

The Lady of Linshui Pacifies Demons: A Seventeenth-Century Novel.

Translated by Kristin Ingrid Fryklund. Introduction by Mark Edward Lewis and Brigitte Baptandier. Annotations by Brigitte Baptandier. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2021. Pp. xxiv + 280. \$99.00 hardcover, \$35.00 paperback.

Chen Jinggu 陳靖姑, canonized as the Lady of Linshui 臨水夫人, is a widely venerated deity from south-eastern China, best known for her protection of mother and infant. She was introduced to sinological scholarship by Brigitte Baptandier in a detailed monograph on the cult, which was first published in 1988 as *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau*.¹ This monograph grew out of her 1983 dissertation, which was based on fieldwork in Taiwan. An English translation of *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau* by Kristin Ingrid Fryklund appeared in 2008 as *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*.² This, however, was much more than a translation as it incorporated later research by the author, this time including fieldwork in Fujian. A central source on which Baptandier relied in her original monograph was the vernacular hagiography of the goddess, the *Linshui pingyao zhi* 臨水平妖誌, as reprinted in the 1980s by the Taiwanese Ruicheng shuju 瑞成書局.³ Her *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau* started out with an extensive summary of this seventeen-chapter work and an analysis of its contents.⁴ It is this “novel” which is now presented in a full translation, preceded by an introduction on its contents and themes.

¹ Brigitte Berthier, *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau* (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1988).

² Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, trans. Kristin Ingrid Fryklund (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). The original French edition, in which the name of the author is given as Brigitte Berthier is not listed in the Bibliography of the publication under review.

³ The amply illustrated lithographic edition reprinted in Wang Jianchuan 王見川 et al., eds., *Minjian sicang: Zhongguo minjian xinyang minjian wenhua ziliao huibian*, ser. 1 民間私藏：中國民間信仰民間文化資料彙編，第一輯 (Taipei: Boyang wenhua, 2011), vol. 13, pp. 334–593 was produced in 1911 by the Huiwentang 會文堂 in Xiamen. At least one copy has been preserved of an (undated?) edition from the early years of the Republic by the Puji chubanshe 普及出版社 in Shanghai.

⁴ Berthier, *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau*, pp. 49–73. This summary is not included in the English version.

When Bapandier conducted her research in the 1980s, the *Linshui pingyao zhi* was quite rare. It also was the only extensive account of the myth of the deity. Since that time, however, many more materials on the myth have become available. These include scripts of puppet plays and plays for human actors, and one more “novel,” the *Haiyou ji* 海遊記.⁵ This latter work in eight chapters has been preserved in an edition of the eighteenth century that is a reprinting of a late Ming work from Jianyang 建陽.⁶ An English translation of this text is provided in Fan Pen Li Chen, *Journey of a Goddess: Chen Jinggu Subdues the Snake Demon* of 2017,⁷ which also includes two scenes from the puppet plays. These works would appear to reflect the northern tradition of the myth of Chen Jinggu, whereas the *Linshui pingyao zhi* would appear to document a more southerly tradition. This latter work provides a much more complicated narrative; it would also appear to be from a later date than the *Haiyou ji*. *The Lady of Linshui Pacifies Demons* is advertised in its subtitle as “a seventeenth-century novel,” and the authors of the Introduction quote Chinese scholars who argue for such a dating (p. xii), but that date is not accepted by all. Ouyang Jian 歐陽健 already pointed out that in the beginning of Chapter 7 a “Peking opera troupe” 一班京戲 is introduced that “performed either Beijing or Anhui style” 京徽並奏 (p. 80).⁸ The young male impersonator of that troupe who is kidnapped to serve as the lover of the White Snake demon in this novel must have been trained as a Peking opera actor, which would not have happened before the nineteenth century. The same scholar goes on to suggest that the *Linshui pingyao zhi* most likely derives from

⁵ This work should be distinguished from a thirty-chapter satirical novel of the same title from the early decades of the nineteenth century.

⁶ Wugenzi 無根子, *Haiyou ji* 海遊記, coll. and ann. by Ye Mingsheng 葉明生, in *Minsu quyi congshu* 民俗曲藝叢書, ser 8, vol. 78 (Taipei: Caituan faren Shi Hezheng minsu wenhua jijinhui, 2000). This volume also includes complete reproductions of a contemporary manuscript copy of the novel and of the eighteenth-century woodblock edition. Ye Mingsheng is also the (co)editor of several other publications devoted to Chen Jinggu in the *Minsu quyi congshu* series.

⁷ Fan Pen Li Chen, *Journey of a Goddess: Chen Jinggu Subdues the Snake Demon* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

⁸ Ouyang Jian, “*Linshui pingyao zhuan*: Yibu bieju qingqu de shenguai xiaoshuo” 《臨水平妖傳》：一部別具情趣的神怪小說, *Ningde shizhuan xuebao* 寧德師專學報 42 (1997): 17.

the *Mindu bieji* 閩都別記, a sprawling vernacular account of the legendary history of Fuzhou and Fujian in 400 chapters that itself may date from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century—dispersed over several chapters, that work provides its own version of the myth of Chen Jinggu. This somewhat later date of the *Linshui pingyao zhi* does not diminish the value of the text in any way. One may well read it as a compendium of traditional Chinese demonology, and the “Dramatis Personae” is very helpful indeed in view of the variety of demons and deities that make their appearance in the narrative.

The *Linshui pingyao zhi* links the myth of Chen Jinggu with the legend of the construction of the Luoyang Bridge 洛陽橋, which also circulates independently as one of the miracles of the Bodhisattva Guanyin, known in this connection as Yulan Guanyin 魚籃觀音 (Guanyin with the fish basket). When money runs out for the construction of this project, Guanyin appears in a boat on the river as a beautiful young girl and promises to marry any man who can hit her with a coin or ingot from the shore. In the “novel,” initially no man manages to do so, so she can deliver boatloads of cash to the local prefect, until the mischievous immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 instructs a poor vegetable seller how to hit her hairdo. The moment the vegetable seller boards the young woman’s boat, however, it disappears. The hair on the head of Guanyin that was hit by the vegetable seller drops to the ground and turns into a white snake that terrorizes Fujian, and Guanyin clips a piece from one of her nails to be born as Chen Jinggu, while the vegetable seller is reborn as Liu Qi 劉杞, who will eventually marry Chen Jinggu. This narrative, which links both Chen Jinggu and her greatest adversary to the immensely popular female Guanyin, can only be a relatively late adaptation of the legend: legends about maidens who, against the wishes of their parents, set out to destroy man-eating snakes circulated in the Fujian area already in the early centuries of the first millennium C.E. as we all know from the tale of Li Ji 李寄 in Gan Bao’s 干寶 *Soushen ji* 搜神記.⁹ What this retelling of the legend of Luoyang Bridge importantly does, however, is stressing the ultimate identity of both the goddess

⁹ Kenneth J. DeWoskin, and J. I. Crump, Jr., trans., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 230–31. While the links between the legend and the Fuzhou locality are consistently stressed in the annotations, one finds no reference to the tale of Li Ji in the volume under review or in *The Lady of Linshui*.

and her adversary as part of the same divine power. While Chen Jinggu is elsewhere said to have lived a mortal life during the eighth century, the action of the “novel” is set during the tenth century, when, following the collapse of the Tang dynasty, Fujian was ruled by members of the Wang 王 family who eventually proclaimed the Min 閩 empire.

In order to enhance the divine status of Chen Jinggu, she has not only to vanquish the White Snake, but also many other monsters once she has acquired her magic abilities after three years of study with the immortal Xu Zhenjun 許真君 at Mt. Lü 閩山, a mountain that is hidden under water and only appears to allow entrance to predestined disciples. In order to enhance the divine status of Chen Jinggu even further, the remarkable abilities of the various monsters, demons, and competing magicians she encounters have to be showcased, so the *Linshui pingyao zhi* is to a large extent made up of the stories of her opponents up to the moment they are vanquished by Chen Jinggu. Often a single confrontation is enough to kill these opponents or turn them into loyal servants. A spider monster that, in female shape but fully dressed, seduces young men and captures them in her web for consumption, is promptly killed by Chen Jinggu, as is the clam monster that manifests itself as a beautiful palace off the coast and swallows the deluded adherents of sectarian religions who believe they have earned entrance to the World of Utter Joy by a lifetime of vegetarianism. Personally, I was very much entertained by the transformations of a butterfly that turned out to be a painted butterfly, so it had to be destroyed by burning the painting. A lascivious monkey, however, is allowed by Chen Jinggu to survive after she has captured him, but only after the animal has been castrated—the readers are warned not to identify this monkey with the chaste and uncastrated Sun Wukong 孫悟空.

The major opponent of Chen Jinggu is, of course, the White Snake, who is supported in her evil by the Ravine Demon (Zhang Kengui 張坑鬼). We first encounter the Ravine Demon when he, together with the lascivious monkey, confronts Chen Jinggu. Following their defeat, he flees and takes refuge with the White Demon. There his task is to provide her with a steady supply of young men who have to be both handsome and talented. The White Snake first exhausts them as bed partners and next devours them. One of her intended victims is at one moment Liu Qi, who is only saved by his wife at the last moment. Later, the White Snake replaces Chen Jinfeng 陳金鳳, the

wife of the local ruler, in their bed, and while she takes her pleasures with him, she also consumes his thirty-six concubines, reducing them to bones. During this time, the Ravine Demon is allowed to take his pleasure with the comatose Chen Jinfeng. Eventually Chen Jinggu comes to the rescue, cutting the White Snake into three pieces on the imperial couch and imprisoning each of these pieces, still very much alive, in separate locations. She also brings the thirty-six concubines back to life and frees Chen Jinfeng, but again allows the Ravine Demon to escape.

As might be expected of a nail-clipping of Guanyin, Chen Jinggu had hoped to remain a virgin all her life. When she studies at Mt. Lü, she refuses to study the lore related to pregnancy, birth, and infant care because she claims she will never marry. She persists in this refusal despite the urgings of her teacher, who, at her departure, urges her not to use her magic when she reaches the advanced age of twenty-four. But Chen Jinggu is predestined to marry Liu Qi, and after many procrastinations the marriage is consummated. When Chen Jinggu turns twenty-four, she finds herself three months pregnant. Here starts the most original episode of the myth. When a severe drought strikes Fuzhou, the prayers of her cousin, Chen Shouyuan 陳守元, who serves the local ruler as his foremost Daoist priest, turn out to be ineffective, and the irate ruler threatens to kill him and all his colleagues if he does not produce results within ten days. Chen Shouyuan appeals to his cousin for help, and she feels she cannot refuse his request because the assistance he has provided to her parents over the years. Well aware of her teacher's warnings, she takes out her embryo and entrusts it to the care of her mother, hiding her parental home below a lotus pond. Dancing the paces of Yu on a mat floating on the river, she indeed produces rain, but the Ravine Demon uses this opportunity to trick Chen Jinggu's mother into revealing her whereabouts and the hiding place of the embryo, which he feeds to the head segment of the White Snake. As a result, Chen Jinggu experiences a massive haemorrhage. Together the revived White Snake and the Ravine Demon then pull her mat under water, causing Chen Jinggu to drown. Xu Zhenjun comes to her rescue by throwing three stones into the air that change into mother ducks that, in turn, dive into the water and pull the mat up again. The cleansed soul of the deceased Chen Jinggu now at last studies the lore related to pregnancy, birth, and infant care with her teacher and takes up her divine position, together with the many sworn sisters

she collected over her lifetime. But while the White Snake is captured and turned into Chen Jinggu's mount, the Ravine Demon escapes yet once again. When he continues his old ways, he becomes the first demon to be defeated by the divine Chen Jinggu. To capture him, however, she needs the assistance of her sworn sister Lin Jiuniang 林九娘 and her mastery of the trigrams. Only then can the Ravine Demon be condemned, killed, and dismembered.

While the White Snake, as the embodiment of greed and lust, may be the cosmic counterpart of Chen Jinggu who embodies virtue and restraint, it is the Ravine Demon who reveals himself in this narrative of the myth as her most inventive, versatile, and persistent opponent. He is also the most enigmatic figure in the *Linshui pingyao zhi*. Baptandier has studied the Ravine Demon first of all as the counterpart of the lascivious monkey. In her *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau*, she noted that the Ravine Demon at least twice manifests itself as a little child, and commented, "Cet élément suffit déjà à lui conférer le rôle prépondérant qu'il joue dans la fondation de ce culte de la maternité et de l'enfance : en tant que personnage embryonnaire et enfantin, il est l'objet même de ce culte" (This element is by itself sufficient to assign him the major role he plays in the foundation of this cult of motherhood and childhood: as an embryonal and childlike character he is himself object of the cult).¹⁰ In her later views, as reflected in *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, the Ravine Demon is assigned less importance and is now characterized as a "skeleton spirit."¹¹ Perhaps the importance of the character is hidden in the Chinese name of the Ravine Demon: He may be described in the "novel" as formed by "the impure exudation of a swamp . . . and the quintessence of the sun and moon" (p. 114) but his name would suggest that he is first of all the "ghost of the gaping hole" of a grave,¹² so the personification of death itself, and as such can only be defeated by those who themselves have attained an eternal life.

The appellation of "novel" should not mislead potential readers. Yes, this tale provides a good read and as such may well be appreciated as a novel, but it is first and foremost the hagiography of a popular divinity, read by her believers as a revealed gospel. This work is of relevance at least as much if not more to students of Chinese religion and to students of gender in China than

¹⁰ Berthier, *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau*, p. 142.

¹¹ Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui*, p. 115.

¹² As a verb the character *keng* 坑 also means "to bury alive."

to students of Chinese literature. The translation is well done, and I have noted only a very small number of minor slips in the main text and the notes. The expertise and care of all involved in this production speak from every page of this book. This is indeed an extremely welcome addition to the available body of renditions of truly popular literature. Its vivid contents will not only surprise many Western readers but also many of our Chinese students.

WILT L. IDEMA
Harvard University

The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narratives, 960–1279.
By Charles Hartman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 377. \$120.00.

I feel unworthy to review a book that is so masterfully written and researched that it seems sheer impertinence to offer my opinion of it. Charles Hartman, a scholar who has been a master for so long that it seems a fact of nature, rather than the achievement of decades of practice, has written a sophisticated, nuanced, and deeply researched study of history writing during the Song dynasty. Specifically, he carefully sifts through the sands and shoals of the historiographic process whereby Song historians, officially and privately, composed histories of the Song dynasty in a highly politically charged environment. Not only were the documentary records of earlier emperors repeatedly culled, edited, and reconstituted as different factions gained control over the official institutions of history writing, but the political implications for historians in their own time were critical for themselves, other officials, and the emperors. Song historians struggled to be true to their work as historians, however that was understood, to portray the past accurately, while understanding the difficulties of their sources and the effects their work had on their present. It was in many respects this struggle that made the Song, as Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 said (cited by Hartman), the peak of Chinese historiography.