BEREZKIN MANY FACES of MULIAN

ROSTISLAV BEREZKIN

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THE PRECIOUS SCROLLS OF LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

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Rostislav Berezkin

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FOREWORD
by Victor H. Mair

From relative obscurity half a century ago, *baojuan* ("precious scrolls") have emerged to become a major focus of interest and investigation among scholars of Chinese popular religious literature of the last millennium. This is the result primarily of five major scholars of this genre: Sawada Mizuho, Daniel Overmyer, Che Xilun, Wilt L. Idema, and Rostislav Berezkin. The first three scholars introduced *baojuan* as a subject deserving of serious study, described the basic corpus and its development through history, and presented newly discovered materials. Idema translated many texts of *baojuan* into English. The fifth scholar, Berezkin, takes up where the others have left off and brings *baojuan* studies to an exciting new pinnacle of sophistication and exactitude.

Among the previously inadequately explored territories that Berezkin is opening up or expanding are the religious dimensions of the texts, the social and literary implications of the genre, and, above all, the performative aspects of these prosimetric works.

The earlier researchers have investigated the religious associations of *baojuan*, but Berezkin goes deeper into the relationship between *baojuan* and specific scriptures and noncanonical sources. He also adroitly illuminates the function of *baojuan* in the religious life and thought of Buddhist believers.

Despite their wide circulation, especially in the middle and lower levels of society, the role of *baojuan* in the development of the literary tradition, both sectarian and secular, has not been delineated sufficiently clearly. In this volume and in his other, closely linked publications, Berezkin shows how *baojuan* fit into a lengthy process of evolution that comprises sūtras and sūtra-explanation texts (*jiangjingwen*),

transformation texts (*bianwen*), tales of causation (*yinyuan*, *yuanqi*, Skt. *avadāna*, *nidāna*), and dramatic works.

Above all, what Berezkin does uniquely is document the performative features of *baojuan*, both historically and in contemporary settings. Most exciting, Berezkin goes into the field, down to the countryside, as it were, and records how *baojuan* are presented to the faithful today. This ethnographic dimension of Berezkin's investigations is completely unprecedented for *baojuan* and is scarcely to be encountered for any other type of Chinese popular religious literature that has deep roots in history.

This is the first research project on Chinese popular Buddhist literature that introduces the methods of folklore studies as an integral component of its overall design. This is a most welcome side effect of Berezkin's research on *baojuan*, for only in this way can studies of Chinese popular Buddhist genres be incorporated into the wider world of popular and folk literature outside of China.

On a quite different vector, Berezkin is unique in the detailed attention that he pays to formulaic, codicological, and linguistic characteristics of *baojuan*. Such empirical data are valuable for assessing the actual social and literary nature of *baojuan*.

Another signal contribution of Berezkin's book that sets it apart from previous studies is its sensitivity to women's issues. In a sense, Berezkin may be said to be in the vanguard of those scholars of popular religious literature who consider with utmost seriousness issues of gender.

Berezkin's research also has significance for literacy studies in that it reveals degrees of literacy and orality that cannot be accurately reflected in a simple binary of literate versus illiterate or oral versus written.

Particularly during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), but even before then, *baojuan* performance was suppressed, the production of *baojuan* scrolls was prohibited, and existing manuscripts were confiscated and destroyed. Berezkin's investigations show unmistakably that somehow or other—though it may have lain dormant for decades—the tradition of *baojuan* production and recitation survived through countless political and ideological vicissitudes. I personally am much heartened by the perduring quality of folk and popular culture in the face of official opposition.

In the early 1980s, I traveled extensively in the Gansu/Hexi corridor, where many of the recently recovered *baojuan* were found. This

was just after the slight relaxation of the anti-religious proscription of the preceding decades. The owners of *baojuan* in remote towns would approach me (the lone foreigner in the region in those days) and show me their collections of forbidden, hidden *baojuan* texts. I carefully noted the titles and other pertinent information about these scrolls in the possession of the country folk. How tremendously gratifying it has been that—during the last thirty or so years—most of the hitherto unknown scrolls whose existence I recorded have now been published, studied, and in some cases translated by Berezkin and his fellow researchers.

Another facet of Berezkin's scholarship, especially as it is embodied in this monograph, that is thrilling for me is the fact that—although his vision ranges far and wide—Berezkin keeps his eye on the story of Mulian (Skt. Maudgalyāyana) rescuing his mother from hell. Not only is this story among my own favorites in the whole of Chinese literature, it has been one of the most treasured narratives for countless generations of Chinese devotees of this ultra-filial Buddhist saint, even those who are not practicing religious Buddhists per se.

If we trace the story of Mulian back to its Indian roots, where he was known as Maudgalyāyana or Moggallāna (Pali), we learn that he is one of the best loved of the Buddha's disciples, revered for his firm devotion and supernatural powers. Furthermore, Mulian, the Buddhist saint is thoroughly domesticated and assimilated as a Chinese filial hero. Thus it is entirely fitting that the author has chosen the Mulian story as the quintessential representative of the entire genre.

The manuscript tradition for the Mulian *baojuan* and related genres in China is particularly rich. Berezkin masterfully tracks down dozens of different editions and variants that appeared during the six-century period of his purview. What he does with this abundant assemblage of data is not merely to catalogue or even to describe them (although he does that too). Rather, Berezkin analyzes and interprets the data in ways that help us better understand how *baojuan* served as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural verities and religious truths.

It is my great pleasure to write this foreword for Rostislav Berezkin's impressive opus. It affords an excellent vantage for viewing the superlative documentation and striking insights of a young Sinologist of the twenty-first century. At the same time, it will make all of us wiser about precisely what the Chinese popular religion tradition consists of and how it serves as a complement to the elite Chinese tradition that is so much better known. Moreover, beyond providing such

an enormous amount of knowledge about the Chinese performative tradition of *baojuan*, Berezkin skillfully compares and contrasts it with relevant manifestations of folk and popular literature elsewhere in the world, thus enabling us to understand and appreciate both better. For all of these reasons, *Many Faces of Mulian* is a pathbreaking achievement that will irrevocably transform the field of Chinese popular Buddhist literature studies.

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PROLOGUE: MULIAN *BAOJUAN* IN JINGJIANG

My first experience with live *baojuan* (precious scrolls)[1] performance was also the most memorable. April 13, 2009, was a rainy and misty day in the village of Xinhua in Xieqiao township of Jingjiang city, Jiangsu, on the northern bank of the Yangzi River. Typical of late spring in the Yangzi delta, the weather was already warm and comfortable.

With the help of local cultural workers, whom I had contacted on the recommendation of Duàn Baolin, a professor emeritus of the Chinese Language Department of Peking University and a friend of one of my teachers in Russia, I was able to witness a performance of a *baojuan* text about Mulian in a private house, a rare occasion nowadays and a fortunate opportunity for me. Being primarily trained as a student of texts of this performative tradition, I was fascinated to listen to their recitation by the folk performers. As I had learned in Russia, these recitations still took place in different areas of China. Now *baojuan* are designated as a part of the "intangible cultural heritage" of the country, so the value of these performative traditions is officially acknowledged by the state, and the events have become more and more open compared to the time of religious persecutions during 1950–1980s. They still represent archaic storytelling, mainly dealing with religious themes, the style of which can be traced to the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties; and they are based on the stories taken from the written scripts. Nevertheless, few scholars, especially Westerners, have been able to witness these performances in their natural setting.

The tradition of Jingjiang, known locally as "telling scriptures" (*jiangjing*), is unusual in many respects. Originally it must have been part of the performance art of *baojuan* recitation that was widespread

in the southern part of Jiangsu, or to use the poetic Chinese name for this region, "the lands to the south of the Yangzi River" (Jiangnan). The majority of old settlers of the Jingjiang area (originally an island in the Yangzi) came from the southern bank and apparently brought with them many old traditions of Jiangnan. Even the dialect used in telling scriptures, called "the old bank speech" (*lao'an hua*), belongs to the Wu group of dialects (or "topolects")[2] that are spread in the areas south of Yangzi and is different from language of neighboring areas of Jingjiang on the northern bank that belong to the city of Taizhou.

However, telling scriptures in Jingjiang today differs from the performance traditions of the areas to the south. The most important difference concerns the use of text in performance: while many other old traditions of *baojuan* recitation in Jiangsu as well as in northern China employ written texts (either printed copies or manuscripts) as performance scripts, storytellers of Jingjiang, known by the name of Buddhist disciples (*fotou*, lit., "the Buddha's head"), mainly present oral versions of traditional stories, which do not have the fixed texts and are re-created each time by the performers. The emergence of this form of performance is usually explained by the influence of other genres of storytelling art in neighboring areas, most prominently *tanci* (plucking lyrics; *chantefable*) and *pinghua* (expository tales) of the Suzhou and Yangzhou city areas.[3] Apparently many "secular" subjects of telling scriptures (*caojuan*, "grass scrolls") were borrowed from these other types of storytelling. Nevertheless, telling scriptures remains a ritualized art, taking place during religious assemblies, now organized mostly in private houses, at what are known as family assemblies (*jiahui*).

When we arrived at the house of the sponsors of the religious assembly, around 8:00 a.m., everything had already been prepared for the performance of telling scriptures. On that day a telling scriptures in the house of the Wang family took place on the occasion of the anniversary of the lady of the house, aged seventy-three, called the "assembly of prolonging life" (*yanshenghui*) after the purpose of the assembly, or "assembly of Guanyin" (*Guanyinhui*) after the main text performed during it. Both of her sons, who were workers in the nearby factory, her daughters-in-law, and her grandchildren, as well as other distant relatives, were present. Their participation, required by custom, served as an expression of their respect (filial piety) toward an old couple. Besides these, many neighbors and friends of the family participated, which contributed to the general joyous atmosphere of the event.

Figure P.01. Altar used for telling pictures in Jingjiang, 2009. Photo by the author.

Three performers—*fotou*—participated in the assembly. The leading performer, responsible for most of the rituals, was a relatively young *fotou*, Liu Zhengkun (b. 1962), who is a famous representative of Jingjiang tradition. Early in the morning they set up "the room for telling scriptures" (*jingtang*) with the altar for deities in the central hall (living room) of this modernized, three-story rural building. A permanent altar with the images of the whole local pantheon, called "sacred images" (*shengxiang*), painted on glass with a modern technique (located on the wall opposite to the entrance from the village street), was used for arranging small icons of deities, called "paper horses" (*zhima*), who were invited to assist the assembly. These icons, together with "the dipper [lamp]" (*xingdou*, also known as "the votive lamp"), four candles, three incense burners, statues of Bodhisattva Guanyin and the God of Wealth, the tablet representing ancestors of the host family, paper flowers, and numerous offerings to the deities (all vegetarian), were placed on the special narrow table standing

in front of the altar. "The dipper [lamp]"—the wooden bucket filled with rice and decorated with several ritual implements, representing the stars of the Northern Dipper, which govern a person's destiny—is a common device in different ritual traditions of China, including Daoist services in its southeastern areas.[4]

While the altar represented the presence of deities, telling scriptures in honor of them took place around a big table, called the "scriptures stand" (*jingtai*), placed against the right wall of the hall, thus closer to the main entrance of the room. *Fotou* together with the chorus sat around that table. That table was decorated with the images of deities, painted on a small screen, known as the "dragon placard" (*longpai*), as well as with bunches of paper flowers (all prepared by the old women who participated in the assembly). Big red candles were lit, and smoke from incense burners, also placed on that table, was swirling in the air, thus creating the mystical and solemn atmosphere of the sacred assembly. The assembly started at 8:00 a.m. with the recitation of a text on "bowing with the vow" (*bai yuan*) and recitation of Buddhist prayers (*nian gongke*). Then the leading performer, standing in front of the altar, invited the deities with a special text, called *Gāthā on Invitation of Buddhas* (Qing fo ji). Only then did the performer start the narrative of the "sacred scrolls" (*shengjuan*), which in that case included *Baojuan of Guanyin* (Guanyin baojuan), *Baojuan of the Great Saint* (Dasheng baojuan), and *Baojuan of Zitong* (Zitong baojuan). All these texts narrate the stories of deities especially venerated in Jingjiang: Bodhisattva Guanyin, Great Saint (a Buddhist monk), and Lord Zitong (or Lord Wenchang [Wenchang dijun]).[5] At the beginning of the performance of the main narrative text, performers in Jingjiang sing four lines of "sacred words" (*shengyu*) and invoke "three friends" (Confucius, Laozi, and Buddha) and four mercies (Heaven and Earth, sun and moon, water and soil, and both parents), which constitute a ritual introduction to *baojuan* texts.[6]

Telling scriptures alternates the recitation of prose parts with the singing of verses typical of *baojuan* texts.[7] The prose part is narrated with different voice "registers" that create the lively descriptions and dramatic dialogues. As for the poetic parts of the text, the *fotou* sing them with different melodies, which are also related to different meters of the verse. The most common melodies are those of "plain tune" (*pingdiao*), used for the seven-syllable verse, "ten-syllable verse" (*han shizi*), and an aria of "Wearing the Golden Lock" (Gua jin suo), with their different modifications. These melodies are

Figure P.02. "Scripture hall" during the "extending longevity" meeting in Jingjiang, 2009. Photo by the author.

traditional, originating from the music of *baojuan* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Only percussion instruments—wooden fish (*muyu*, a sort of small drum), clapper (*qipai*), and small bell (*lingyu*)—are used for accompaniment; this constitutes the archaic form of *baojuan* music in southern Jiangsu, called "recitation with the wooden [fish] accompaniment." A set refrain, known as "echoing the Buddha's name" (*hefo*), forms a peculiar feature of *baojuan* music. At the moment the performer finishes each second (rhymed) line of verse, the chorus sings the last syllable in the line together with the storyteller and chants the name of Buddha Amitābha: "Homage to Buddha Amitābha!" (Namo Amituo Fo); different forms of refrain are used. In Jingjiang, usually pious old women (six to eight during the "family assembly") who are familiar with the story and manner of performance form the chorus. Chorus members are also engaged in the preparation of ritual paraphernalia—ritual money (made of foil) and paper flowers—right at the time of performance. They also form the primary audience of performance, as they are constantly present during recitation.

During the assembly on April 13, recitation of major narrative texts, interspersed with the rituals of worshiping deities, took the whole day (with intermissions for lunch and late dinner). After dinner the worship

of the deities of the underworld, who judge a person's soul in the afterlife and decide on its future rebirth, started. This ceremony took most of the night. It started with the recitation of *Baojuan of Li Qing* (Li Qing baojuan, alternatively called *Baojuan of Repaying Ancestors* [Bao zü baojuan]) dealing with the journey of an ordinary person in the underworld and introducing the Ten Kings of Hell and rituals of their worship. Then the performers recited *Baojuan of the Ten Kings* (Shi wang baojuan), which included rituals of asking pardon for the host's soul, called "sacrifices to the [Ten Halls]" (*jiao dian*). Ritual money and special "memorials [of pardon]" (*diewen*) were burned for every king of hell, while descendants together with the *fotou* were praying for the salvation of their elders. Only at 4:00 a.m., just before dawn, did the performance of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* (Xuehu baojuan), the local variant of *Baojuan of Mulian* (Mulian Baojuan), start.

Performance of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* is related to traditional Chinese beliefs about the physiological impurity of women: because they pollute water and soil with menstrual and childbirth blood, they are predestined to suffer in the underground Blood Pond after death. Special rituals conducted by pious descendants are required to rescue a mother of the family from afterlife torments. Recitation of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* in Jingjiang is a local variant of the ritual of the "breaking of the Blood Pond" (*po xuehu*) in modern religious traditions of China. It enacts the salvation of a mother by descendants, who follow the example of pious monk Mulian rescuing his mother's soul from the underworld.

The performance of "breaking of the Blood Pond" takes place in front of a special altar called the "sacred stand" (*shentai*), constructed on the left side of the permanent altar with the deities' images. On the occasion I witnessed this sacred stand was represented by a small table under which the "treasury of the Blood Pond" (*Xuehu baoku*) was placed. The "treasury" was made of paper and represented the offerings for the officials of this compartment of hell. Three small icons ("paper horses") representing Dizang (Skt. Kṣitigarbha), Mulian, and the Dragon King (Longwang), and five kinds of offerings (noodles, sweets, rice cakes, and fruit, all decorated with pieces of red paper, as well as a plate with the paper flowers) were put in front of the "treasury."

The bowl with red water, representing the Blood Pond, and the bigger basin were placed on the table, while a stick with a pink towel on top of it, which symbolized the pewter staff presented to Mulian

Figure P.03. Performance of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* in Jingjiang, 2009. Photo by the author.

by Bodhisattva Dizang, was stuck in the back of the chair, which was also placed in front of the table. The water in this bowl was dyed with the use of a plant called *lignum sappan* (*sumu*, commonly used in Chinese medicine). Brown sugar (*hongtang*), which is cheaper, is often substituted for it. While reciting the text of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond*, which he knew by heart, Liu Zhengkun knelt in front of this temporary altar most of the time. He wore a piece of red cloth, which symbolized Mulian's cassock (see figure P.03). Therefore, all magic objects that appear in *baojuan* about Mulian and his mother (pewter staff, cassock, and the Blood Pond) were materialized in this ritual performance. The woman's descendants (children, grandchildren, and daughters-in-law) knelt on the floor behind the *fotou* and performed the bows and prostrations required by the ritual. The recitation of *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* started with the invocation of the underworld deities, including Bodhisattva Dizang, the Ten Kings with their spouses and retinue, the guards of each hell, and demons (*yakshas*, Ch. *yecha*) serving there. While reciting the text of the *baojuan*, Liu Zhengkun at first narrated the story of Mulian and his mother. The text was recited in topolect, but it was possible to follow the main story line, especially as I had read the written version of it.

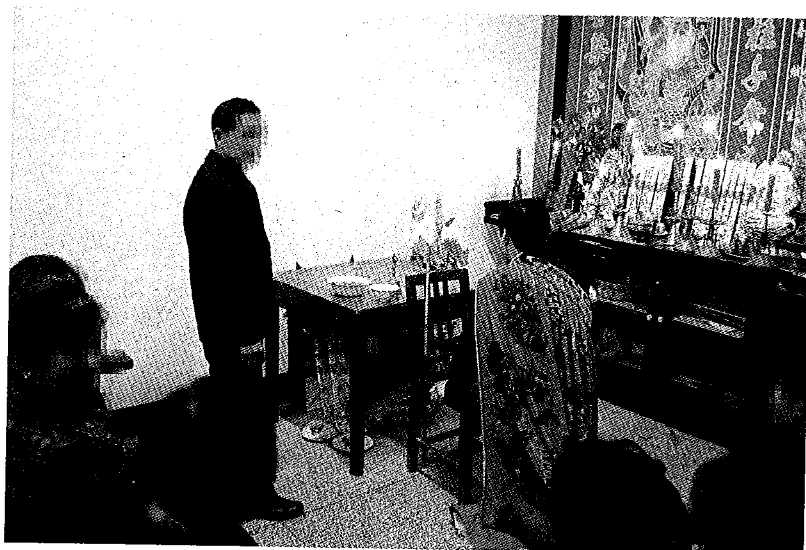

Figure P.04. "Breaking of the Blood Pond" in Jingjiang, 2009. Photo by the author.

The *fotou* personified different characters in the Mulian story with the use of different voice registers. In this narrative we hear the voices of Mulian, his parents, and souls of the deceased in hell.

Mulian, whose original name was Fu Luobo, was a son of rich landlord Fu Xiang in Fuxian village near the southern capital during the end of the Tang dynasty (ca. ninth century). In fact, however, Mulian was an incarnation of a star deity, who had been banished to earth to be born in the family of Fu Xiang and his wife, Liu Qingti. After his father died in an accident, a heavenly immortal descended to the world to teach Mulian how to rescue his father from underworld sufferings and attain salvation himself. Mulian and his mother were converted to Buddhism, which required worshiping the Buddha and observing a vegetarian diet. In addition, Mulian had to travel to Mount Jiuhua (in Anhui), where he became a Buddhist monk and a disciple of Bodhisattva Dizang (the savior of souls from the underworld in Chinese Buddhism). However, while he was on leave, Liu Qingti, who stayed at home, listened to the instigation of her evil brother Liu Jia and started to eat meat and drink wine. Furthermore, after Mulian had returned home, she lied to him and said she had not broken the vegetarian diet. This was a grave sin for which her life was immediately taken away, and her soul first confined to the Blood Pond

in the underworld. After undergoing all the torments of the underworld, her soul was imprisoned in the City Enclosed in Iron (Tiewei Cheng; that is, Avīci, the deepest level of the underworld). With the use of magic objects that Dizang bestowed on Mulian, including a pewter staff, a cassock, and a pearl, Mulian was able to descend to the underworld to seek his mother's soul. While he traveled through the hells, he passed by the Blood Pond. Liu Qingti was not the only soul who was tormented there, as other women also found themselves there because of their sins of pollution.

At this point we learn the way of deliverance from sufferings of the Blood Pond: descendants, in place of their mother, need to drink blood from the pond. Meanwhile, Mulian traveled to the Buddha, who taught him how to rescue his mother's soul by organizing the Assembly of the Blood Pond. In addition, the Buddha bestowed on Mulian the "Penitence Text of the Blood Pond" (*Xuehu chanhuiwen*), which listed the seventy-two sins of a woman that should be recited during the Assembly of the Blood Pond. The *fotou* recites this text and bows each time a new sin is mentioned; kneeling descendants repeat his actions. After the penitence is recited, the *fotou* breaks chopsticks placed in the basin, which symbolize the railings of the Blood Pond. While Mulian's mother leaves hell, all other women in the pond also can escape their sufferings and be born in heaven: "The Blood Pond turns into white jade, eighteen layers of hell turn into heaven palace, all women in the Blood Pond escape from the sea of suffering and are born in the heavenly realm, they are happy and at ease."[8]

After this, the *fotou* calls the woman's descendants to drink red water from the bowl, following Mulian's example: "Pious daughters and sons in the sponsors' family come to the Buddha and drink three cups of crimson water; this means that they repay the mother's mercy of birth and nurture."[9] Before relatives are allowed to drink from this bowl, they should give tips to the *fotou*, which means the purchase of "the bloody water." Performers feel quite happy for this reason, and they should drink the rest of water in the bowl after the descendants.

After the Blood Pond is broken, the *fotou* takes the imitation pewter staff and knocks the ground thrice; this symbolizes the destruction of the City Enclosed in Iron and liberation of all souls imprisoned there. Then the narration continues: the *baojuan* tells that after Liu Qingti's soul had been rescued from hell, she was reborn as a dog, and Mulian took trouble to rescue her again until she was reborn in a human form. Mulian, in his turn, had to undergo another rebirth,

because he had to collect souls of sinners, who had escaped when he destroyed the City Enclosed in Iron. In his next reincarnation he became the rebel leader Huang Chao (d. 884), an important historical figure of the Tang dynasty (618–907), who killed the required number of people and thus restored the world order. Thus a religious legend and historical events are intertwined in this oral narrative. According to *Baojuan of the Blood Pond* from Jingjiang, the title of dragon was eventually bestowed on Mulian,[10] which explains the use of the paper horse representing the Dragon King in the ritual setting of the recitation.

"Breaking of the Blood Pond" was the final part of the regular telling scriptures assembly to celebrate a woman's anniversary in Jingjiang. On April 14 it finished at 6:00 a.m., when it was already light outside, and was followed by a breakfast. Afterward, the *fotou* performed the concluding rituals, including "closing scroll" (*jie juan*), "presentation of tea" (*shang cha*) to the deities, "untying the karmic knots" (*jie jie*), "recitation of memorial" (*nian biao*), and "sending-off buddhas" (*song fo*). All paper ritual implements (treasuries with the offerings for the underworld deities, paper horses, and a paper "lotus boat") were burned by the performers.

Here the main focus is on the Mulian narrative, with many elements of rituals of the telling scriptures session omitted. On the whole, the assembly of "prolonging life" in Jingjiang differs from similar events involving *baojuan* performances in southern Jiangsu. First, it preserves the traditional scheme of overnight performance that is now rarely found in neighboring areas, especially in the case of an assembly organized for the welfare of living people. Thus it is very rich in content, with many texts and rituals included. Second, presentations of *Baojuan of Mulian* in neighboring areas are usually performed during funerals of old women, as in the case of telling scriptures traditions of Changshu and Zhangjiagang (located on the opposite bank of the Yangzi from the city of Jingjiang and belonging to the jurisdiction of Suzhou). Thus the joyous atmosphere of the Xieqiao assembly, which also served as the occasion of an extended family reunion, was quite special in comparison with other similar cases. Finally, rituals and an early meal became the start of the happy new day. The assembly in Xieqiao represents just one version of enactment of the multifaceted Mulian *baojuan*, a story whose history illuminates the development of the *baojuan* genre and its significance in Chinese religious culture.

Introduction

Baojuan as a genre of Chinese popular prosimetric literature, written in language that mixes classical Chinese with vernacular elements, arose around the thirteenth through the fourteenth century and flourished in many areas of China until the beginning of the twentieth century. *Baojuan* texts were transmitted as manuscripts or in printed editions and were intended for a type of performance usually called "scroll recitation" (*xuanjuan* or *nianjuan*).[1] The history of *baojuan* encompasses three periods.[2] During the first period (thirteenth through the fifteenth century), *baojuan* propagated popularized Buddhist doctrines; in the second (sixteenth through the eighteenth century), most *baojuan* were the scriptures of sects;[3] and in the third (nineteenth through the twentieth century), *baojuan* mostly lost their connection with sectarian teachings and simply narrated popular stories. I call these periods early, middle, and late, respectively, breaking with the terminology of several classical studies of *baojuan* that designate the period of the sixteenth through the eighteenth century as "early" and that of the nineteenth through the early twentieth century as "late."[4]

Early on, scholars noted that some texts that traditionally are included in the corpus of *baojuan* use different generic names in their titles. These include "liturgy" (*keyi*), "scripture" (or sūtra, *jing*), "precious/miraculous scripture" (*baojing*, *miaojing*), "precious penitence text" (*baochan*), and "precious account" (*baozhuan*).[5] We can treat all of these as a single genre, however, on the basis of common features in their form and contents.

HISTORY OF *BAOJUAN*

External sources provide little information about the history of the *baojuan* genre, especially in the early and middle periods of its development. This paucity of historical data about *baojuan* of the thirteenth to the eighteenth century can be explained by their connection with popular sects and beliefs. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, sectarian groups were persecuted by the state, as their ideas of salvation were regarded as heterodox by the imperial government. Officials confiscated and destroyed sectarian *baojuan*. Nevertheless, many expensive woodcut editions of sectarian *baojuan* survived from the end of the Ming dynasty (sixteenth to early seventeenth century), indicating that persecutions were not as severe as those that followed under the Qing dynasty at the end of the seventeenth century.[6] The late Ming elites' lenient attitude toward sects and their scriptures implies that some aristocracy and courtiers supported the sectarian beliefs and sponsored the production of beautifully executed and decorated woodcut editions of *baojuan*. During the later Qing persecution of the sects, the confiscation of *baojuan* increased greatly, and the expensive printed editions of *baojuan* gradually disappeared, giving way to cheap editions and manuscripts.

A type of *baojuan* that became popular in the nineteenth century, however, was different from the sectarian scriptures. Texts of this type usually included moralistic stories about pious men and women who experienced many hardships in the course of their spiritual cultivation but in the end were rewarded with sainthood. During this period, many *baojuan* with secular subjects appeared; these materials often came from folk legends, novels, and drama. The *baojuan* genre developed from serving purely religious purposes into a combination of religious devotion and entertainment. Unlike the earlier sectarian *baojuan*, most of which came from northern China, the nineteenth-century *baojuan* became popular in the south, mainly in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.

In the south, primarily professional storytellers, usually called "masters of scroll recitation" (*xuanjuan xiansheng*), performed *baojuan*. Although some were disguised as monks or Daoists, they were not ordained clergy. They earned their living from *baojuan* recitals and performed in public places (pilgrimage sites, temple fairs, teahouses, and entertainment quarters) and in private houses. The recitation of *baojuan* with more traditional religious subjects was

connected closely with folk religious ceremonies; those with secular subjects were performed mainly for entertainment purposes. On the other hand, *baojuan* developed in an interchange with morality books (*shanshu*), didactic literature of the late imperial period, although, unlike *baojuan*, morality books usually were not used as scripts for oral performances, especially in the early period of their development.[7] At the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, publishers of morality books printed the texts of *baojuan* mostly in southern cities.

BAOJUAN IN THE MODERN PERIOD

After the 1950s, the practices of *baojuan* printing, copying, and recitation declined because of a new government policy that restricted popular religious activities; mass media took the place of the *baojuan* performances as a means of entertainment. In the 1980s, *baojuan* performances survived mainly in the rural areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the south and in some areas of Gansu (mainly in the so-called Hexi corridor), Qinghai, Shanxi, and Hebei in the north. In Jiangsu and Zhejiang, the local traditions of performances experienced a revival in the 1980s and 1990s. In Gansu, Shanxi, and Hebei, however, they gradually declined and almost disappeared. Several *baojuan* still are recited by folk religious associations in remote areas of Gansu and Qinghai.[8] The centers of *baojuan* survival in Jiangsu and Zhejiang are the cities of Jingjiang, Zhangjiagang, Changshu, Suzhou, Wuxi, Changzhou, and Shaoxing. In those places, recitation of *baojuan* usually appears incorporated into religious assemblies on such occasions as anniversaries, house consecrations, and funerals or when there is a need for requests for the protection of children and healing.

In the 1980s, *baojuan* performances in several areas of China attracted the attention of local scholars.[9] In the 1990s–2010s, Chinese and foreign scholars continued fieldwork research on *baojuan* in various areas and published a number of reports that demonstrated the value of this literature in the context of traditional culture.[10] During the same time, the PRC government recognized the surviving traditions of *baojuan* performances as folk art, and several living traditions of *baojuan* performances were proclaimed an "intangible cultural heritage" (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan*), with efforts to preserve them with government support.[11] In several places, scholars have collected *baojuan* texts and published them.[12]

Interestingly, while the southern traditions of *baojuan* are related to the third (late) period of the genre, several northern traditions still use texts that belong to the second (middle) period. For example, a folk music association in the South Gaoluo (Nan Gaoluo) village of Laishui county in Hebei (only 120 kilometers away from the national capital, Beijing) still recites several texts dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, albeit out of their original sectarian context.[13] Several sectarian *baojuan* of the same period also are still used by folk associations in Gansu.[14] This situation reflects the historical development of *baojuan* texts and demonstrates that the performance of *baojuan* traditionally classified as second-period texts persisted into the third period and survived into the twenty-first century. Therefore, modern evidence of *baojuan* performance is an important source of information on the state of the *baojuan* genre during various periods of its development.

GOALS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In this book, I discuss the development of the story of Mulian in texts of the *baojuan* genre from the fourteenth through the nineteenth century, and its relationship with the religious and social background of these texts. This story of how a disciple of Buddha Śākyamuni, Mulian (Skt. [Mahā]Maudgalyāyana, Ch. [Mohe]Mujianlian or Muqianlian, usually abbreviated as Mulian),[15] rescued his sinful mother from rebirth in hell was widespread in the popular literature of China from the Tang dynasty onward (see appendix 1).[16] The tale of Mulian is also a unique example of a subject continuously used in *baojuan* since examples occur in the texts of all three periods. Furthermore, the earliest available specimen of the *baojuan* text—*Baojuan of Maudgalyāyana*, an incomplete manuscript dating to 1372—deals with this story.[17] *Baojuan* texts on Mulian are also important for understanding the popular religion of premodern and modern China, and they are still are performed in a number of storytelling traditions in China, mostly in conjunction with local ritual activities.

Nevertheless, *baojuan* texts concerning Mulian have not received sufficient attention from Chinese and foreign scholars. Among works dealing with the *baojuan* genre as a whole, studies of sectarian scripture-type *baojuan* in various languages still outnumber works devoted to texts of the narrative type.[18] Although Chinese and foreign

scholars have long paid attention to the narrative texts of *baojuan*, they produced only a few general studies,[19] followed by analyses of several narrative *baojuan* texts.[20] Most of these studies demonstrate the transformation of a plot in different genres of Chinese literature or analyze types of stories in narrative *baojuan*, such as the stories of female salvation.[21] Narrative *baojuan* are of growing interest to scholars of Chinese literature and culture, especially as many such texts have been reprinted recently in mainland China and Taiwan and are available to the public.[22] Several of these have been translated into English.[23]

Current studies, nevertheless, have paid little attention to the succession of texts of *baojuan* that deal with the story of Mulian. Several important monographs have focused on the development of the Mulian story in China and neighboring countries but have devoted little space to the *baojuan* about Mulian.[24] Studies of texts about Mulian in several other genres have analyzed texts from the medieval period (fifth to eleventh century) and the history of the Mulian drama and its local varieties.[25] An important 1995 article discussed the performance context and religious meaning of a late text, *Precious Account of Mulian Rescuing His Mother in the Underworld* (Mulian jiu mu youming baozhuan; Che no. 690, hereafter *Precious Account of Mulian*),[26] although little was known at that time about the living traditions of *baojuan* performances in China, and this influenced the author's conclusions about the nature of the text. Another late variant of the Mulian story, *Baojuan of Mulian Rescuing His Mother in Three Rebirths* (Mulian san shi jiu mu baojuan; Che no. 694, hereafter *Baojuan of Three Rebirths*), was published in English translation but without an outline of the complete succession of *baojuan* texts on Mulian and detailed explanation of their ritual and cultural significance.[27]

This book thus fills a need in providing a comparative study of the major texts of the *baojuan* genre that relate the Mulian story. Studying this story as it is used in *baojuan* of different periods contributes to our knowledge of the evolution of the narrative texts of the *baojuan* genre. I analyze their contents against the background of the development of this subject in other genres of Chinese literature, focusing on the texts' performative and ritual aspects. Concentrating on this example of the Mulian story contributes toward a deeper understanding of the *baojuan* genre's nature, origin, historical background, and evolution.

MAJOR SOURCES

The five major texts analyzed here are the most representative examples of the use and transformation of the story of Mulian rescuing his mother in the *baojuan* genre. These are *Baojuan of Maudgalyāyana*, which dates to approximately the fourteenth century; *Baojuan of Bodhisattva-King Dizang Governing the Underworld* (Dizang wang pusa zhizhang youming baojuan; Che no. 160, first edition dated 1679, hereafter abbreviated as *Dizang baojuan*); *Baojuan Expounded by the Buddha of Benefiting Living Beings and Understanding of the [True] Meaning* (Fo shuo li sheng liao yi baojuan; Che no. 236, ca. seventeenth century, hereafter abbreviated as *Baojuan of Benefiting Living Beings*); *Precious Account of Mulian* (ca. early nineteenth century; I am using the reprint of the 1893 edition); and *Baojuan of Three Rebirths* (ca. second half of the nineteenth century; I am using the reprint of the 1898 edition).[28] These texts can be classified chronologically into three groups that correspond to the above-mentioned three periods in the development of the *baojuan* genre. There is one text from the early period (*Baojuan of Maudgalyāyana*), two texts from the middle period (*Dizang baojuan* and *Baojuan of Benefiting Living Beings*), and two texts from the late period (*Precious Account of Mulian* and *Baojuan of Three Rebirths*). In the corresponding chapters I outline special features of the form and contents of texts in each group; compare the texts in the second and third groups to detect characteristic features of contemporaneous *baojuan*; and compare these characteristic features with those of the text/texts in the preceding group, thus demonstrating the continuity and transformation of the form and content of *baojuan*.

I consulted other *baojuan* on Mulian for comparison in state and private libraries in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, Russia, and the Czech Republic. In addition, I collected several related texts during my fieldwork in the Jingjiang, Changshu, Suzhou, and Wuxi areas in 2008–13.[29] Several local recensions of *baojuan* about Mulian that are modified from the editions of *Baojuan of Three Rebirths* have been performed in these areas up to the present. Many texts evaluated here were not published previously; nor have they been discussed by scholars. A list of different *baojuan* texts on Mulian (seventeen in total) supplements existing catalogues of *baojuan* (see appendix 2).

Whereas studies of *baojuan* mostly rely on written sources, the present volume draws on both written materials and on live performances of *baojuan*. This method, substantiated by modern folklore theories, enriches our understanding of the functioning of the early texts and clarifies several issues concerning their history. I concentrate on traditions from the Changshu and Jingjiang areas, although I have also used materials from Suzhou, Gansu, Hebei, and other areas published by other Chinese and foreign researchers.