

Narrative *daoqing*, the Legend of Han Xiangzi, and the Good Life in the *Han Xiangzi jiudu* *Wengong daoqing quanben*

Wilt L. Idema

Abstract

The legend of Han Xiangzi's conversion of his uncle Han Yu is one of the most popular subjects of narrative *daoqing* since the emergence of the genre in the 16th century. Two narrative *daoqing* on the legend of Han Xiangzi are identified. *Han Xiangzi's Twelffold Conversion of Han Yu: Indigo Pass* (*Han Xiangzi shierdu Han Wengong Languan ji* 韓湘子十二度韓文公藍關記) is only preserved in Japan. It tells its story in an alternation of prose and seven-syllable verse. This text served as one of the sources of Yang Erzeng's novel *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan*, and therefore most likely dates from the 16th century or even earlier. The better known *Newly composed daoqing on Han Xiangzi's Ninefold Conversion of Han Yu* (*Xinbian Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing* 新編韓湘子九度文公道情) is only preserved in editions of the 19th century and later. It tells

Wilt L. Idema (b. 1944) obtained his doctorate at Leiden University, where he taught from 1970 till 1999. From 2000 till 2013, he was Professor of Chinese Literature at Harvard University. Most of his research has been focused on Chinese vernacular literature from the late-imperial period, including fiction, drama, and narrative ballads. One of his areas of interest is the interaction between Chinese religion and popular literature. Some of his recent publications are *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives on Guanyin and her Acolytes* (2008); *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang* (with Beata Grant, 2011); *The Resurrected Skeleton: from Zhuangzi to Lu Xun* (2014), and *The Immortal Maiden Equal to Heaven and Other Precious Scrolls from Western Gansu* (2015).

its story in an alternation of prose and song (among the songs the tune Shuanghai'er stands out for its prominence). The text most likely dates from the early Qing. In order to fully understand the difference in content between these two narrative *daoqing* and the early versions of the legend up to the end of the Song dynasty, it is argued, one has to understand the role of the dramatic genres of the intervening period in shaping the narrative: whereas *zaju* preferred a three-step conversion in its deliverance plays, southern drama (*xiwen* and *chuanqi*) required the presence on stage of female characters alongside the male protagonists. In the *Han Xiangzi's Ninefold Conversion of Han Yu: The Story of Rising to the Immortal Realm* (*Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong Shengxian ji* 韓湘子九渡文公昇仙記 (the only surviving Ming dynasty dramatic version of the legend, most likely preserved because of its suitability for performance in the context of rain-making rituals), Han Yu's wife and Xiangzi's bride suddenly occupy major roles. As a result, these two female characters become increasingly prominent in the *daoqing* adaptations, and especially the *Newly composed daoqing on Han Xiangzi's Ninefold Conversion of Han Yu* makes an effort to integrate these two characters into the plot: in its final four chapters two chapters are devoted to the final conversion of Han Yu and two to the final conversion of Xiangzi's bride. The final section of the paper is devoted the images of the transcendental pleasures of the life of the immortals in Xiangzi's appeals to his uncle, his aunt and his bride in his successive efforts to convert them.

Keywords: Han Xiangzi, narrative *daoqing*, *Han Xiangzi's Twelfefold Conversion of Han Yu: Indigo Pass* (*Han Xiangzi shi'erdu Han Wengong Languan ji*), *Newly composed daoqing on Han Xiangzi's Ninefold Conversion of Han Yu* (*Xinbian Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong daoqing*), *Han Xiangzi's Ninefold Conversion of Han Yu: The Story of Rising to the Immortal Realm* (*Han Xiangzi jiudu Wengong Shengxian ji*)