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► **To cite this version:**

Vincent Durand-Dastès. Sleep of Heroes and Villains: Types of Dreams and Their Uses in a 17th-Century Full-length Novel. Association for Asian Studies annual conference, Chicago, march 26-29 2015, Mar 2015, Chicago, United States. <halshs-02113314>

HAL Id: halshs-02113314

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02113314v1>

Submitted on 28 Apr 2019

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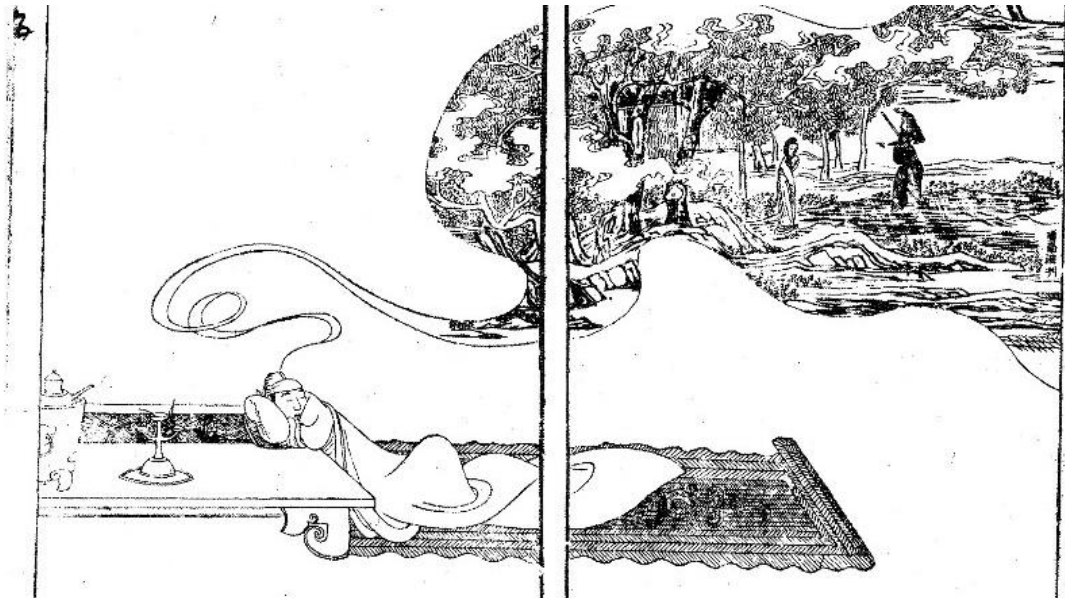


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Sleep of Heroes and Villains: Types of Dreams and Their Uses in a 17th-Century Full-length Novel

Talk given during the panel *Dreams Scenes and the Construction of Narrative in Late-Ming and Early-Qing Fiction*, Association for Asian Studies annual conference, Chicago, 26-29 mars 2015.

Vincent Durand-Dastès, Inalco.



Dreams and Chinese narratives.

Dreams and narrative literature have in China a long intertwined history. The theme of “life as a dream” appears already prominently in several major *chuanqi* 傳奇 (classical Chinese short stories) pieces of the ninth century, which will be retold many times in later dramatic or novelistic versions and be very influential. One may quote among them the story known as the Yellow millet dream (original title: *Zhen zhong ji* 枕中記, “memory from inside a pillow”), or the “Biography of the governor of Nanke” *Nanke taishou zhuan* 南柯太守傳, famous for having provided the proverb “a dream of Nanke”, used to describe the feeling one has when suddenly coming out of a dream and reflecting back towards one’s oneiric experience.

In the later age of the vernacular novel (*tongsu xiaoshuo* 通俗小說), the word “dream” will even become one of the possible titles a novelist may chose for his work: if most of the novels are entitled *ji* 記 (notes, memories), *zhuan* 傳 (biographies of, tradition about) or *yanyi* 演義 (with the double meaning of “development and explanations of the meaning about...”/“developments of the noble deeds of...”), a not un-significant number of works carries the word “dream” in what one may label as a generic position in their very titles. The most well-known example is of course the “Dream of the red mansions” *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, but we may list a few others from the 17th or 18th centuries: “Yin and yang dreams to awaken the world” *Jingshi yinyang meng* 警世陰陽夢, “Dream of the return towards the lotus” *Guilian meng* 歸蓮夢, ... Other vernacular narratives are comprehended within the space of a dream, even when it is not overtly stated in the title: the *Xiyou bu* 西遊補 (“Complement to the Journey to the West”, or “A tower of myriad mirrors” in English translation), which narratives is entirely contained within a dream made by the Monkey king during the quest for the sutra, is one famous example. One may also quote the very interesting vernacular *huaben* 話本 short story by Ling Mengchu in *Erke Paian jingqi* 19, “Tianshe weng shi shi jingli, mu tonger ye ye zunrong” 田舍翁時時經理 牧童兒夜夜尊榮, which is built along the principle of the famous “Butterfly dream” of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子: a poor shepherd boy dreams every night that he is a high ranking literati. His official oneiric career mirrors and heralds changes in his modest life in the stable of his master, but the reflect becomes gradually a reverse one: positive changes in his official life eventually produce catastrophes in his real life, and the shepherd eventually dreads so much sleeping that he will have to seek the guidance of a Taoist master to escape from the double narratives of dream and real life – thus rejoining the final escape from the dream of life which is the usual ending of “life as dream” narratives.

But dreams appear in novels far beyond the “life as a dream” format. One can only be stricken by the recurrence and, I would say, high realistic qualities of the dream sequences in novels not built against the “life as a dream” frame. We will today take an example from the XVIIth century. The late Ming and early Qing period has been a great time in China for dream’s literature: publication of new handbooks of oneiromancy (like Chen Shiyuan’s book of 1562, *Mengzhan yizhi*), accounts of dream by literati in poetry, jottings and notes. A very well-known

example is Dong Yue, who, besides authoring the dream novel *Xiyou bu*, has been noting his own dream and sharing oneiric experiences with other literati.

This high level of what one may call a “dream awareness” in late Ming or early Qing Chinese society do reflects on novels which are not of the “life as a dream” type. Today, we will study the narrative use of dreams in focusing on a novel and its sequel, *Chan zhen yishi* and *Chan Zhen houshi*, written by the same author in the first half of the seventeenth century. By surveying a single novel, we may be able to characterize how dreams are put to use in a single late Ming Chinese narrative.

Chan Zhen yishi and Houshi.

The two novels entitled “Lost stories of the Dhyana masters and the immortals” *Chan zhen yishi* 禪真逸史 and “Later stories of Dhyana masters and the immortals” *Chan Zhen houshi* 禪真後史 are late Ming full-length novels (respectively 40 chapters and 60 chapters) by a Hangzhou man named Fang Ruhao 方汝浩. They represent a rather rare case of a novel and its sequel written by a single author. Though the novels didn’t attract much critical attention before the end of the 1980’s (Keith McMahon can be said to be one of the modern “re-inventors” of this novel), the rather high number of re-editions and reprints shows it did enjoy a kind of success and found a respectable readership in Ming and even Qing times.

Its author, Fang Ruhao, could be said to be a brilliant novelist by his ability, as Keith McMahon has pointed out, to “do” all the styles of the previous or contemporary vernacular novel, from pornography to magic warfare to social satire to supernatural encounters and edifying discourse. Looked at from our time, Fang is not a very sympathetic figure: social and moral deviants are always eventually punished in his stories, with often a great display of cruelty, and sometimes utter sadism. But, thanks to his brilliant authorial brush, Fang Ruhao allows us to listen to the very voices of people he condemns, and his two novels gives sometimes to the contemporary readers moments of great literary pleasure. Among those moments of pleasure we may rank without hesitations the dreams’ sequences in the two Chan Zhen novels.

Features of dreams episodes in the two *Chan Zhen* novels.

Fang Ruhao is not the only late Ming *tongsu* novel’s author to show a great mastery in the way dreams are depicted. I won’t dwell long on it, but the dream

sequences are included in the whole narrative with a great deal of subtlety: for example, the reader follows the character in not being told that the dream has begun. Often, one only mentions the fact that he intends to go to sleep, then the dream episode begins as if the sleep has been interrupted. Sometimes, the stories may say that the character “get dizzy, confused” (*menglong* 朦朧), but the word “dream” (*meng* 夢) generally won’t appear until the dream is over, sometimes by quoting the proverbial saying (referring to the Tang tale *Nanke taishou zhuan*) “it was only a dream of Nanke” (*Nanke yi meng* 南柯一夢). We should also commend the late Ming authors as Fang for the way they recreate the fluidity of dreams: un-natural changings in the surroundings of the dreamer, in the nature of the characters interacting with him, etc.

If the oneiric dream sequences in Fang Ruhao’s novels are individually brilliant episodes, they also help to structure and frame the evolutions of the narrative. Some of the dream sequences with the most interesting narrative implications, are, unsurprisingly, those linked either to Eros or Thanatos – which are by no ways exclusive of each other, as proves such dramatic masterworks as *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭. In the first type, which may be called Hell dreams or *yin* 陰 dreams, the dreamer either meets a dead person or is himself dragged towards the netherworld to be judged even before dying; the second type, the “Spring dream” *chunmeng* 春夢, is borne out of sentimental or sexual frustration and enacts partially the desire of the dreamer. I will now discuss an example of each of those two types taken from the novel *Chan Zhen yishi*.



Picturing a *chunmeng* 春夢 (ill. for the play *Huanhun ji* 還魂記) and a *yinmeng* 陰夢 (Sun Wukong dragged to Hell in the *Journey to the West* 西遊記)

Two dreams from *Chan Zhen yishi*:

1/ Chen Abao's hellish dreams or the nightmares of a low-class villain.

Chapter 12 and 13 of *Chan Zhen yishi* features an interesting dream scene and its aftermath. The dreamer is called Chen Abao. He is definitely a villain of the tale. A low-class character, he has betrayed for profit Lin Danran, one of the main heroes of the novel, and in the process caused the demise of another positive and generous man, Du Chengzhi. When the dream scene happens, Abao is frustrated: he has been cheated of a part of his reward, then worries about the fate of the remaining hundred *taels* of silver he's kept: should he put it in the custody of his master (who may cheat him), bury it (but he may be seen and robbed), keep it all the time with him (very inconvenient)? He goes to sleep in this state of excitement and frustration, only to be awakened by his brother in law, who comes to propose him to invest his money in a business trip overseas. They soon sail together, but their boat is taken into a tempest and capsizes. Abao saves his life by grabbing a floating plank left from the boat, then manages to

get ashore on a remote island, where he is attacked by a big man who tries to ransom him. Running for his life, he falls in a pit full of manure where he is half drowned and attacked by disgusting insects – he then shouts so loudly in his sleep that his neighbor awakes him, putting an end to the nightmare. Abao turns back and fell asleep again. He immediately begins to dream again: the second dream is at first very pleasant: seeing fishes playing in a clear stream, Abao undresses and plunges in the water to catch them. But soon the nightmare is back: he is suddenly fished out of the water from the magnificent boat of a high official, surrounded by demons-looking guards. Still naked, he is bound and tried by the officials, who consult a registers that reveals Abao is the reincarnation of an evil man, a butcher. He should have lived anyway a brief live (36 years), but his recent crime demands that his lifespan be further reduced. The judge writes two lines of poetry on his face, then have him expelled. One of the demon-like guards throws him violently against a wall: Abao awakens again, feeling horrified and oppressed.

2. Zhong Shoujing’s erotic dream or the initiation to love and frustration of an enamoured abbot.

The second dream I wish to discuss comes earlier in *Chan Zhen yishi*, in chapter five. The dreamer is Zhong Shoujing 鐘守淨 the young and influent abbot of a big Nanjing monastery during the Liang dynasty. He has felt in love at his first sight of a beautiful girl who came to attend one of his lectures, but he does not even know her name. Unable to forget the girl, he spends a sleepless night. Near dawn, he walks in his garden when a young monk tells him that a woman wants to meet him to order a recitation of sutras. He is delighted to find out that she is precisely the woman he is obsessed with. The woman offers him two taëls of silver for the ceremony, but, when Zhong Shoujing wants to take the silver from her, it changes in his hands into a woman’s hairpin. More and more excited, he asks for her name, but she answers by four apparently meaningless sentences. Asked about her purpose in asking for the *sutra* recitation, she confesses that, pregnant, she wants to be sure to have a boy. Zhong Shoujing pretends to have a “miraculous pill” (lingdan 靈丹) able to stabilize the embryo and make sure that it will be a boy. Then he takes her to his room, but asks for a further price: the “leaving treasure that dwells in the middle of her waist, more precious than twenty thousand taëls of pure gold”. Showing her his penis, he explains that it is “this little monk who’ll play the doctor, who’s truly miraculous” and enlaces her. But the lovers are suddenly interrupted by a red-faced wandering monk, a *dhuta*

頭陀, who jumps out of a crack in the wall and begins to beat Zhong Shoujing who cries so loudly that he eventually attracts the attention of his young disciple who comes and awakes him.

The short aftermath of the two dreams: explanations and translations in real life.

Heroes of both dreams awake shaken and wounded by their oneiric experience. Characteristically, both of them will seek an analyst of a sort, able to explain the meaning of their dreams. The luckless Chen Abao will seek explanations from a profligate daoist priest who tells him, after being told about the sentence the magistrate had written on his face, that his dream is actually an erotic dream, a *chunmeng* 春夢: he thus takes him to a brothel to meet a renowned courtesan named Meichun (“Prunus spring”): but there, he will be humiliated and robbed of all his money by Meichun, eventually committing suicide. No one has been able to explain to him that a sentence in the poem written on his face warning him that “all the treasures will go back to Spring” was not the portent of a gallant adventure, but an allusion to the name of the courtesan about to rob him and send him to his death. In contrast, Zhong Shoujing beneficiates from the guidance of a competent if immoral diviner, a cunning lay-nun called “honey-mouthed” Zhao 趙蜜嘴: in chapter 6, she proves able to decipher, by the *chai zi* 拆字 methods, the mysterious lines from his dream: it simply gives the full name of the girl, Li Saiyu, and of her husband, Shen Quan. As Honey-mouthed Zhao is also a matchmaker, she’ll thus be able to arrange a gallant meeting between Zhong and the girl. But, when the abbot will find himself again in chapter 7, this time in real life, ready to bed the girl, she cannot eventually make love with him because she has her periods – as a naïve young man who’s been a monk since childhood, Zhong Shoujing does not even know what periods are, and has to be taught by Li Saiyu! Only then does Zhong Shoujing understand that the “red-faced *dhuta*” of his dream, jumping from a crack to stop the merriment of the lovers, was pre-figuring the interrupted love scene to come. Fortunately for the profligate monk and his lover, their next attempt at lovemaking will prove successful.

The long range aftermath : mirror effects.

Those two dream scenes do not merely have an immediate narrative aftermath. They also help in structuring the development of the entire novel, by using mirror effects. Let’s turn first to the dream of Zhong Shoujing: his interrupted

love scene has left him obsessed and depressed. He is now fully aware that he will no longer be able to be a holy monk. The need to seek an explanation to the dream will also put into action Honey-mouthed Zhao, a decisive character in forming a network of villains in the novel, and turning the initially naïve and well-wishing Zhong into a profligate monk who will try to conceal his debauchery at all costs. In contrast, the aftermath of the dream will help shape the figure of Lin Danran, also a monk but a positive character in the story: a martial type, straightforward and virtuous, he will try to warn Zhong Shoujing and, rebuked and threatened, will eventually have to escape for his life, launching the wanderings who will constitute the main part of the novel. Interestingly, Lin Danran has himself only simple, straightforward revelatory dreams during the novel¹; one may even wonder if a complex dream of frustration and desire could not be a characteristic of a negative character.

Chen Abao's dream reflects even more characteristically on another part of the narrative, in chapter 20, around the middle of the novel. Then, a character in many ways similar to Abao also undertakes a journey to hell: like Abao, he's known only under a rather derogatory name, Achou. Like him also, he is unruly, destitute and young (much younger actually, Achou is an orphaned child as Abao is a young man in his twenties). And, as Abao, he will meet the underworld authorities to get a revelation about his true identity. The taste of the *tongsu xiaoshuo*'s authors for repetitions and counter-echoes was so strong at the time that I do not believe that all those common elements could be a coincidence. But Achou, if a mirrored image of Abao, is indeed an inverted reflect: he will meet in Hell not a stern and severe judge, but a benevolent figure, his late father, now a netherworld official. The orphan boy will thus learn that he is the son of Du Chengzhi, the man whose very death was caused by Abao's denunciation. As Achou is by pure hazard in the custody of Lin Danran, a close friend of his late father, his statute, upon his return among the living and the revelation of his true identity, will considerably improve, giving him a "normal" name (Du Fuwei), and turning him into the main hero of the last leg of the novel. Interestingly, the trip to Hell of Achou/Du Fuwei is not a dream, but an actual death: Achou indeed breaks his neck by falling from a tree, and, when he will be about to be sent back to life, there will be worries about the fact that his body

¹ For example in chapter 17 Li Danran has a pair of simple *yin meng* : a dead monk he knew has him settling a debt he's left behind him before dying (first dream : asks for his help; second dream: thanks him task done)

may have already begun to decay. As, in most narratives of short-trips to hell, the netherworld journey usually happens during a dream or a catalepsy, one may wonder if the “real” death of Achou has not been chosen by Fang Ruhao as a way to separate further the problematic oneiric space from a straightforwardly heroic reality.

Common-knowledge and idiosyncratic elements in the dreams

Both dreams we have analyzed contain what may be called “divinatory” (or at least “fate revealing”) elements that are by no means restricted to the sphere of vernacular novels: for example, the revelation of an enigmatic poems that has to be explained through *chaizi* divination is a classic element of divinatory literature, and especially of the oneiromantic treatises. The fate-revealing journey of a living being to Hell features as well prominently in didactic literature since the Six dynasties on. But the originality of the two dream narratives in *Chan Zhen yishi* is to blend those common knowledge elements with idiosyncratic inventions: in Chen Abao’s dream, the Hell scene is made more mysterious and vivid by a what can only be called religious fantasy: the hell-king like figure is not Yama or one other of the famous ten kings of hell, but a mysterious “Bright king of the correct law of the aquatic offices” (Shuifu zhengfa mingwang 水府正法明王), which mixes the ancient figure of the Shuiguan 水官 (the Officer of water, one of the Three officers, *sanguan* 三官, was a kind of Hell judge in ancient taoist creed²) with the warlike tantric gods called the “Bright kings” or “Kings of light” *mingwang* 明王; but even more significantly, the Hell dream does not come alone. It is doubled with a first nightmare that doesn’t seem to be informed by former mantic or religious literature, a “pure” nightmare one may say.

² « Dans le 1^{er} système taoïste, il y avait 3 juges des morts : les officiers du ciel, de la terre et de l’eau. Le membre le plus redouté de ce trio était l’officier de l’eau, et la pire destinée qui pouvait attendre les âmes des morts était d’être voués à l’office de l’eau (*shuifu*). L’officier de l’eau avait, de toute évidence, hérité de la substance et de la fonction infernale de l’ancien comte de l’eau (*Hebo*) » Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins*, p. 399.



The Water Officer, *shuiguan* 水官



Ming painting of a 'Bright King' *mingwang* 明王 (Baoning si, 寶寧寺)

In the same way, the brutal appearance of the “red-faced *dhuta*” in the erotic dream of Zhong Shoujing, following the more conventional transmission of a

poetic riddle, parts with the oneiromantic literature: the portent of a frustration to come in a dream aroused by an already present frustration is literally understandable in a divinatory context.

Both dreams do not appear uphazardly in the narrative, but take place at a moment of intense frustration for the two dreamers. They are characteristically borne out of frustrated desire or anger (isn't *hen* 恨 a celebrated motive of literary creation in China?). By retaining some elements coming from common divinatory knowledge but also constructing symbolic elements idiosyncratically linked to the very peculiar situation of his characters, Fang Ruhao seems to progressively free himself from the vocabulary of dream's mantic in the construction of his oneiric narratives.

In *Chan Zhen houshi*, the sequel of his novel, Fang will write another dream scene of frustration and desire. A young woman, Lao Woxi, one of the six spouses of an aged and impotent man, hears one of her fellow-concubines laughing with a stray monk who's managed to make his way into the women's quarters of the house. Unable to understand what is happening but aroused by the voices of the monk and of the other concubine, she comes back very agitated to her room, where she has a dream full of sexual symbolism. Lao Woxi's dream is borne out of frustration, too, but the symbolic elements (she has dreamed of a monk rhythmically beating a drum with a stick, of surging flooded waters, of her body set in fire and having to be covered by water sprayed by the monk in order to "extinguish her fire"...) are neither commentated upon or later explained by a learned "analyst"-diviner, nor linked to a precise diegetic element in the coming narrative. Nevertheless, it has a narrative importance of its own, as it helps establishing her as the main female protagonist in the coming "love fight" between the monk and the six wives. One may wonder if, by quitting here the set-elements transmitted by the oneiromantic traditions, Fang Ruhao is not contributing to the creation of a "modern" oneiric vocabulary that will be re-used by the next generations of Chinese novelists, among them the author of *Honglou meng*. However, one should refrain to consider hastily this evolution as a "progressist" evolution that would take us from "primitive" oneiromantic lore to psychology: maybe the most interesting feature of Fang Ruhao's dream episodes is their ability to move freely, when necessary, from the mantic knowledge to the minute description of the psychological conditions of the most problematic characters in his novels.

March 2015.

