



Fan Lihua and Xue Dingshan: A Case Study in Battlefield Courtship

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When asked to describe the typical heroine of traditional Chinese fiction, most students of Chinese literature would probably call to mind a fragile young woman of ethereal beauty; few would envisage an equestrian woman-general at the head of an army charging against enemy forces. Yet in Chinese popular fiction—particularly in fiction derived from the storytelling tradition—such daring heroines abound. Not only are they endowed with the same beauty as their frail sisters, they are also martial arts experts, and their military prowess is far superior to that of their male counterparts. Like their frail sisters, they too seem to be imbued with romantic notions about marriage and are willing to make tremendous sacrifices in order to win the hand of the man of their choice. In fact the *yanyi* 演義 stories of the Ming and Qing dynasties seem to be filled with courtships on the battlefields, and in a majority of cases it is the woman who takes the initiative, with the man either complying readily to her proposition (in the simpler plots) or repeatedly resisting her advances despite threats to his life (in the more complex stories). This superficial reversal of male and female roles in courtship has far deeper significance than a mere disruption to the commonly accepted male and female roles. The purpose of this article is to examine, through the study of one particular *yanyi* story—*Shuo Tang zheng xi san juan* 說唐征西三傳, or *Xue Dingshan zheng xi* 薛丁山征西 (Xue Dingshan Conquers the West)¹ as it is more popularly known—the variations on the theme of battlefield courtship and its moral implications.

Yanyi is a type of fiction which can be traced to the *huaben* 話本 of the Song dynasty and the *jiangshi* 講史 or *pinghua* 評話 of the Yuan dynasty. It takes the endeavours of certain historical figures as a basis, and weaving legend and imagination with facts, recreates the exploits of men who were involved in the founding or destruction of dynasties. Thus C. T.

1. There are variations in the names used for different editions or even the same edition of the story. For example, the Jiaqing twelfth year (1807) edition *Rengui zheng xi shuo Tang san juan* 仁貴征西說唐三傳 has an alternative title on the half title page: *Xin ke yishuo hou Tang juan san ji Xue Dingshan zheng xi Fan Lihua chuanjuan* 新刻異說後唐傳三集薛丁山征西樊梨花全傳. Since the present study is based primarily on an analysis of the plot, I have based my discussion on a 90-chapter edition reprinted in *Zheng dong, ping nan, sao bei* 征東·平南·掃北 (Hong Kong: Guangyi shuju 廣義書局, n.d.). The *Zheng dong* and *Sao bei* versions in this edition are based on the Fuwen Tang 福文堂 edition (Daoguang eighteenth year [1838]). Most of the known editions of *Zheng xi* consist of 90 chapters though the number of volumes vary considerably. For further details please see entries nos. 45 and 46 in Liu Ts'un-yan, *Lundun suo jian zhongguo xiaoshuo shumu tiyao* 倫敦所見中國小說書目提要 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe 書目文獻出版社, 1982), pp. 128–130.

Hsia, in his seminal study of this genre, refers to such stories as military romances.² The most famous story of this genre is perhaps the *Sanguo zhi tongsu yanyi* 三國志通俗演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) written in the early Ming dynasty. As the genre developed, the stories shifted their emphasis from historical and military events to the glorification and mystification of certain military heroes and their real or fictional scions. The story of Xue Dingshan, written in the Qing dynasty, falls under the latter category.³

I

The saga of the Xue family, of which *Zheng xi* is a part, has as its basis the historical figure Xue Rengui 薛仁貴,⁴ a general of the Tang dynasty who, during the reign of Taizong 太宗 and Gaozong 高宗, helped to conquer Liaodong and Korea. Xue Rengui's military achievements provide the basis for the second part of *Shuo Tang hou juan* 說唐後傳, or *Xue Rengui zheng dong yanyi* 薛仁貴征東演義 (Romance of Xue Rengui Conquering the East),⁵ which became the first of a group of *yanyi* stories detailing the military endeavours Xue Rengui and his fictional children and grand-children, most notably Xue Dingshan and Xue Gang 薛剛, the heroes in *Xue Dingshan zheng xi* and *Xue Gang fan Tang* 薛剛反唐 (Xue Gang Rebels Against the Tang Dynasty).⁶

While the theme of the *yanyi* stories is the glorification of heroes who seek to expand or defend the territory or influence of the Han⁷ empire through military prowess, in a large number of these stories, the Han heroes accomplish their goal through marriages to "barbarian" women-generals who then join the Han forces to defeat other "barbarian" enemies. *Zheng xi* on the one hand typifies such stories about courtships on the battlefields in that it

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2. C. T. Hsia, "The Military Romance: A Genre of Chinese Fiction", in *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, edited by Cyril Birch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 339–390. Section III of this article contains a brief discussion of Fan Lihua's courtship of Xue Dingshan.
 3. For a brief account of this shift of emphasis please see Hsia, pp. 343–346.
 4. The biography of Xue Rengui is found in both the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 ("liezhuan" 列傳 no. 33) and the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 ("liezhuan" no. 36). According to both entries, Xue Rengui demonstrated outstanding bravery and military prowess in battle. Not only did he earn handsome rewards from the emperors, but he was also feared and respected by his enemies.
 5. For obvious differences between editions please see Liu, entries nos. 43–45.
 6. According to the two Tang histories, Xue Rengui has one son, Xue Ne 薛訥, who also became a high-ranking general. Xue Rengui's nephew Xue Xiong 薛雄 and grand-nephew Xue Ping 薛平 also served the empire as high-ranking military officers. However, there is no mention of the names Xue Dingshan and Xue Gang, characters in the *yanyi* stories who are respectively Xue Rengui's son and grandson. Xue Dingshan is of course the hero in the story *Xue Dingshan zheng xi*, while Xue Gang is the hero of *Xue Gang fan Tang*.
 7. By Han I mean the Han people, not the Han dynasty. The Han people has not been a stagnant, homogeneous group, but has grown as the main population group in China since the Han dynasty through the cultural, political and military expansion of each successive dynasty. See Wu Zhuhui 吳主惠, *Han minzu de yanjiu* 漢民族的研究 (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1968). Thus, the moral codes subscribed to in *yanyi* fiction may be said to reflect to a certain extent this process of assimilation.

adheres closely to the formula on which such stories rely;⁸ on the other hand, it diverges from the established norms and forces one to confront the moral implications of the conventional battlefield courtships. In order to understand how *Zheng xi* functions on these two different levels, we should first examine the usual formula for *yanyi* battlefield courtships.

The components for the formula for inter-racial courtships and marriages in the *yanyi* stories can be summed up as follows: 1) Both the hero and the heroine rank high in their respective armies; the heroine is very often a princess or the daughter of a “barbarian” general. 2) In a majority of cases the hero and the heroine fall for the good looks of each other at first sight. 3) It is invariably the woman who takes the initiative and proposes marriage and the man who, out of ethical, filial and racial considerations, demurs, indeed often rudely declines at the risk of death. 4) Though both the hero and the heroine are martial arts experts, the heroine always has the advantage of having studied under an immortal and is therefore endowed with supernatural power and magic weapons. Even if the hero had also studied under an immortal teacher, the heroine is still the one with greater martial arts skills and superior magic weapons. As a result the hero is often captured by the heroine. 5) The heroine has frequently been forewarned by her immortal teacher that she is predestined to marry a Han man. 6) Though beautiful and powerful, the heroine always feels inferior because she is a “barbarian”. She is therefore more than happy to accept her lot in life. The man, on the other hand, is reluctant to marry a “barbarian” woman. 7) In a desperate attempt to lure the hero into consenting to the marriage, the heroine uses threats as well as baits. The threat is: Marry me or die; the bait is: Marry me and I will surrender and help you conquer my fellow countrymen. 8) The hero often fakes consent in order to be freed, and once released, goes back on his words and mocks the heroine. 9) Through the good services of an intermediary, usually from the hero’s camp, the hero and heroine are finally united. 10) The evil forces are wiped out with the heroine’s help.

All these components are of course inter-connected. For instance, the first and fourth components are pre-requisites of the seventh: only a high-ranking woman-general would be in the position to offer a military stronghold, a city or even a state as her dowry, and only a heroine who has more military might than the hero could capture him and lure him with the threat-and-bait tactic. That the “barbarian” heroine rather than the Han hero should propose marriage is also obvious — according to accepted Han ethics marriages must be arranged by one’s parents. Marrying without parental consent is unfilial, and marrying into the enemy camp amounts to treason. Thus for the Han hero to retain his innocence and self-respect he must be *forced* into the marriage. The barbarian heroine, on the other hand, can count herself among the fortunate because she has caught herself a Han husband, to her eternal betterment.

Though this paper deals with a typical example of male-centred morality in a patriarchal society, it is not my intention to approach the issue from the feminist point of view. Thus, I propose to accept all the facts and established relationships between men and women in the

8. For an analysis of the general battlefield courtship formula and its application to battlefield courtships in other *yanyi* stories, see Lin Baochun 林保淳, “Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo zhong ‘zhenqian zhaoqin’ mosi zhi fenxi” 中國古典小說中「陣前招親」模式之分析 (An Analysis of the Battlefield Courtship Models in Classical Chinese Fiction), in *Zhanzheng yu Zhongguo shehui zhi biandong* 戰爭與中國社會之變動 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 學生書局, 1991), pp. 75–113.

story, including the fact that men are entitled to as many wives as are convenient for them, as the norm. In this context, I shall try to illustrate how the courtship between Fan Lihua and Xue Dingshan differs from the norm and thus provides a deeper moral insight into *yanyi* conventional morality.

II

Zheng xi provides three main examples for battlefield courtship related to the hero, Xue Dingshan. In the following I shall summarize events leading to Xue Dingshan's first and second marriages and show how the formula for courtships on the battlefield detailed above apply to these two cases.

Xue Dingshan's first wife is Dou Xiantong 竇仙童⁹ who, together with her brother Dou Yihu 竇一虎, has built Chessboard Mountain 棋盤山 into their stronghold (Variation on 1). As Xue Dingshan crosses the borders of the Tang empire in the company of his mother and sister to join his father Xue Rengui, who is engaged in battle with the tartars of Western Liang, they pass by Chessboard Mountain. Dou Yihu falls for Xue Dingshan's sister's good looks and tries to capture her. Unfortunately the heroes in the Tang army prove too strong for Dou, who then asks his sister for help. In this manner Dou Xiantong and Xue Dingshan come face to face with each other in battle.

The minute Dou Xiantong lays eyes on Xue Dingshan, she is completely enamoured with his good looks (2), while Xue is too preoccupied with the fate of one of his staff who has been captured by Dou Xiantong earlier on to be anything but angry with her. However, Dou Xiantong is a girl who knows exactly what she wants and comes straight to the point: she tells Xue that she is a disciple of the Yellow Flower Sage Woman 黃花聖母 of Nine Dragon Mountain 九龍山 from whom she received training in the martial and magical arts (4); she also suggests that if he would marry her, she would accompany him to rescue his father and the Tang Emperor (7). Her words incense Xue Dingshan, who rebukes her: "I am the son of a high-ranking general; why should I marry a bandit like you!" (6) He immediately launches an all-out attack; though he is physically stronger than Xiantong, she captures him with a magic weapon (4). Xiantong takes Dingshan back to her fortress and forces him to marry her on that very day or be immediately executed (7). He flatly refuses and so she gives the order that he be taken outside for immediate execution (3).¹⁰ At this critical moment the old Tang general Cheng Yaojin 程咬金 appears on the scene to play match-maker for the couple (9).

9. The courtship of Xue Dingshan and Dou Xiantong occupies Chapters 18 and 19 of the story.

10. Dingshan's behaviour here is more forthright than that of most *yanyi* heroes caught in a similar situation. However, if one compares his reaction here with the later episodes involving Fan Lihua, in which he feels no compunction about faking consent again and again, one may conclude that there is an inconsistency in the characterization of Xue Dingshan. This is indeed one of the weakest elements of *yanyi* fiction, and one of the main reasons why *yanyi* stories are not considered as serious fiction. Dingshan's defiance in the face of Xiantong's death threat is less the demand of characterization than plot: Fan Lihua, rather than Dou Xiantong, is the true heroine of the story. Thus the vicissitudes of battlefield courtship must be reserved for Lihua, while Xiantong can be married to Dingshan with the least fuss.

Dingshan still declines on the grounds that both his father and his King are still under siege, and it would be unfilial and disloyal for him to get married without their prior approval and when their lives are in danger (3). However, as Cheng repeatedly vouches for the acceptability of such an arrangement, and also points out to Dingshan how expedient it would be to have Xiantong's assistance, he finally consents (9). After the marriage, both Xiantong and her brother leave Chessboard Mountain to help the Tang army conquer Western Liang (10).

Xue Dingshan's second wife is Chen Jinding 陳金定. Although their marriage does not conform strictly to the formula of courtship on the battlefield it contains some interesting elements absent in the Dou Xiantong story. Instead of being an adversary in battle Chen Jinding actually saves Dingshan from the clutches of the lusty queen of Western Liang. Jinding's father was originally a military officer in the Xu dynasty who, because of some mishaps, is left in the land of the barbarians to hack out a living cutting firewood. Thus Jinding is apparently very different in background from the heroines of other courtships in battle. Moreover, while other heroines are beauties, she is distinguished by an uncommon ugliness. However, when Cheng Yaojin visits the Chens the day after Jinding has rescued Dingshan, Jinding's father has the following words to say:

My daughter is the disciple of the Wudang Sage Woman (4) who had told us a couple of days ago that the young general and my daughter are predestined to be married (5). If you do not find fault with my daughter's ungainly appearance I shall send her over to your camp so that the two of them can be married.

Cheng Yaojin, the proverbial match-maker, promises to bring the affair to a happy ending (9). Thus despite Dingshan's initial protest, Xue Rengui reminds Dingshan that Jinding has saved his life and that her martial arts expertise would be invaluable to the Tang army (Variation on 7). In short, Xue Rengui exercises his parental authority and orders Dingshan to marry Jinding.

While Dou Xiantong is a pupil of an immortal there is actually no divine instruction telling her that she must marry Dingshan. In fact it is Dingshan who, having been forewarned by his immortal teacher that he would meet with his predestined wife in a barbarian land, thinks that Dou Xiantong must be that wife. In the case of Jinding, however, it is the woman who has been forewarned (as is more common in such stories). What is of particular interest here is Dingshan's refusal to marry Jinding. The reason for his refusal is not stated in the story, but it probably has more than a little to do with Jinding's ungainly appearance.¹¹ On the other hand, the reasons given by Xue Rengui in support of the marriage are clear-cut: firstly, it is Dingshan's moral obligation to repay Jinding for having saved his life (the traditional concept of *bao en* 報恩);¹² secondly, the Chens will be useful to the Tang army (i.e., pure utilitarianism). If we see the physical attraction between hero and heroine as a manifestation

11. Dingshan's reasons for objecting to marriage with Xiantong do not apply in this case, for Jinding is neither a barbarian nor an enemy, and Dingshan's father is not in danger.

12. The saying *yi shen xiang bao* 以身相報 normally refers to a woman giving herself in marriage to the man who has saved her life or her integrity. This is one of the unusual cases where the roles are reversed.

of romantic feelings,¹³ then it is obvious from the Chen Jinding episode that romantic feelings play no part in the union between the two. What is of overwhelming importance are filial piety, utilitarianism, and the idea of *bao*. The fact that Dingshan bows so easily to parental pressure in this case is an illuminating contrast to later episodes involving Fan Lihua.

As far as Han generals depicted in *yanyi* stories go, Xue Dingshan is probably one of the more gentlemanly. While other generals do not hesitate to flirt with their pretty adversaries in battle, and frequently resorts to rather vulgar words,¹⁴ Dingshan, though chauvinistic, always behaves with dignity. In fact though Dou Xiantong is a beautiful woman, her beauty is described through the eyes of Luo Tong 羅通 and other characters, while Dingshan seems to have been completely unmoved by it. It is not until he meets Fan Lihua, his true “destiny”, that he expresses secret admiration for a woman’s beauty.

The main courtship story in *Zheng xi* is that between Xue Dingshan and Fan Lihua,¹⁵ and it takes place after Dingshan’s marriage to Dou Xiantong and Chen Jinding. Lihua is the daughter of Fan Hong 樊洪 (or Prince Dingguo 定國公, a title conferred on him by the Tartar king), the general defending Cold River Fortress 寒江關 (1). After the Tang army has conquered the land east of the Cold River, they decided to cross the river to lay claim to the area west of it. It is thus Fan Hong’s duty to resist the invasion of the Song army. Fan is defeated in the battle on the river; his two sons sustain injury, and Cold River Fortress comes under siege. At this point Fan summons Lihua, who has studied under the Old Lady of Mount Li 黎山老母 (4), and asks her to cure her brothers with her magical pills (4) and help defeat the Song army. Lihua, however, has been forewarned by her immortal teacher that she is predestined to marry Xue Dingshan (5) and help him conquer the west (10). So when she promises her father and brothers to avenge their defeat, she actually has something else in mind.

Lihua is already betrothed to Yang Fan 楊藩, another Tartar general. Dissatisfied with her fiancé’s ugliness, she decides to take a look at Dingshan first, and the next day in the battlefield she asks for Dingshan by name. But it was only after she has beaten two generals from the Song army and both of Dingshan’s wives that she has the chance of telling Dingshan’s sister about her intention of marrying him. When Lihua finally sees Dingshan she is completely stricken by his good looks, and deep in his heart Dingshan marvels at Lihua’s peerless beauty (2). But Dingshan cautions himself that he already has two wives and must not harbour any evil thoughts regarding this woman (6). The first words Lihua says to Dingshan are as follows (3):

Are you Xue Dingshan? I have come on the orders of my teacher who says that we are predestined to become husband and wife (5). Though my father and brothers are barbarian

13. Indeed physical attraction seems to be the only element which can be vaguely interpreted as an aspect of “romantic love” in the relationship between the hero and the heroine in battlefield courtships.

14. A mild example in this story is in Chapter 18. When Luo Tong, a young general in the Song army, sees Dou Xiantong, he immediately tells her that she should go back to his camp and become his wife. He is of course captured by Xiantong.

There are plenty of examples of Han men lusting after the women they meet in battle in the *Shuo Tang*.

15. This occupies Chapters 28 to 45.

generals, if you would agree to our marriage, I shall tell my parents and our family will surrender and help you conquer the west (7).

To this far-from-bashful proposition Dingshan replies:

I am an upright person and a general of the great Tang Empire. Don't you even dream that I'd marry a lustful barbarian woman like you! (3)

Lihua then captures Dingshan with her magic power (4) and threatens to kill him unless he agrees to the marriage (7). In a bid to get himself released Dingshan pretends to consent (8) and swears that he would receive retribution if he were to go back on his word. When he is released he of course immediately goes back on his word and insults Lihua (8) who then uses her magic power to capture him again. This happens three times in the same day, and Dingshan is finally resigned to the marriage. When Cheng Yaojin, the proverbial match-maker, learns about Lihua's powers, he persuades Xue Rengui that this match would be to the advantage of the Tang army (9). Xue then asks Cheng to be the match-maker.

When Lihua returns to Cold River Fortress she informs her father of her engagement, justifying it with her teacher's words, and tries to persuade her father to surrender to the Tang army. Fan Hong is infuriated by her unfilial and disloyal behaviour, and draws his sword meaning to slay her, but during the struggle he falls upon her sword and dies. Her brothers rush out and draw their swords, whereupon Lihua kills both of them. Lihua then tells her distraught mother that they must bury the bodies to prevent Dingshan from knowing about this for fear that it would affect her marriage prospects. She then gives orders to surrender, and she and her mother are welcomed into the Tang camp where the wedding is to take place.

After the wedding ceremony Dingshan asks Lihua why her father and brothers are nowhere to be seen. As he is unsatisfied with her lies, she tells him the truth, whereupon Dingshan calls her disloyal and unfilial, and draws his sword to avenge her father and brothers. When the others learn about this they all say it is Dingshan's fault; Xue Rengui orders Dingshan to apologize to Lihua, saying that if she were to change her mind about surrendering no one in the Tang camp would be able to resist her military might. When Dingshan insists that he will not marry someone who has slaughtered her own father and brothers, he is beaten and thrown into prison.

Meanwhile Lihua goes to her teacher in Mount Li and is told that the obstacles to her marriage are a result of karma: She was the Jade Maiden and Dingshan the Golden Boy in the service of the Emperor of Heaven, and they were sent to earth as a punishment for harbouring romantic feelings for one another. On her way down to earth the Jade Maiden smiled at an uncommonly ugly immortal, who follows her to earth (in the form of the Tartar general Yang Fan), while the Golden Boy expressed disgust at the Jade Maiden's flirtatiousness. This is the explanation for Dingshan's dislike for Lihua.

After her visit to Mount Li, Lihua returns to her mother. Meanwhile the Tang army has started battling against another Tartar general, who not only defeats them but also captures Xue Dingshan. In a bid to rescue Dingshan Cheng Yaojin is sent to seek Lihua's help, with the promise that Dingshan will be made to recognize and consummate the marriage. When rescued, Dingshan defies his father's order and flatly refuses to take to wife one who is guilty of murdering her own kin. For this he is once more beaten and thrown into prison, until he is again needed in battle against another Tartar general who captures him. Lihua is again

persuaded to come to his rescue in the hope that he would accept her. This happens three times before Dingshan grudgingly agrees to accept her. But at the wedding ceremony Lihua's handsome adopted son (who is the same age as Dingshan) arouses Dingshan's suspicion. Thinking that he is actually Lihua's lover, Dingshan annuls the marriage. His father threatens to have him decapitated; finally he is again thrown into prison. Heart-broken, Lihua returns to her mother.

Shortly after this Xue Rengui dies (at the hands of Dingshan, who mistakes him for a white tiger) and the Tang Emperor Taizong is succeeded by Gaozong, who decides to personally head the army against the Tartars. When the Emperor passes by Cold River Fortress Lihua petitions him to do her justice and punish Dingshan. At this point Dingshan is imprisoned in the Tang army camp, soon to be executed for patricide, but he is eventually pardoned by the emperor on one condition — that he persuades Lihua to head the Tang army and defeat the Tartars. While Dingshan's status is reduced to that of a mere commoner, Lihua is made a Grand General by the Emperor. The relationship between Dingshan and Lihua is thus completely reversed, and to save his life Dingshan kowtows all the way to Cold River Fortress to beg Lihua's forgiveness. After playing tricks on Dingshan three times (thus avenging the insults she suffered in his hands), Lihua agrees to be his wife and to head the Tang army to victory. The rest of the story tells of how Lihua and Dingshan confront dangerous enemies and shatter Tartar resistance.

III

If we look at events from a neutral perspective the story takes on a very different moral colouring. In order for the hero and the heroine to arrive at the point of "living happily ever after" the heroine has to take drastic action which, though perfectly acceptable according to the *yanyi* convention, leaves most present-day readers in moral disgust. In all battlefield courtship stories the heroines are called upon to betray their country, their family and their friends, and to cast aside all moral and filial obligations in their attempt to gain favour with the man they want to marry. Such action is always put in the context of a clash between good and evil (military) forces, and the treacherous behaviour of the heroine (who forsakes the "evil" forces) is always presented in a positive light, and in no other case is the moral question more acute than in Fan Lihua's murder of her father and brothers. Of course one recognizes the fact that a positive representation of the heroines depends invariably on the use of double standards, for the heroine's behaviour would not have been condoned had she been Han.¹⁶ This balancing of immoral action against a righteous (or self-righteous) military cause leads to the following question: Are qualities such as loyalty, filial piety, justice and righteousness to be expected of all human beings, or are there different standards for men and women, for the Han and the non-Han people? A superficial reading of the story of Fan Lihua and Xue Dingshan would seem to confirm that double standards is the foundation for their

16. In cases where a Han woman warrior marries a barbarian general, it is the latter who joins the Han camp. One example from *Zheng xi* is the marriage of Dou Yihu and Xue Dingshan's sister Jinlian 金蓮.

courtship and eventual marriage, but a closer examination of the events preceding their final union suggests that there are more complex elements at play.

Up to the point when Lihua returns to Cold River Fortress to inform her father of her betrothal to Dingshan, the courtship between Lihua and Dingshan follows closely the formula for battlefield courtships; it contains more elements of the formula than the Chen Jinding and the Dou Xiantong episodes, and is therefore a more representative stereotype than the other two courtships. The story begins to deviate from the norm when Lihua's father Fan Hong refuses to surrender to the Tang army and declares his loyalty to the Tartar king who has always respected and honoured him. Fan Hong, a patriotic old "barbarian" general, is in fact a rare breed in the *yanyi* stories. Fan's counterparts in other *yanyi* stories all jump at the chance of "forsaking darkness to follow the light" 棄暗投明. But Fan's loyalty to king and country is rewarded with death at his daughter's hands and the discontinuation of his family line (both his sons are also killed by Lihua). According to conventional values the latter is probably the harshest punishment a man can meet with.

The drastic action taken by Fan Lihua and the miserable fate of her father Fan Hong are justified on two different levels in the story. First, *yanyi* stories have a convention of their own. Their world is a black-and-white one based on the storyteller's assumption and the readers' concurrence that Han is good and non-Han is evil. Under this premise Fan's loyalty and integrity are seen as stubbornness and unrepentance. In his refusal to betray his country he has become an obstacle to the advance of the Tang army, and as such must be disposed of. Everyone in the Tang camp (with the exception of Dingshan) considers Lihua's action unreproachable because it is to their benefit and therefore to the benefit of all involved. Patricide is an unforgivable sin because it is the most serious violation of the moral imperative *xiao* 孝 (filial piety). However, according to conventional *yanyi* morality, the only kind of creditable loyalty is that towards the Han emperors, and since, through patricide, Lihua makes a deliberate choice to serve the Han cause, her behaviour can be forgiven because it demonstrates her "loyalty". This is the reason (though unspoken) why all the Han characters except Dingshan do not find Lihua guilty of any moral or temporal sin. From their point of view it is acceptable for Lihua to commit a small act of evil in order to achieve common good for all. (The Tang army of course believes that conquering barbarian land is not only good for the Tang dynasty, it is also good for the barbarians.) A Chinese saying describes this attitude succinctly: Those who aspire to achieving great deeds must overlook the small irregularities 成大事者不拘小節. Lihua's elimination of her father and brothers is just an example of such "irregularities". The second justification functions on the supernatural level: Lihua and Dingshan are destined to marry, and whoever stands in the way of this marriage must be got rid of. From what the Old Lady of Mount Li tells Lihua, we know that the reincarnation of the Golden Boy (Dingshan) must despise the reincarnation of the Jade Maiden (Lihua), and having her kill her own kin is as good a way of occasioning his disgust as any. If we look at the murders from this angle, Lihua's father and brothers are but instruments in the fulfilment of her destiny; their deaths are part of the divine scheme of things and the blame cannot be placed on Lihua.

In most *yanyi* stories the two justifications listed above are accepted by protagonists and readers alike as adequate, and therefore the heroine's action would have been condoned. But this is not the case in *Zheng xi*, where there is a strong undercurrent of opposing views.

Zheng xi is a rare case in *yanyi* stories in that there is actually a number of people (though a very small number) who apply the same moral standards to Han and non-Han characters.¹⁷ Fan Hong and his sons perceive themselves and their relationship to king and country in the same way as any Han general in *yanyi* stories does; they share the same moral qualities of integrity and loyalty as their Han counterparts, though in their case they are punished rather than rewarded. Even when Fan Hong draws his sword on Lihua he is exercising the same sort of right which a Han general would consider himself entitled to: a parent demanding obedience from his child, a superior demanding loyalty from his subordinate. It is exactly the sort of feelings which induce Xue Rengui to threaten to kill Dingshan when the latter refuses to marry Lihua.

The impression that Fan Hong is morally correct and therefore Lihua morally guilty is reinforced by Dingshan's refusal to marry her. If everyone in the Tang camp as well as Lihua's mother and subordinates are willing to overlook Fan Lihua's guilt, why should Xue Dingshan so stubbornly refuse to accept her as his wife? It is because Xue Dingshan does not subscribe to the utilitarian moral conventions and is unwilling to overlook the fact that Lihua has "killed her father unintentionally and her brothers intentionally" 無心弑父，有意殺兄. Just as Lihua is the first heroine to perform the ultimate act of rebellion against family and country,¹⁸ Dingshan is the first hero to withstand parental wrath and refuse to marry his

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17. An illustrative comparison can be made with the courtship between Princess Tu Lu 屠墟公主 and Luo Tong in *Sao bei*. Luo swears a false oath of love to the Princess to secure her help in conquering her own country, but later refuses to marry her because she is responsible for the death of his nine-year-old brother Luo Ren 羅仁. Cheng Yaojin, their match-maker, tries to convince Luo that he cannot abide by two conflicting moral imperatives, that though in refusing to marry the Princess he may be fulfilling his duties to his brother (*yi* 義), he will be going back on his words as a gentleman (*bu xin* 不信). Cheng then goes to the Emperor, who decrees that Luo Tong should indeed marry the Princess. However, on their wedding night Luo accuses the Princess of grave violation of filial piety and loyalty while excusing himself from the demands of *xin*. Shamed and enraged, the Princess kills herself, swearing revenge on Luo Tong. This story is interesting in that though the hero judges the heroine according to established Han moral codes, he exempts himself from similar judgement. Moreover, his accusations that the Princess was disloyal and unfilial are but secondary objections; the main reason for his hatred of her is the death of his brother at her hands. Thus, Xue Dingshan's accusations of Lihua seem to be much more altruistic in comparison.
18. Another famous example of Han treachery and the "barbarian" heroine's neglect of moral and filial duties is in the *Shuo Tang*. When Mu Guiying's 穆桂英 fortress is burnt down and her family and clansmen slaughtered by the followers of her (Han) betrothed, her anger and desire for revenge are quickly pacified by the words of one of her followers, who advises her that what is lost is lost, but if she joins the Tang troops she has a lot to gain. This incident is typical of the ordinary "barbarian" heroine's betrayal of country and family: she is guilty of condoning the sins of her lover, but not guilty of the sins herself. One could argue that Mu Guiying arrives at her decision to forgive and forget through practical (as well as romantic) considerations. After all even if she had killed all the enemy generals there was no way she could revive her family. With Fan Lihua the case is completely different. She is the only one guilty of murder, and she is the one who hushes everyone up after the fact. In a strange reversal of positions Xue Dingshan, her betrothed, refuses to forgive her. (The most usual way of achieving an alliance with the Hans was of course in successfully persuading the heroine's father/brother to surrender to the Han. No bloodshed is involved.)

“barbarian” heroine on moral grounds.¹⁹ Whereas our run-of-the-mill hero often objects to the match when it is first proposed by the heroine, the objection is always based on the grounds that 1) a Han should not condescend to marry a barbarian; 2) he cannot marry without the consent of his parents and his superiors. In this case, however, the match is approved of not only by Xue Rengui, Dingshan’s parent and superior, but by everyone in the Tang camp. Dingshan’s objection is purely moral — he will not marry a woman who has killed her own father and brothers. If we take into consideration the fact that Dingshan has married twice before under similar circumstances (i.e., accepting his father’s decision on what is good for him and the army rather than acting on his own), we must come to the conclusion that Lihua’s case is indeed significantly different from Dingshan’s previous marriages in that she is in a morally repugnant position. The only way he can overlook her crime is for him to acknowledge the validity of the other characters’ moral standard, and this he refuses to do.

One must of course acknowledge the fact that Dingshan’s refusal to marry Lihua is a key element to the story, that without his stubborn refusal the story will be much shorter and much less colourful.²⁰ Thus in all probability the storyteller was only looking for a dramatic effect when he introduced elements which we would now consider a challenge to standard *yanyi* morality. The effect of a story, particularly in terms of its moral implication to a later generation, can be very different from what its author intended it to be, and *Zheng xi* is probably one such case, for in this story the hero does face a clash of moral imperatives. Should he subdue his sense of justice to serve the demands of filial piety and loyalty (that is what marrying Lihua amounts to)? And if he is loyal and filial, does he not have the right to expect his wife to possess the same qualities regardless of her race?

And this is precisely what makes Xue Dingshan interesting: here is a *yanyi* hero expressing a modern, humanistic view of morality. His “stubbornness” in refusing to marry Lihua demonstrates that he stands opposed to and therefore calls into question:

19. C. T. Hsia argues in “The Military Romance” that Dingshan rejects Lihua not because of her moral transgressions but because she is a far superior warrior, and thus a threat to his ego. Hsia further argues that the intense paternal pressure on Dingshan also arouses his resentment and thus reinforces his stubborn rejection of Lihua. While this argument is convincingly based on our common understanding of human psychology, events in *Zheng xi* suggests that it is at most a subconscious reason. Readers must remember that Dingshan’s first wife Dou Xiantong is also a better warrior than him, that he was also captured by her in battle. But once he is convinced by Cheng Yaojin that the match is morally acceptable as well as expedient the marriage went ahead smoothly. Similarly, when Dingshan reveals his reluctance to marry his second wife Chen Jinding, pressure from Xue Rengui (also arguing that the marriage is both morally correct and practically advantageous) induces Dingshan to immediate consent. One can of course argue that it is precisely because these previous incidents have given rise to an accumulation of resentment in Dingshan that he wants to vent by rejecting Lihua, but there is no indication in the story that he is anything but happy in his marriage with his first two wives. Rather than stretching the psychological thread, I propose to stick to events as narrated in the story.

20. As Hsia points out in “The Military Romance”, authors of later *yanyi* fiction have a tendency to increase the complexity of the major constituent elements in the stories. Thus, military mazes (or *zhen* 陣) and magic weapons all become more and more powerful. The romantic element is also subject to the same tendency in its development.

1) the established moral hierarchy and definitions of virtue of the *yanyi* world; and 2) the Machiavellian virtue of “tolerating unquestionable wrong to secure the services of eminent ability”.²¹ Xue Dingshan, very much a modern moralist placed in the *yanyi* world, faces a unique dilemma because his own moral imperatives clash with those of his times.

IV

What makes such a potentially interesting story flat is that the characterization is completely lacking in depth. This is probably the reason why C. T. Hsia sees no serious struggle between passion and honour in this story, and considers the courtship between Lihua and Dingshan a sort of comedy of manners.²² The two main characters, Lihua and Dingshan, are placed in situations which should entail the most difficult moral dilemmas, and yet in the story they never really *experience* any such dilemma. In the case of Lihua in particular her grief at having slaughtered her own kin is remarkably short-lived. All her considerations are practical — how to hide the fact from her prospective husband and in-laws; how to secure her own position in the Tang army. Her only kind words to her mother are that she will be cared for, on the condition that she cooperates with Lihua to hide the truth from the Tang camp. Even when confronted by Dingshan with the enormity of her crime she shows absolutely no remorse. This is what Lihua says to Dou Xiantong after Dingshan draws his sword on her on the wedding night:

“He said that I had murdered my father and my brothers and he was going to kill me. Don’t you think I should be angry?”

Lihua’s frustration and her grief are simply a result of not getting the man she wants. The fact that she brings the whole case before the Tang Emperor and tries her best to punish and humiliate Dingshan when she is in a position to do so shows that in her opinion, Dingshan’s reason for refusing to marry her has no justification at all. Since Lihua subscribes completely to the double standards inherent in *yanyi* stories, she is not capable of experiencing any moral dilemma.

As for Xue Dingshan, the case should have been somewhat different. Here is a young dashing general betrothed to an attractive barbarian woman (we must remember that Lihua is the only woman in the whole story whom Dingshan finds physically attractive). In this marriage he has the blessing of his parents and superiors. He then finds out that the woman does not live up to his ideals: She has committed the gravest crimes because of him. Dingshan’s moral indignation is of course justified, but his subsequent action undermines his high moral standing: Twice when the Tang army, and particularly his own life, is in danger he agrees to forgive Lihua and marry her on the condition that she comes to his rescue. She does,

21. This is a quote from J. A. Froude’s essay on “Reynard the Fox”, collected in his *Essays in Literature and History*. There are some superficial similarities between moral questions posed by Reynard and Lihua, but ultimately the two stories are on different planes: in Froude’s words, Reynard is “a conscious hypocrite”, whereas the characters in (and the authors of) *yanyi* stories have no idea that they are hypocrites at all.

22. Hsia, pp. 377–378.

but he rejects her again nonetheless. In *yanyi* stories, Han generals are as a rule not very good at keeping their word (a fact that helps the storytellers to provide the necessary complications and diversions in the story line), but Xue Dingshan's case is one of the most extreme. His far more lenient judgement of himself in effect points to another set of double standards and raises another important question: Do the morally guilty such as Lihua deserve to be treated with honesty? There is no arguing that Dingshan has undermined his own integrity by lying repeatedly to Lihua.

But we all know that *yanyi* stories are not supposed to be about moral dilemmas, and so a solution must be found to resolve the clash of moral imperatives. Here the storyteller falls back on the tried and trusted formula of predestination, or the Will of Heaven. After all, even when a subject rises in revolt against his emperor (an undeniable violation of loyalty, the ultimate virtue) and succeeds to replace him, the usurpation becomes a legitimate "succession" because it is in accordance with the Will of Heaven; the usurper is merely fulfilling his destiny. Thus, when the storyteller imposes predestination as the highest imperative in the story, the action and responses of each and every character is seen to be in the service of this imperative, and the demands of all other virtues can be conveniently negated or ignored.

Predestination is an unquestionable solution because it is on a different, a higher plane. However, if we examine this solution more closely, we would realize that while the storyteller is in a position to absolve his characters of any moral responsibility on the grounds that their actions are predestined, the characters themselves are normally not aware of this.²³ Thus, while the readers are invited to judge the characters on the higher plane of predestination, the characters themselves still have to rely on their own ethical standards in judging themselves and others. For this reason, we can say that despite the intervention of predestination, the dilemma of Xue Dingshan remains, for he is unaware of his relationship to Lihua in their previous incarnation.

V

The story seems to have come to an impasse here, for Dingshan seems to have decided that whatever favours, or *en* 恩, Lihua does him cannot cancel out her one major crime. At this point, however, the plot takes a sudden twist: Xue Dingshan kills his own father by mistake.²⁴ From Dingshan's earlier vehemence towards Lihua, the reader would expect this event to have a great emotional impact on the hero. Yet true to *yanyi* fashion, we are only told that Dingshan is to be executed. We do not know whether he condemns himself for the death of his father as severely as he has condemned Lihua for the death of hers; what we do know

23. Lihua (and many other heroines of battleship courtships) has indeed been told by her immortal teacher that she would marry Dingshan, but even she is not told of the sacrifices involved. It is thus doubtful whether Lihua can justify to herself while she slaughters her brothers that to do so is her destiny. In the case of Dingshan, it is of course impossible for him to fall back on predestination as a justification for his conscious decisions.

24. Xue Rengui, the reincarnation of a White-Tiger-Spirit, reverts to his spiritual form while he is resting after an exhaustive battle. Dingshan spots the white tiger and kills it with an arrow.

is that he does not want to die. In the end, under orders from the Emperor, Dingshan effects a complete change and kowtows all the way to Lihua's fortress. When he learns of her (feigned) death his grief is apparently genuine. Although everything works out in the end and they are happily married, no mention is again made of the death of his or her father.

The death of Xue Rengui, like that of Fan Hong and his sons, can be interpreted as part of the divine scheme of things. After all, the idea of karma plays a significant part in the *yanyi* stories related to the Xue family.²⁵ However, if we put aside any supernatural considerations, Dingshan's unintentional killing of Xue Rengui takes on important psychological significance: it is the only act which can put Dingshan on the same footing as Lihua. On the one hand Dingshan, himself guilty of patricide, loses his sense of moral superiority and is no longer in a position to condemn Lihua for the murder of her father. On the other hand, having gone through a similar experience as Lihua,²⁶ he probably feels more sympathetic towards her.

Psychological complexities of this nature are of course not described in the story: we are only told of Dingshan's change of attitude; we are not told "why". But the fact that neither filial piety nor loyalty can induce Dingshan to overlook Lihua's patricide, that Xue Rengui's death appears to be the only possible way out of the impasse, is perhaps illustrative of the way *Xue Dingshan zheng xi* differs from other *yanyi* battlefield courtships. Though the characterization is flat and the story still relies heavily on double moral standards and superstition, the introduction of parallel experiences between the hero and the heroine brings a new element into play. Moreover, the moral issues and moral dilemma in this story are created as a result of a basic deviation from the *yanyi* norm: No other barbarian heroine has ever been faced with the need to choose between family and lover, let alone between patricide and marriage.²⁷ The Fan Lihua story pushes the moral dilemma created by double standards to its limit, and to the modern day reader, the death of Xue Rengui serves a darker

25. There is, for example, an underlying antagonism in the relationship between Xue Rengui and Dingshan because the latter is destined to kill the former. In the third generation of the Xue family, Xue Gang, the son of Dingshan and Lihua, is said to be the reincarnation of Lihua's fiance Yang Fan whom she kills in battle at the birth of Xue Gang. Thus Xue Gang finally causes the downfall and nearly the annihilation of the Xue family because as the reincarnation of Yang Fan he is destined to seek revenge on his parents. Besides the supernatural element, there is of course also the idea of *bao ying* 報應: since Lihua and Dingshan have both killed their fathers, they must repay this debt. It is therefore fitting that their family should perish because of their son's misdeeds. Lihua, however, is saved by her immortal teacher at the last minute. The story stresses the supernatural element rather than the idea of *bao*.

The idea that Yang Fan, a barbarian general, should be given a chance to avenge himself (albeit in another life) is also a rare divergence from the *yanyi* norm. This in fact amounts to at least a partial recognition that Yang Fan has been wronged and deserves his revenge. Thus, behind the screen of supernatural intervention lies another subtle challenge to the convention of double standards perpetuated by the *yanyi* stories.

26. From a totally objective point of view, the exoneration of Lihua cannot be complete because there is a difference between her position and that of Dingshan's. Although they both kill their fathers by mistake, Lihua is still guilty (according to the Han moral standards) of murdering her brothers and betraying her country. However, at this point Dingshan must conveniently forget about such differences or else the author will not be able to continue with the story.

27. Even in the case of Mu Guiying as discussed in note 18 the choice is made for her because her family is already killed. Her only choice is whether to avenge their death or not.

function than a mere element of destiny. In employing the kind of double standards customarily found in *yanyi* stories of this type, and in attempting to provide a more complicated story line, the storyteller is drawn unwittingly into a moral predicament of which he himself is probably unaware.

Zheng xi is thus unique among *yanyi* stories in that it follows the formula for battlefield courtships while at the same time calling into question the validity of the conventional morality of the *yanyi* world. The conflicting view of Lihua as represented by Dingshan's opinion on the one hand and that of other members of the Tang army on the other forces the reader to acknowledge the existence of, and therefore to question, such double standards. Though *Zheng xi* is still a *yanyi* story written in the conventional style, in which the hero and the heroine manages to "live happily ever after", its overtures of psychological and moral insights seem to provide an answer to our question: while barbarian heroines can literally get away with murder, let alone disloyalty and unfilial behaviour, their actions do not always go unchallenged. One is left with the impression that though double standards are the norm and are accepted by most storytellers and their readers as good enough explanations for the questionable behaviour of the heroine, there is nevertheless a slightly discordant note. Have Dingshan and Lihua finally found happiness because of the triumph of double standards, or is it because one murder cancels out another?

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樊梨花與薛丁山：「陣上招親」的變奏

(中文摘要)

孔慧怡

明清的演義故事裏經常出現「陣上招親」的情節，而且多由女方主動。本文試以《說唐征西三傳》裏薛丁山分別與寶仙童、陳金定及樊梨花結成的三段陣上姻緣，探討演義故事裏構成「陣上招親」的各種原素及其涉及的道德問題。

《說唐征西三傳》記述薛丁山與樊梨花陣上相遇，經過多番波折，最後終成眷屬，手法與一般演義故事無異，但所牽涉的道德問題卻比其他演義故事複雜。樊梨花為薛丁山弑父殺兄而遭薛丁山休棄，因為薛丁山認為這是不忠不孝，極不道德的行為；軍中其他人卻認為樊梨花並無過錯。本文就薛丁山與樊梨花兩人關係發展的變化，深入剖析這個故事如何挑戰一般演義故事常見的雙重道德標準，又如何化解這項挑戰造成的死結。

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