become diminished as *xia* became more and more a temperament, behavior pattern and lifestyle. Liu An (劉安 179-122 B.C.) in the early Han even declared that "a warlike person is not a *xia*." (喜武非俠)²⁷ Sima Qian simply ignored the martial side of his *youxia* and showed no interest in whether they possessed swordsmanship or not. He placed virtues like altruism and personal loyalty far ahead of swordsmanship even for his assassin *xia*, for whom *wu*, or martial ability, was crucial. This mood was maintained through both the Western and Eastern Han. In the *Wu Yue Chunqiu*, the *wu* side of *xia* was re-explored. With its descriptions of the martial skills of Zhuan Zhu (專諸), Jiao Qiuyi (椒丘沂), Qingji (慶忌), Yuenu (越女), Yuangong (袁公) and Chen Yin (陳音), *wu* and *xia* were given a balanced image. During the Wei-Jin period, admiration of novelty and fantasy drove many writers to stress the martial side of *xia*, as they found that *wu* opened a fascinating realm in *xia* literature, where they could let their imaginations run free to create magnificent scenes and images.

The rise of a new martial tradition in *xia* literature also had its social foundation. The Wei-Jin was a time of chronic war. Most of the literati were drawn into wars and other lesser conflicts in their lifetime. Many even had military experience. Cao Pi (曹丕 187-226) in his *Zi Xu* (自叙), or *Autobiography*, recorded his early experience of learning archery and horsemanship from his father and swordsmanship from a master. The following episode shows how well trained he was:

I heard that [General] Deng Zhan (鄧展) was very vigorous and adept in using all kinds of weapons. He claimed to be able to use his bare hands to fight people with swords. I once took time to discuss swordsmanship with him and I told him, "your way is not correct. I had learned swordsmanship and have acquired a good technique." He requested a match between us. That time we were eating sugar cane after a heavy drink. We used the cane to fight in the front square of the palace. In several rounds I hit his arm three times. The spectators around burst with laughter. Zhan felt embarrassed and requested to do it over again. I said to myself, "I know he will try to launch a quick attack to my chest." I pretended to step forward into him. Zhan approached me head-on as I expected. But I made a sudden turn and hit him on his face. Everybody was stunned. I went back to my seat and said with a smile, "In the past, Yang Qing (陽慶) asked Chunyu Yi (淳于意) to change his old ways and taught him a secret technique. Now I would like to ask General Deng to give up his old ways and to learn the essentials of swordsmanship." Everybody present was amused.²⁸

The experience of Cao Pi, a prince (later a monarch) and also an important writer of the time, shows that the martial tradition, which was suppressed through the whole Eastern Han dynasty, was revitalized among the nobility, as well as in society as a whole.

This renewed martial tradition was reflected in descriptions of swords and swordsmanship. As shown in many *xia* stories, the sword was a favorite weapon of *xia* heroes. It was the subject of poetry and was worshipped in pre-Qin times. Descriptions of mythical swords and tales of sword culture re-emerged in the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and *Yue Jue Shu*. During the Wei-Jin period, swords appeared in each literary genre with an unprecedented frequency.

It should be noted that this was more than the restoration of a broken tradition. First, the writers of Wei-Jin were not as a whole interested in using the sword as an image to convey a philosophical or political message, as Zhuangzi had done in his treatise, *Shuo Jian* (說劍). In the Wei-Jin, the sword was personified and human intelligence was bestowed upon it. It upheld justice in its own way. Second, the sword and sword culture were greatly mysticized and mythologized in the hands of Wei-Jin writers. Mainstream Confucian thought had always been realistic and rational, and it took a strong stance against mythology and irrationalism. It was inclined to rationalize any fictional elements it encountered. The spread of Taoism, and especially Buddhism provided writers of the Wei-Jin with an entirely different way of thinking. The influence of these religions upon the mysticization of swords can be easily found. The later Qing scholar Shen Zengzhi (沈曾植 1851-1922) in his *Hairilou Zhacong* (海日樓札叢) described the Buddhist swordsmanship of the Wei-Jin and Tang in terms such as *chengjiu jianfa* (成就劍法) and *chengjian chengjiufa* (聖劍成就法). Through mastering either of the above, a swordsman would gain supernatural power from his sword, which would enable him, for example, to illuminate the darkness, kill a monster or break through an enemy battle formation.²⁹

The tale of swordsmith Ganjiang Moxie was rewritten again and again by Wei-Jin writers. They created a new image of the sword in these stories. The Jin writer Xiao Guangji (蕭宏濟) in his *Xiaozi Zhuan* (孝子傳), or *Biographies of Filial Sons*, was the author of one of these:

The wife of the King of Chu once embraced an iron pillar to cool herself off in summer. She felt inspired and thus became pregnant. She later gave birth to a piece of iron. The King of Chu ordered Moxie to make it into two swords. It took Moxie three years to complete the work. One female and one male sword were finally produced. Moxie kept the male for himself and presented the female to the King of Chu. The female sword often mournfully lamented its fate in the scabbard. The king asked his subjects the reason and was told, "There were originally two swords, female and male. The female sword laments, because it is missing the male sword." The king was furious. He had Moxie arrested and killed immediately.³⁰

The story of male and female swords was twisted and developed further in the *Shiyi Ji*

(拾遺記). The work was allegedly written by Wang Jia (王嘉 fl. 4th century), a Taoist monk in the late Jin period. The sword and sword culture were Wang's favorite themes. He claimed that Emperor Zhuanxu (帝顓頊) of high antiquity had a sword called *yeying* (曳影), which would fly to a place and put down an armed rebellion whenever one occurred. In time of peace, "A roar of a dragon or a tiger was often heard from the scabbard."³¹ As a Taoist monk, Wang himself might have been engaged in alchemical practices such as smelting metals or making pills of immortality, because he was said to possess the detailed knowledge of the subject. In Wang's stories, some very memorable scenes of sword making are to be found. The most fantastic story is his *Kunwu Shan* (崑吾山), where he eloquently described the Taoist sacred mountain and the swords it produced:

Under the Kunwu Mountain there was plenty of flame-red gold. In ancient times, the Yellow Emperor once deployed his troops there against the forces of Chiyou (蚩尤). People used to dig a hundred *zhang* (丈) deep into the ground but could not reach its source. They only saw sparks flying off like stars. The earth contained cinnabar, which could be smelted to sharp green bronze. The color of the mountain spring was red. The grass and plants on the mountain were all vigorous and even the earth was solid and compact. At the time of King Goujian of Yue, workers were sent to offer a sacrifice of a white horse and white cow to the god of the Mountain Kunwu. They excavated the metals and cast them into eight swords. In the mountain lived a kind of animal as big as a hare. [The male ones] were golden-colored. They ate minerals and lived in a deep cave. They also ate copper and iron and thus had iron-like internal organs. The female ones were silver-colored. On one occasion the weapons in an armory of the state of Wu all disappeared, even though the doors of the armory remained locked. The king ordered his officials to investigate the holes in the armory. A pair of hares, one white and one yellow, were captured and killed. When their chests were cut open, they were found to have iron organs. The hares had eaten the weapons. The king called in his swordsmiths and ordered them to cast the organs into swords. Two swords were made, the male one was named "*Ganjiang*" (干將) and the female "*Moye*" (鑄鐸). They could be used to cut jade and horn. The king treasured them very much. Because of these swords, he became an overlord over the other states. The swords were later kept in a stone casket and buried. At the time of Jin's resurgence, a violet ray rose up to the sky from their buried place. Zhang

Hua (張華) appointed Lei Huan (雷煥) the governor of Fengcheng County (豐城縣), where Lei found the two swords. Zhang and Lei each took one of them. After being cleaned by the clay of Huayin (華陰), the swords became dazzlingly brilliant. Zhang was later killed and nobody knew the whereabouts of his sword. One day the son of Lei carried his father's sword and walked over the Yanping Ford (延平津), when his sword roared and flew into the river. The son jumped into the water to search for it, but only found two dragons coiled together under the pool staring at him. He dared not continue the search.³²

The story possessed such a strong charm, especially the part where the swords were found and then lost forever, that later *xia* novellas, novels and poetry repeatedly alluded to it. From the middle of the Eastern Han, the sword was no longer a combat weapon in military service. It had been replaced by other more practical weapons like the *dadao* (大刀), or broadsword, a kind of chopper with only one edge, commonly used to cut down enemies in battle. However, the sword as a cultural symbol of the martial tradition has never met with any serious challenge. This legacy was greatly enriched in the Wei-Jin literature. The aesthetic value of the sword, as well as the mysterious culture around it, directly inspired the creation of *jianxia* (劍俠), or the swordsman *xia*, in the Tang *xia* novellas.

For Sima Qian, one could be a *xia* with or, more often, without a sword. The Wei-Jin writers turned a new page, where the *xia* were always accompanied by their swords in upholding social justice. The new *xia* existed mostly in literature. They were called *wuxia* (武俠), or the martial *xia*, and their commitment to social justice, a centerpiece of the literature, was called *yiwu xingxia* (以武行俠), or the use of force in the practice of *xia*.

The *xia* in Wei-Jin *Yuefu* ballads

Sima Qian's idealization of the *xia* was carried on in *xia* literature. In the real world, the *xia* continued to follow its Han *haoxia* model, with new variations in the turbulent Wei-Jin era. The Wei-Jin *xia* developed basically in two directions: those of the commoner *xia* and the noble *xia*. The commoner *xia*, including the lower-society *xia* and other non-noble *haoxia*, formed their own groups, well-organized or otherwise, across the north and south to defend themselves or to dominate their neighborhoods.

Like Lu Su (魯肅 172-217) of Wu (三国·吳) and Zu Di (祖逖 266-321) of Jin (晉), they organized "*qingxia shaonian*" (輕俠少年), or youthful *xia*, and "*baojie yongshi*" (暴傑勇士), or "formidable and valiant men", into quasi-troops to protect their clans or local communities as they migrated from their war-ridden native places in the north to the relatively peaceful south.³³ Many *haoxia* organized similar groups and communities, which were called "*buqu*" (部曲) or "*wubao*" (塢堡), primarily based on ties of clanship. Quite a few of them used these kinds of organized forces to control their neighborhoods, like Zheng Bao (鄭寶) and Zhang Duo (張多) in the south and the Gao (高) brothers in the north.³⁴

As for the noble *xia*, many young members of aristocratic families were themselves engaged in *xia* activities, often for comradeship and pleasure-seeking. When Cao Cao (曹操 155-220) was young, he "behaved recklessly like a *xia*, not attending his proper duties."³⁵ He and his friend Yuan Shao (袁紹 ?-202), another young noble, were both "fond of being *youxia*" (好為遊俠). They were described as sneaking into a wedding house and kidnapping the bride.³⁶ During the Wei-Jin period, behaving like a *xia* seems to become the life style of young men from noble families and other upper-class families. It became almost a conventional pattern that a man lived a reckless and restless *xia* life when young and then became a prominent official or general or social celebrity in middle age. Xu Shu (徐庶 fl. 2nd century) was "fond of the ways of the *xia* and the sword as a young man".³⁷ Xue Xiuyi (薛修義 fl. 6th century) was "an evil *xia* when he was young." (少而奸俠)³⁸ Dai Yuan (戴淵 fl. 3rd century) was born to a family that produced officials for generations, but he wanted to live a different life:

When Dai Yuan was young, he behaved like a *youxia* and never cared about the norms of conduct. He often robbed merchants and travelers between the Jiang and Huai rivers. Once Lu Ji (陸機 261-303) returned to Luoyang for his vacation with considerable baggage. Dai sent his young followers to plunder Lu's boat. Dai sat himself in a big chair on the bank, directing the operation methodically. Dai had a graceful carriage. Even when he was committing a crime like this, he was still different from other robbers.³⁹

Like all the above mentioned people, Dai later changed his life and became an army general. This sort of account is seen in many historical biographies of the time. Historians, however, were in general still following the stance taken by Ban Gu and Xun

Yu, two orthodox official historians, in criticizing *xia* for their evil nature. Nevertheless, they were also influenced by Sima Qian's promotion of his version of *youxia*. That is why they paid so much attention to the people who had a *xia* past and later became prominent in the public arena. This might also be viewed as an unconscious effort by historians and scholars to remold the *xia* into something more socially acceptable.

The *xia yuefu* (樂府) ballads of Wei-Jin are the full embodiment of this trend. Compared to their sister genre of the novella, which is more concerned with the heroism and altruism of the *xia*, the ballads cover a broader range of *xia* life, especially that of the youthful *xia*. There is another obvious difference between the two genres. While the *xia* novellas are filled with the supernatural so popular at the time, the ballads are full of youthful vivacity and rely more upon realistic events.

The Wei-Jin novella and Wei-Jin ballad had different traditions. The Wei-Jin novella largely grew out of the influence of pre-Han mythology, such as the *Shan Hai Jing* (山海經), and the Han miscellaneous histories (雜史), those listed under Ban Gu's *xiaoshuo* (小說) category. Fascination with the supernatural and extraordinary phenomena is its unmistakable imprint. The genre-conscious Wei-Jin writers, many of whom were also historians, such as Guo Pu (郭璞 276-324) and Gan Bao (干寶 fl. 317-322), often drew on source materials unfit for inclusion in the more serious and critical histories, but which were still useful as a supplement to those histories in their novellas, where they could give play to their imagination with less restraint.

In contrast to the novella, the *Yuefu* had a more official lineage. *Yuefu*, literally the Music Bureau, originally was a governmental institute created in the early Han with two main functions. One was to collect folklore from across the country and eulogistic verse written by men of letters. These works were then set to music to play in court presumably as a means of making the feelings of common people known to the higher authorities. The other function of the institute was to provide imperial religious ceremonies with verse and music. The Music Bureau's function of collecting folklore was exaggerated and idealized by Confucian scholars as a means by which the monarch observed the people's sentiments and the conditions across the land. However, the collections made by the Bureau helped bridge the gap between the folk song and the poetry of the literati, providing a source of inspiration for men of letters for centuries after, and both the folk song and its imitations were termed *yuefu*. The

strong expression of aspirations, high principles and heroic vision is to be found in Han narrative verse, and it is this mood that imitators of later times found attractive and put to such good use in their own literary efforts.

The political and social function of the Han *yuefu* made the editors and writers of the genre take more realistic and reflective approaches toward their subject. This is the main reason Han *yuefu* as a whole were created with a strong realistic bent. This spirit was inherited in the Wei-Jin *yuefu* ballads.

Yuefu ballads flourished during Wei-Jin times. Among the *yuefu ballads*, the *youxia yuefu* is one of its most creative and lively parts. The idealization of *xia* started by Sima Qian was finally completed in the *youxia yuefu*. Sima Qian praised some virtues of the *youxia*, but he also recognized the lawlessness of *youxia* conduct. Because of this, the *youxia* had always drawn sharp criticism from orthodox historians. The *youxia yuefu* portrayed the *youxia* as a force to help maintain imperial law and order. In other words, the *youxia* were remolded in the *youxia yuefu* from the outlaw of tradition to the crusader for law. The *youxia*, as a subject of admiration and the embodiment of justice and righteousness, began in the literature of the Wei-Jin period, specifically with the *youxia yuefu*.

Zheng Qiao (鄭樵 1104-1162), an authoritative Song scholar and cataloguer, in the *Yuelue* (樂略), or *Treatise on Music*, of his *Tong Zhi* (通誌), or *General History*, listed twenty-one *yuefu* titles under the subject *Youxia*. Those initially created in the Wei-Jin represent almost half of them. They are the following: *Youxia Pian* (遊俠篇), *Xiake Pian* (俠客篇), *Boling Wanggong Xiaqu* (博陵王宮俠曲), *Linjiang Wang Jieshi Ge* (臨江王節士歌), *Shaonian Zi* (少年子), *Chang'an Shaonian Xing* (長安少年行), *Qingbo Pian* (輕薄篇), *Jieke Shaonianchang Xing* (結客少年場行) and *Zhuangshi Pian* (壯士篇). Later other scholars added *Baima Pian* (白馬篇) and *Liu Sheng* (劉生) to the list. Today there are eleven titles and thirty ballads extant. This may not be impressive in terms of quantity, because the other *yuefu* subjects, such as love songs, are much greater in number. But the *youxia* ballads are valuable in conveying a complete image of the Wei-Jin *xia*, especially the youthful *xia*, from which the image of the *xia* dominant today, the *yixia* (義俠 righteous *xia*), was derived. Furthermore, the Wei-Jin *youxia yuefu* is the most important contributor to the formation and efflorescence of the *biansai* (邊塞), or frontier poetry in the Tang dynasty.

The general theme of the Wei-Jin *youxia yuefu* is the glorious life of youthful *xia* turned war heroes. This theme is developed in a three-fold progression, from youthful *xia* through service on the frontiers, to return home as a recognized hero:

The Wei-Jin historians were generally unsympathetic towards the *xia* past of a person, no matter how prominent he became in later life. But the Wei-Jin *youxia yuefu* poets usually dwelt upon the early life of the *shaoxia*, with admiration. Unlike the writers of Han *yuefu* ballads, most of whom were either anonymous or little known, most of the Wei-Jin *youxia yuefu* writers came from noble families. They had either lived such a *shaoxia* life themselves or else were familiar with it. This provided the basis of their creative portrayal of the *xia* model. In the *youxia yuefu* ballads, the possessions of the *shaoxia*, such as his horse and weapon, are depicted in detail. This is shown explicitly in *Jieke Shaonianchang Xing* (結客少年場行), or *Making Friends Among the Young Bloods*, written by Bao Zhao's (鮑照 414-466) and Liu Xiaowei's (劉孝威 496-549):

A fine piebald horse with a golden halter,	驄馬金絡頭
A curved knife worn on a brocade belt. ⁴⁰	錦帶佩吳鉤

and

Coming from the Liujun area,	少年本六郡
The young man wandered through the big cities.	遨遊遍五都
A bronze short sword at his waist,	腰插銅匕首
A silk umbrella over his head to shut out sunlight.	障日錦塗蘇
His silver arrows all were hawk-feathered,	鷲羽裝銀鏑
And his ivory bow was decorated with rhinoceros skin. ⁴¹	犀膠飾象弧

The proud *shaoxia* even had his jade bridle installed by the Lord of Chen (陳王) and his golden whip made by the Empress of Jin (晉后)⁴² The artistic exaggeration of detail serves well to portray the image of a bold and uninhibited *shaoxia*. It was widely adopted by Tang poets to express the high *xia* spirit.

Besides their appearance, the *shaoxia*'s joyful and pleasure-seeking life style is another subject often described in *youxia yuefu* like *Shaonian Zi* (少年子), *Qingbo Pian* (輕薄篇), *Chang'an Shaonian Xing* (長安少年行) and *Youxia Pian* (遊俠篇). The last poem written by Wang Bao (王褒 ?-572 or 577) is representative:

Famous songs come from the two capitals,	京洛出名謳
Powerful <i>xia</i> compete in making friends.	豪俠競交遊
They visit the four princes south of the River,	河南期四姓
And call on the five marquises west of the Gate.	關西謁五侯
They watch cockfighting by the highway,	鬪鷄橫大道
Or ride on the road lined with tall catalpa trees.	走馬出長楸
As the mulberry-trees' shadows shift at sunset,	桑陰徙將夕
They linger about under the locust-trees. ⁴³	槐路轉淹留

Their high life would never be curbed by the sunset. "Locust-trees" is a veiled allusion to a brothel or a recreational place, where many *shaoxia* consumed their remaining energy. Emperor Yuan of Liang (梁元帝 508-555) describes this aspect of the *shaoxia* life in his poem about Liu Sheng (劉生):

Young Liu indulged in <i>xia</i> activities,	任俠有劉生
His words are valued in both capitals.	然諾重兩京
People in Fufeng would feel honored when he visits,	扶風好驚座
And in Chang'an his name is often counted upon.	長安恒借名
During the night he drinks pomegranate wine,	榴花聊夜飲
Next morning he needs bamboo tea to sober himself up.	竹葉解朝醒
He makes friends with people like Commander Li,	結交李都尉
Roaming around the city of beauties. ⁴⁴	遨遊佳麗城

Cock-fighting, horse-racing, wine and women constituted the life of these *shaoxia*. But if their lives consisted solely of these activities, they would not be much different from the other profligates from hereditary noble families. After acknowledging their taste for the extravagant life style, the *youxia yuefu* writers would then display the show of their heroic side of the *shaoxia*, as in Zhang Hua's *Boling Wanggong Xiaqu* (博陵王宮俠曲):

The brave lads indulge in heady chivalry,	雄兒任氣俠
Their fame overwhelms unruly youths.	聲蓋少年場
They wreak vengeance on behalf of friends,	借交行報怨
And kill people by the market place	殺人都市旁
Curved knives clang in their hands,	吳刀鳴手中
Or swords with edges sharp as autumn frost.	利劍巖秋霜

From their waists jut white halberds,	腰間叉素戟
In their hands, white-headed spears.	手持白頭鑲
These they wield as fast as lightning flashes,	騰超如激電
Or whirl around as fleeting beams of light.	回旋如流光
A hand-to-hand fight decides the issue,	奮擊当手決
One across another, corpses lie.	交尸自縱橫
Living beyond the dominion of law,	身在法令外
With nothing to restrict his free will. ⁴⁵	縱逸常不禁

These *shaoxia* are very short-tempered, with just a "displeasure incurred over a cup of wine", leading to "a feud fought with glittering blades."⁴⁶ In outward appearance, this poeticized scene almost matches that in Sima Qian's *Biography of Guo Xie* when Guo's young bandit life is introduced. However, the point of view of the Wei-Jin *yuefu* poets is a different one, as they treated lawless behavior as an integral part of a hero's growth.

While Sima Qian strove to reveal the moral side of the lawlessness of his *youxia* and assassins, the Wei-Jin *yuefu* poets felt no need to justify a hero's reckless youth. The basic difference is that Sima Qian was writing of historical personages in accordance with the norms of contemporary history writing. Even though he admired some of the less moral characteristics of his heroes, as a historian he had to indicate the lawless side of their conduct. The Wei-Jin *yuefu* writers, in contrast, used literature to create an image of society, by which they intended to show that the youthful *xia* life was not blameful but a necessary part their heroes' expenses. Besides this, another important difference is that Sima Qian's *youxia* mostly came from the lower levels of society, which gave him reason to offer them sympathy. The Wei-Jin *yuefu* writers, however, reflected in their ballads the lives of young scions of the great houses, who later became social heroes.

The *yuefu* poets were highly conscious of transforming their *shaoxia* from men of "personal prowess" (私勇) to men of "public heroism" (公勇). This is the second of the three stages. Cao Zhi's (曹植 192-232) *Baima Pian* (白馬篇) is a representative *yuefu* in this regard. Cao actually started the tradition:

A white steed decked with a golden bridle,	白馬飾金羈
Galloped past towards the north-west	聯翩西北馳

"May I inquire who the rider is?"	借問誰家子
"A <i>youxia</i> from You (幽) and Bin (幽) in the north."	幽幽遊俠兒
He left his native district in his youth,	小小去鄉邑
And spread his fame across the distant desert.	揚聲沙漠陲
He always carries a fine sturdy bow,	宿昔乘良弓
With jagged arrows made of bramble wood.	枯矢何參差
Pulling the string, he hits the target on the left;	控弦破左的
Shooting from the right, he hits another target " <i>yuezhi</i> ".	右發摧月支
Looking up, he shoots a leaping ape;	仰手接飛猱
Bending down, he hits the target " <i>mati</i> " once more.	俯身散馬蹄
He is more agile than a monkey,	狡捷過猿猴
And as fierce as a leopard or dragon.	勇剽若豹螭
When alarms came from the frontier,	邊城多緊急
That barbarian troops had made repeated raids,	胡虜數遷移
And when a call to arms came from the north,	羽檄從北來
He mounted his steed and reached the frontier fort.	厲馬登高堤
He rode on right into the land of the Huns,	右驅蹈匈奴
Holding the Tartar tribes in high disdain.	左顧凌鮮卑
He threw himself before the pointed swords,	寄身鋒刃端
Without giving a thought to his own life.	性命安可懷
He did not even worry about his parents,	父母且不顧
Let alone his children and his wife.	何言子與妻
His name entered the register of heroes,	名編壯士籍
His heart had no room for personal feelings.	不得中顧私
He risked his life at a time of national disaster,	捐軀赴國難
And regarded death merely as returning home. ⁴⁷	視死忽如歸

This is the first instance of the *xia*-turned-hero image created in the Wei-Jin *yuefu* ballads. While the hero's *youxia* past is touched on very briefly, the focus of the poem is upon his martial skills and patriotic passion. But his *youxia* past is essential to the poem. The poet obviously intended to tell his reader that the *youxia* past was accountable for the martial skill and heroism of the protagonist. This poem by Cao Zhi is the first indication since Sima Qian's time of the *youxia* being a force for good. It does more in this regard than all Sima Qian's justifications for "offending against the law" and effectively challenges the accusations of Han Fei that all *xia* were outlaws. In

the above poem, the vigor and bravery of the *shaoxia* were set in the noble enterprise of frontier warfare.

Cao Zhi, a prince himself, led a mischievous and reckless young life. As he grew older, he dreamed of realizing his military and political aspirations. In his well-known *Zishi Biao* (自試表), or *Memorial to the Throne on Self-examination*, he described himself as being also talented militarily. In this regard, it is fair to say that Cao Zhi is not really talking about *youxia* as such but is using a highly selective image of the *xia* to reflect his own ambitions. He created an image for himself, but in so doing he thus created a new image of the *youxia*. This new image of a *youxia* who risked his life rushing to the frontier in time of "national crisis" (国難) inspired many other writers and poets to explore the theme. Yuan Shu (袁淑), a Song (南朝·宋 420-479) poet, in his *Baima Pian*, a poem modeled after Cao's original work, developed a more sophisticated *youxia* character. The traveling *youxia* made many noble friends in the capital because he was a man of integrity and credibility. Once he gave his word, he would never betray it. Finally he went to the north-west border to defend his country, because "his mind is always occupied by the concern of the country."⁴⁸ He was thus praised by the poet as a "heroic *xia*" (俠烈).

The third and final stage of this process is the realization by the *xia* of the rewards due to him for his heroism. There are two descriptive models to be found of heroes returning after they won honor on the frontiers. The first is of the contemplative maturity acquired by the hero after enduring his baptism of border warfare. Bao Zhao's *Jieke Shaonianchang Xing* is representative of this model:

Having left his home for thirty years,	去鄉三十載
He now once more returns to the old hills.	復得還旧丘
He ascends a peak overlooking the fortresses,	昇高臨四閩
And gazes at the imperial city, in and out.	表裏望皇州
The nine roads lie as smooth as water,	九衢平若水
The double palace gates rise like clouds.	双闕似雲浮
The palace is full of generals and ministers,	扶宮羅將相
Lining the road stand princes and lords.	夾道列王侯
At noon the market-place is crowded and busy,	日中市朝滿
Carriages and horses pass like a running stream.	車馬若川流

As bells strike, men dine from rows of vessels,	擊鐘陳鼎食
Driving out, they seek the company of friends.	方駕自相求
"What is this that I alone am doing,	今我獨何為
Frustrated and beset with a hundred cares!" ⁴⁹	感稟懷百憂

The hero had returned from the frontier, where he initially went to avoid arrest as a result of a blood-feud killing. But the former *shaoxia* could not find mental peace again when facing a tranquil scene, or even by seeking pleasure in the capital as he first appeared to be doing in the poem. The poet's desire was to have his hero become more contemplative and reflective as he aged. This was an obvious effort to tame and rationalize the unruly *shaoxia*. This model has a variant: a returning war veteran devotes more to public interest than to his personal reward, as shown in Kong Zhigui's (孔稚圭 447-501) *Baima Pian*:

After I engraved my name on the stone to the Yanran Mount,	勒石燕然道
I returned in triumph to the pavilion in Chang'an.	凱歸長安亭
My bravery is known to the authorities,	梟官知我健
And no one in the country is not overwhelmed with admiration.	四海誰不傾
Only when the powerful Hun is destroyed,	但使強胡滅
Will I need a mansion built for me. ⁵⁰	何須甲第成

The last couplet is a reminiscence of the words of Huo Qubing (霍去病), one of the greatest generals of the Han dynasty: "Since the Hun has not yet perished, I will not need a home."⁵¹ The *shaoxia* is thus elevated to the status of the national hero.

The second model is that of the glory and grandeur of triumph. This model seems to be more common in the *youxia yuefu*. The hero's suffering in service on the borders was greatly honored and rewarded, as shown in Kong Zhigui's *Baima Pian*:

He was always resolved to dedicate himself to his country,	本持身許國
And he came into prominence with his military accomplishment.	況復武功彰
Even after a thousand years,	會令千載後
His name would be still in the book of honor. ⁵²	流譽滿旌常

In Liu Xiaowei's *Jieke Shaonianchang Xing*, the accomplished *shaoxia* could still keep his

old life style and enjoy the favor he received:

He kicked a ball after showing bravery in the battlefield,	勇餘聊蹙鞠
And he played pitch and toss when the war was over.	戰罷戲投壺
He was formerly a general in the north,	昔為北方將
Now he becomes a lord in the south.	今為南面孤
The head of state carried his bow,	邦君行負弩
And the county governor cleared the way for him. ⁵³	縣令且前驅

This sort of artistic exaggeration is often used in Chinese folklore. The *youxia yuefu* poets in general were motivated to create an atmosphere where the *youxia* spirit was promoted. As we know, most of the *youxia yuefu* poets lived under the southern dynasties. These dynasties held only the southern half of Chinese territory and were always under direct military threat from the non-Chinese occupiers of the north. The *shaoxia* heroes could by no means in the *yuefu* ballads run wild around Luoyang and Chang'an, because these two areas had been wholly occupied by the northwestern conquerors since the collapse of the Western Jin. The flourishing border and *youxia* themes in the Wei-Jin *yuefu*, which were full of the scenes of glorious military success and optimistic heroism, may well have functioned for the writers as channels to dissolve the reality of their frustrations and defeatism. Thus the gay life of the *shaoxia* and their military adventures were fully exploited and described in the *youxia yuefu*. These literary fantasies brought about an essential change in the conception of the *xia* as a whole. In the hands of the above *yuefu* poets and other Wei-Jin poets, the *youxia* were finally transformed from antisocial deviants into guards of public security, from outlaws to social heroes. However, the transformed *youxia* were usually not reduced to being a mere appendage of the authorities. The Wei-Jin *yuefu* writers could admirably keep a well-balanced tension in the character of their *youxia* heroes, with the youthful vitality pushing outward against the attainment of mental maturity. This may be one of the main reasons why images of the *youxia* have been so well received by Chinese readers in general, and young readers in particular, on the course of Chinese history.

The final transformation of the early *xia* tradition was basically completed in the Wei-Jin *youxia yuefu*. In other words, the imagery of the *xia* in the Wei-Jin *yuefu* became prototypical for later Chinese *xia* literature. This imagery has been enriched and diversified ever since.

Notes

- ¹ *Zhuangzi yigu* (莊子詁詁) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1991), <外物>, p.559.
- ² *Qian Han shu* (前漢書), v.30, <芸文誌>, p.167.
- ³ *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* (少室山房筆叢) (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), v.32, <四部正偽>, p.415.
- ⁴ *Yan Dan Zi* (燕丹子) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), <孫星衍序>, p.5.
- ⁵ *Siku quanshu zongmu* (四庫全書總目), v.2, <小說家類存目>, p.1215.
- ⁶ *Bowu zhi* (博物誌) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1980), v.8, <史補>, p.81.
- ⁷ *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* (少室山房筆叢), v.32, <四部正偽>, p.415.
- ⁸ *Yan Dan zi* (燕丹子), p.1. Translation is from *The Golden Casket: Chinese Novellas of two Millennia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), with my emendations. Sima Qian made use of similar folkloric anecdotes as those in the above passage obviously with caution. Not long after Jing Ke, Prince Dan and others were killed for their involvement in assassination attempts on the King of Qin, the Qin armies completed their ruthless wars of unification. The whole country was under the tyrannical rule of the Qin regime. Jing and the prince were regarded among the people of the conquered states as martyred heroes. A cult honoring them developed during the Qin dynasty especially in the lower levels of society, where plots of toppling the regime did not cease. The stories of Jing and Prince Dan legends like this one were widespread, and still circulating at the time when Sima Qian started collecting source materials for his history.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, p.4. Translation from the *Golden Casket* with my emendations.
- ¹⁰ *Shiji jinzhu* (史記今注), v.5, <刺客列傳>, p.2550. Translation from *The Grand Scribe's Records*, xvii, *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, p.329.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, <平原君列傳>, p.2387.
- ¹² *Han Changli ji* (韓昌黎集) (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chubanshe, 1977), v.2, <張中丞傳後序>, p.86.
- ¹³ *Yan Dan zi* (燕丹子), p.1. Translation from *The Golden Casket*, p.31.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.2.
- ¹⁵ *Shiji jinZhu* (史記今注), v.4, <伍子胥列傳>, p.2218. Translation from the *Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, p.54.
- ¹⁶ *Yan Dan zi* (燕丹子), p.5. Translation is from *The Golden Casket*.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, quoted in <楊家駱序>, p.3. Chaofu and Xuyou are considered the ancient Taoist sages.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.2. Also see *Siku zongmu tiyao* (四庫總目提要), v.143, <小說家類存目>, p.1215.
- ¹⁹ *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo jishi* (唐前誌怪小說輯釋) (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1987), <魏晉編>, pp.141-3.
- ²⁰ *Wu Yue chunqiu yizhu* (吳越春秋詁注), <闔閭內傳>, p.74.

- ²¹ *Quanben soushen ji pingyi* (全本搜神記評訳) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1994), v.11, p.206.
- ²² *Lieyi zhuan deng wuzhong* (列異傳等五種) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1988), p.85.
- ²³ *Bao*, or retribution, has been a basic notion in Chinese moral philosophy. Before Buddhism and Taoism injected their influence into its content, *bao* had been more temporal. Its basis was retributive justice. Under the influence of Buddhism, the notion of *bao* began to carry religious flavor, for instance, it became a notion of predestination. The new component enhanced the imperative nature of retribution. See Dun Weng (遁翁) *Yinguo de dinglu* (因果的定律) in *Fojiao genben wenti yanjiu* (佛教根本問題研究) (Taipei: Dasheng wenhua chubanshe, 1978), p.201.
- ²⁴ In this regard, the *zhiguai* (誌怪) was not merely a literary genre actively flourishing in the Wei-Jin era; it was also to some extent a way of thinking among intellectuals of the time.
- ²⁵ *Soushen houji* (搜神後記) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), v.2, p.11.
- ²⁶ *Quanben soushen ji pingyi* (全本搜神記評訳), v.19, p.366.
- ²⁷ *Huainan zi* (淮南子), <說山>, p.277.
- ²⁸ *Dianlun* (典論), <自叙>, p.3.
- ²⁹ *Hairilou zhacong* (海日樓札叢) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), pp. 219-20.
- ³⁰ *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo jishi* (唐前誌怪小說輯訳), <魏晉編>, p.142.
- ³¹ *Shiyi ji* (拾遺記) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), v.1, p.16.
- ³² *ibid.*, v.10, pp.232-4.
- ³³ *Wu shu* in *Sanguo zhi* (三國誌·吳書) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), v.54, <魯肅傳>, p.1267 and *Jin shu* (晉書) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), v.62, <祖逖傳>, pp.1693-5.
- ³⁴ *Wei shu* in *Sanguo zhi* (三國誌·魏書) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), v.14, <劉曄傳>, p.443 and *Bei Qi shu* (北齊書) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), v.20 <高乾列傳>, pp.289-90.
- ³⁵ *Wei shu* in *Sanguo zhi* (三國誌·魏書), v.1, <武帝紀>, p.2.
- ³⁶ *Shishuo xinyu* (世說新語) (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1965), <假譎>, p.224. The authenticity of the story is dubious, because in the social milieu of the day the kidnapping of a bride would break the taboos of male and female conduct and make the girl unmarriageable again. But it is believable that Cao Cao, like many other descendents of nobility of the time, went through a youthful *xia* style, characterized by its turbulent nature.
- ³⁷ *Shu shu* in *Sanguo zhi* (三國誌·蜀書) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), v.35, <諸葛亮傳>, p.914.
- ³⁸ *Bei Qi shu* (北齊書), v.20, <薛修義傳>, p.275.
- ³⁹ *Shishuo xinyu* (世說新語), v.5, <自新>, p.164.
- ⁴⁰ *Gafu shishu no kenkyu* (樂府詩集の研究) (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1970), v.66, p.402. See translation of the poem in James Liu's *The Chinese Knight-errant*, p.59.

- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.402.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, v.66, <長安少年行>, p.405.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, v.67, <遊俠篇>, p.408. See translation in *The Chinese Knight-errant*, pp.60-1.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, v.24, <劉生>, p.199.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, v.67, <博陵王宮俠曲>, p.409. See translation in *The Chinese Knight-errant*, p.59.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, v.66, <結客少年場行>, p.402.
- ⁴⁷ *Kafu shishu no kenkyu* (樂府詩集の研究), v.63, p.390. See translation of the poem in James Liu's *The Chinese Knight-errant*, pp.57-8.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, v.63, <白馬篇>, p.391.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, v.66, <結客少年場行>, p.402.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, v.63, <白馬篇>, p.391.
- ⁵¹ *Shiji jinzhu* (史記今注), v.6, <鰲騎列傳>, p.2953.
- ⁵² *Kafu shishu no kenkyu* (樂府詩集の研究), v.63, <白馬篇>, p.391.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, v.66, <結客少年場行>, p.402.

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