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Plowing in the Bedroom, Braying at the Table: Competition and Control in the Tang Tale "Banqiao San niangzi"*

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Abstract

"Banqiao San niangzi" 板橋三娘子 is a tale from the Tang 唐 (618-907) collection *Hedong ji* 河東記, by Xue Yusi 薛漁思 (n.d.). Its itinerant protagonist encounters a sorceress who turns men into donkeys by feeding them cakes baked with grain magically grown in her bedroom. This kind of magic is not seen anywhere else in Chinese literature. I posit that the story originated in India and I explore its relationship with various foreign counterparts. The paper provides a new reading of the tale, juxtaposing the tale with Indian and Arab versions to argue that the story primarily concerns gender power-play. The author of the tale highlights the fear that women can be deliberately fiendish and unscrupulously successful merchants who do

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* Since writing this paper I have become aware of an important Japanese study of "Banqiao san niangzi," Okada Mitsuhiro's 岡田充博 *Hankyō sanjyōshi kō* 板橋三娘子考. Its 692 pages are entirely devoted to the study of "Banqiao san niangzi" and its place in worldwide stories of ass transformation. It is the most thorough study of a Tang story that I have seen in any language. Each element of the story, from setting to characters to difficult lexical items, is meticulously treated at length, as are the appearance and development of each important motif, such as the magical farming, the use of puppets, and ass transformation. He has a section on all of the important variants from pages 527-36. Of interest to me particularly is Okada's look on pages 37 to 65 and 329-65 at various Indian and Arabian versions. The only thing that I do not see in his otherwise thorough treatment is a mention of the important eighth century Arabic anecdotes. Okada's book is, without a doubt, essential reading for any student of this tale.

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not need men's help. Worse yet, they can use men for their own purposes, and even rob men of their identities. He shows men that by staying on guard and maintaining vigilance, it is possible to beat women at their own game, and to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Keywords: Tang tale (*chuanqi*), magical farming, third lady, transformation, "Banqiao san niangzi"

"Banqiao San niangzi" 板橋三娘子 (Third Lady of Plank Bridge)[1] is an exceptional tale from the Tang 唐 (618-907) collection *Hedong ji* 河東記, by Xue Yusi 薛漁思 (n.d.).[2] Its itinerant protagonist encounters a sorceress who turns men into asses using a kind of magic not seen anywhere else in Chinese literature.[3] The story takes a form and uses a rhetorical style typical of Tang informal narratives that since the Ming have been known as *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmission of the strange),[4] but simultaneously it differs in key ways from all other tales of any form and any time in China. "Banqiao san niangzi" thus appears unique and especially "weird" in China, even in the context of countless stories of the strange.[5] Examining gender struggle and certain primary motifs in the tale, my paper will provide a new close reading that explains why and how this tale is unique among indigenous stories and its foreign kin alike.

On the surface "Banqiao San niangzi" appears to be a simple story about greed,[6] but careful examination reveals that the story mainly concerns a powerplay between a man and a woman. The author of the tale highlights the fear that women can be deliberately fiendish and unscrupulously successful merchants who do not need men's help.[7] Worse yet, they can use men for their own

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[1] Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., eds., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, 286; 149-50. Also see Li Jianguo 李劍國, ed., *Tang Song chuanqi pindu cidian, shang* 唐宋傳奇品讀辭典, 上 554-56, and Wang Meng'ou 王夢鷗 155-61.

[2] There are thirty four works from the collection *Hedong ji* in the *Taiping guangji*. The name *Hedong ji* does not appear in the *Tang shu* 唐書 or in the *Song shi* 宋史 "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志. Chao Gongwu's 晁公武 *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志, *juan* 卷 15 simply notes that *Hedong ji* is a work in three *juan*, by the Tang writer Xue Yusi. Wang Meng'ou 王夢鷗 thinks that *Hedong ji* was written in the Late Tang or Five Dynasties. For Wang's speculations regarding Xue Yusi's identity and a textual history of *Hedong ji*, see Wang Meng'ou, Vol. 4, 90-95; 103-04. Also see Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄下冊, Vol. 2, 634-40. For an English translation of "Banqiao San niangzi," see Karl Kao 307-10.

[3] In another story, "Ni lüke" 逆旅客, from the tenth century, magical bedroom farming does occur, and it might have been influenced by "Banqiao san niangzi." However, it is far less developed and is treated fundamentally differently from the farming here. I will discuss "Ni lüke" further below. There are a few later tales where a sorceress turns men into donkeys, as well. For example, there is a story in Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 called "Zaochu" 造畜 (Making animals), which does not seem to have been influenced by "Banqiao San niangzi." Rather, it is probably part of the same general folk tradition, involving a different set of motifs. See Pu 14. 748-49; Cheng 198; Scobie 258 ff.

[4] I will refer to "Tang tales" instead of "*chuanqi*" for the most part, since *chuanqi* was not a recognized genre in the Tang. I am not referring to stories and anecdotes that have been in later times categorized as *zhiguai* 志怪, *biji* 筆記, *suibi* 隨筆 and so on, which were also written in the Tang and are often significantly different in form and concerns from *chuanqi*.

[5] A typical example is Li Jianguo, who sighs that it is "a truly strange and unique *chuanqi* story" (洵稱奇絕). Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 640.

[6] Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義 makes the typical remark that "it is an 'eccentric' story that 'criticizes greed and avariciousness.'" See *Sui Tang Wudai xiaoshuo shi* 隋唐五代小說史 117.

[7] There are other stories about female protagonists making money by unscrupulous magical means, for example, in "Hu Mei'er" 胡媚兒 the titular character puts vast sums of money and even cartloads

purposes, and can even steal men's identities. He shows men that by staying on guard and maintaining vigilance, it is possible to beat women at their own game, and to give them a taste of their own medicine (even though one might not be able to learn all of their wily female tricks!).

The message at the heart of "Banqiao San niangzi" about the ominous otherness of females is one of the traits it shares with many other Chinese tales of the eighth and ninth centuries, and with many foreign stories of all ages. A small number of scholars have indeed focused extensively on the probable foreign origin of the tale, because of the peculiar form in which this ominousness manifests. Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 (1915-2009) made an interesting but unlikely suggestion that it was probably a distant relative of the Circe story in Homer's *Odyssey* and of the Roman novel *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius.[8] It is implausible that the story is directly descended from these geographically and temporally distant Greek and Roman tales, though they do contain the man-into-animal motif that undoubtedly belongs to the same family of folktales.[9] Almost without exception if later scholars mention non-Chinese influence they quote Yang's hypothesis, but they do not develop it. In his *Bijiao gushi xue lunkao* 比較故事學論考, however, Liu Shouhua 劉守華 argues that "Banqiao san niangzi" came directly from Arabia, since there is a cognate story in *The Thousand and One Nights*.[10] Zhou Shuangli 周雙利 and Sun Bing 孫冰 make the same claim in a 1986 article, "'Banqiao san niangzi' yu Alabo wenxue"〈板橋三娘子〉與阿拉伯文學,[11] although they do admit that Arabian literature in general was probably influenced by Indian literature.[12] None of these scholars supports these claims with convincing evidence, nor do they develop the theory, simply focusing on shared motifs of the magical farming, and speculating how the story came from Arabia. Unlike them, I posit that the story originated in India, undergoing

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of government-owned property into an impossibly tiny bottle, and disappears with it. She is treated as a female knight errant of sorts, and the story is read as corrupt officials getting their just deserts. But unlike that story, the narrator of "Banqiao San niangzi" is closest to and sympathizes with the male protagonist rather than the female magician. In "Banqiao san niangzi" the witch is clever but the man wins out in the end. "Hu Mei'er" is, like "Banqiao San niangzi," from the collection *Hedong ji*. See Li Fang 286; 148.

[8] Yang Xianyi, *Lingmo xinjian* 零墨新箋 49-52; "Yi yu ou shi" 譯餘偶拾 118-24.

[9] These tales are classified in folklore studies as folktale type 449A, "Ass-Tales." See above, note 3.

[10] See Liu's "*Yiqian yiye* yu zhongguo renmin gushi"《一千一夜》與中國人民故事, which looks at eleven stories in China that are similar to stories in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Liu does mention some stories that he claims came from India, through Buddhist influence (pgs. 241-42), but he does not believe that "Banqiao san niangzi" is one of them, nor does he mention any Indian collections such as *Kathāsaritsāgara*. See Liu Shouhua, *Bijiao gushi xue lunkao* 238-51, esp. 243.

[11] Zhou and Sun 4-7.

[12] *Ibid*., 6.

transformations as it travelled both to the east and west, possibly as an oral story. The story that bears the most resemblance to the Chinese tale is found in the Kashmiri tale collection, *Kathāsaritsāgara*,[13] an eleventh century work that has its roots in oral and textual tales from centuries earlier. This story lends itself to the most fruitful comparison with the Chinese version and proves its Indian origin.[14] A small number of tales with substantially similar plot details in both *The Thousand and One Nights* as well as earlier Arab collections show that it travelled westward from India as well, like other stories found in collections from all three regions.[15] Unlike other studies, my focus is not on what likely routes this story traveled from India to Arabian and Chinese collections, but rather on better understanding this classical language text-based Tang tale by comparing it with foreign relatives that are recognized to have fluidly moved into and out of the oral and textual traditions for centuries.

My paper presents the Tang tale side by side with Indian and Arab versions, as well as the early Greek and Roman narratives in which its universal motifs also appear. This juxtaposition primarily does two things. It clarifies how this tale is different from its foreign counterparts, and at the same time it deepens readers' understanding of why it is different from indigenous narratives. In addition, the juxtaposition shows that this Chinese tale is deeply concerned with gender-

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[13] The Sanskrit *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the "Ocean of Stories," is a vast collection of tales compiled around 1070 by the Kashmiri writer Somadeva. Scholars agree that the tales within this work date from many centuries earlier than the compilation, so the late date compared to that of the Chinese story is not an issue when considering the genesis of the tale. The narrative material moved fluidly into and out of the oral folklore and the textual traditions of India for many hundreds of years. For a brief explanation of the textual history of the work, see my article, "The Lecherous Holy Man and the Maiden in a Box" 41-55. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, "Banqiao San niangzi's" central motifs appear in three places. See Penzer, Vol. III 193-95; Vol. VI 4-7 and 55-56.

[14] There is no extant evidence of direct textual transmission from abroad, and the tale was likely imported to China orally from India at some unknown time. Given the complexity of possible avenues that stories could have traveled, and in the absence of textual evidence, arguments about transmission must remain speculative. For further evidence of shared folkloric motifs between early Indian story collections and medieval Chinese narratives, see my article, "Parallel Worlds, Stretched Time, and Illusory Reality: The Tang Tale 'Du Zichun'" 309-42. Also see my "The Lecherous Holy Man and the Maiden in a Box." Pei Puxian 裴普賢 has discussed the influence of Indian non-Buddhist literature on Chinese medieval narratives, speculating that stories and parables likely came to China through southern ocean trade routes. See Pei 196-212, esp. 197. Chinese folklorist Ding Naitong rightly recognizes "Banqiao San niangzi" as folkloric in origin, but has noted the difficulty of classifying it, deciding to label it folktale Type 449A, since he could not classify it exactly according to the Aarne-Thompson classification system of folktales. See Nai-tung Ting, *A Type-Index of Chinese Folktales* 77, and "On Type 449A" 69. Some of the important motifs under that tale type that are specific to our tale are classified as D132 (transformation of man or woman to ass), D2157.6 (field cultivated and sowed by magic) and Z1981.2 (planting, seeding and sowing symbolizing sexual intercourse), For an easily accessible index of folktale types and motifs, see El-Shamy. Also see Ikeda 152-53.

[15] For a brief survey of the Arabian stories, see Penzer, Vol. VI 62-66. Also see Macdonald 353-97, esp. 374-79.

based struggle and sex, even though it does not overtly mention them; this subtlety contrasts with many Chinese Tang tales as well as all of the foreign variants which are far more blatant. With its matchless plot sequence of farming in the bedroom, "Banqiao san niangzi," unlike other Tang tales with their more typically overt references to sexuality, is an inimitably nuanced story, containing suggestive material lying concealed beneath layers of metaphor and symbol. In China, this foreign folktale became a sophisticated warning for men and an encouragement to them to remain alert and to beware the loss of their own control.

"Summary Outline of Banqiao San niangzi"

"Banqiao San niangzi" opens with the protagonist, Zhao Jihe 趙季和, travelling on business. He comes to an inn, where he stops for the night. He has arrived later than the other guests, so he is given the bed furthest toward the back of the inn, next to the room of the proprietress. The owner of the inn is an unmarried, childless woman over thirty years of age. She is described as the wealthy owner of a large number of donkeys, which she sells inexpensively to travelers in need of new animals. She is praised for her moral goodness (*you dao* 有道) and her inn is a popular resting spot. Zhao Jihe joins the other guests around the dining table where they eat a generous meal. With the exception of the teetotal Zhao, the guests also merrily partake of alcohol. At night Zhao alone stays awake tossing and turning (*du Jihe zhuanzhan bumei* 獨季和轉展不寐) because he is not inebriated; he feels curious when he hears the woman moving about in the next room, so he spies on her through a crack in the wall.[16] He sees her take out a six or seven inch long wooden man and a tiny wooden ox and plow; she brings all of these to life by spitting on them. She orders the tiny farmer to plow a spot in front of the bed and gives him grain to scatter on the furrows. When the grain has magically grown, the woman orders the puppet to harvest and hull it. She then makes the grain into meal which she bakes into little cakes. In the morning she offers the cakes to all of her guests except Zhao, who has left early to hide outside. He sees the men eat the cakes, begin to bray and turn into donkeys. The woman quickly herds the donkeys into a pen and takes ownership

[16] An interesting side note is that the text says that Zhao Jihe "happens to" see (*oujian* 偶見) the woman through a crack in the wall. It is not entirely clear what the author had in mind here. Clearly a man does not look into a woman's bedroom through a crack in the wall by chance—he would have to make an effort to do so.

of the guests' possessions. Zhao leaves, envying the woman and her powers. At a later date he returns to the inn, finding this time that he is the only guest. When San niangzi puts her charmed cakes on the table, Zhao secretly exchanges a cake of his own for one of hers, claiming that he has brought a cake to share with her and offering her what is actually her own cake. She unsuspectingly eats it and transforms into a sturdy donkey, which Zhao rides for a number of years. Eventually an old man recognizes her and convinces Zhao that she has suffered enough. The stranger pries open the donkey skin, from which San niangzi—"Third Lady"—emerges whole and human, as she was before.

Tang Reader Expectations Satisfied and Frustrated

Although it is probably not originally from China, "Banqiao San niangzi" shares concerns and some traits with many other Tang tales. In its length and understated literary style, as well as its concentration on the human response to the strange, it is a typical tale of the ninth century. The extant corpus of Tang narratives includes a large number of stories featuring predictable plot elements and thematic motifs; Chinese readers of the Tang dynasty would have read these narratives with definite expectations. In the first few sentences "Banqiao San niangzi" appears in style as well as setting as though it is going to conform to reader expectations, but it thwarts them in interesting ways. The primarily male, literati readership in the Tang understood that the female in tales often represents the dangers that lie in wait for vulnerable men. The female is linked with the "other" in general—she is the representative of the foreign, the unknown, the otherworldly, and the dangerous—but also of the exciting and titillating possibilities that are encountered when away from the safety as well as the humdrum realities and responsibilities of home.[17] When the first sentences of the story describe the male protagonist approaching an inn and meeting a female innkeeper, the Tang dynasty Chinese reader would have recognized these as formulaic plot elements. He would anticipate the following: A young man travels away from home and, in the evening, he comes to a building of some sort. Later that building will likely turn out to be a fox burrow or a broken down grave. He meets a gorgeous young woman and feels desire for her. He will probably have a brief yet deeply passionate sexual experience with

[17] For a study of the development of gynophobia in China, see Wawrytko 163-97, esp. 174-81. For a thorough treatment of the Chinese literary treatment of the dangers of women, see Hsieh, esp. chapter 1, "Dangers and Temptations" 33-57.

her. Sometime after the encounter, the young man will discover that the woman is not what he had thought—perhaps she is actually an animal such as a fox or a tiger, or even a ghost or demon who has temporarily taken on living human form. Usually the protagonist will emerge intact from the encounter, but he might be shaken and bemused.

"Banqiao San niangzi" satisfies the anticipation for a story about the female other encountered on a journey, but it appears to frustrate many of the other specific reader expectations for a Tang tale. The woman is not young and ravishing, but rather a middle-aged, somewhat motherly figure who provides food and beds for sleeping in, rather than for sex. The inn is neither fox burrow nor tomb; it remains an inn throughout the tale. There is a moment when the protagonist looks into the woman's dark bedroom that offers a perfect opportunity for sexual innuendo, but strangely no sex ever occurs; nor is it even mentioned. Rather than a fox, ghost, or a succubus, San niangzi is throughout the tale a living, breathing, human who uses dark charms against men for her own personal gain. Tang tales in which a fox or other creature tricks a man into thinking she is human often concern a contest or at least connection between humans and "others" (supernatural, non-Chinese, deceased, animal, even vegetable sometimes), rather than a battle between the sexes per se. "Banqiao San niangzi" differs in that it is centrally concerned with male-female relationships. The male here is up against one particular kind of "other" being: the female.[18] Most unusual for a Tang tale, in the end the woman San niangzi is turned by a man into an animal in an almost karmic turnabout, rather than a non-human creature temporarily tricking a man into thinking she is a human. These elements have left baffled readers searching in vain for similar tales in the tradition.

Non-Chinese Stories with Shared Plot Elements

In order to understand and demystify the story as it appears as a one-of-a-kind phenomenon in the Tang tale corpus, it is helpful to examine plot elements such as food magic and human-to-animal transformation not only as they appear in this tale but also in other literary contexts in which they are commonplace and very much expected. First I introduce "Circe" and *The Golden Ass*, the two stories that Yang Xianyi thought were related to "Banqiao San niangzi." Next I provide a brief synopsis of what I consider to be significant foreign pre-

[18] This tale is different from other more humanistic tales such as "Li Wa zhuan" 李娃傳 as well in that there is such a pronounced interest in the mysterious magic that the woman does.

cursors of the tale, followed by my analysis of the Chinese story itself, considering both how it compares with the foreign tales and how it sits in the Chinese *xiaoshuo* 小說 (informal narrative) tradition.

"Circe"

Like Yang Xianyi, readers of "Banqiao San niangzi" will likely be reminded of western tales in which men are turned into animals by women. In folklore studies, these are known as "Ass-Tale" stories; they have been studied by various scholars, but recently most notably by Alex Scobie.[19] He determines that an early textual precursor of an ass tale is an episode in the tenth book of Homer's *Odyssey* in which the traveling hero Odysseus meets the enchantress Circe.[20] The episode finds Odysseus sending a group of men to locate residents of a certain island. The men find a house surrounded by docile wolves and lions (presumably previously transformed humans). The men eat and drink merrily until the hostess, Circe, touches them with her wand, turning them into pigs. Helped by the god Hermes, Odysseus becomes impervious to Circe's charms, and when he pays her a visit and fails to become a pig, she begs him to become her lover. He agrees, with the condition that she must set his men free from their animal forms. When the men leave, Circe tells Odysseus that his next adventure will involve a journey to Hades. She says that at a certain spot near a tributary of the river Styx, he is to dig a pit and into it sprinkle barley, crying out a prayer for the spirits of the dead, promising them a sacrifice.[21]

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[19] See Scobie, note 3. Recall that Yang Xianyi also theorized that the Chinese tale was related to the "Circe" story. Scobie treats "Circe" as a precursor to "ass tales" even though in it the enchantress turns men into pigs rather than asses. Scobie does not fully analyze the tales; rather, he attempts to come to an understanding of the range and the directions of transmission of this set of motifs. Besides the Greek and Roman tales, he looks at "Ass-Tales" from Sri Lanka, Kirghizstan, Mongolia and Japan, as well as one of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* anecdotes, "Jullanar of the Sea" from *The Thousand and One Nights*, and "Banqiao San niangzi."

[20] Odyssey 10.210-545, or Lawrence 141-51.

[21] Though it might not seem to be directly related to the common folkloric motif of a woman turning men into animals, this sprinkling of magical grain near water of some kind, interestingly appears, as we shall see, in the Indian, Arab, and Chinese versions of "Banqiao San niangzi," but in all of them, unlike in the Greek story, there it is made the focus of the episode's transformative magic. It must be assumed without evidence to the contrary that this curious shared motif is a coincidence, but it may have been details such as this that led Yang Xianyi to conjecture that the Greek tale was somehow related to "Banqiao San niangzi." Scobie discusses at length what he considers the probable relation between the Circe story and literature in Asia. He stresses that there is a story of human to animal transformation like Circe in Sri Lanka, in the historical chronicle of Sri Lanka, the *Mahavamsa*, written in approximately 500 CE. Scobie speculates about the various ways that early Greek literature might have penetrated into South Asia, although well over a thousand years and thousands of miles separate the *Odyssey* from the *Mahavamsa* (Scobie 237-38). Of course, these stories could certainly have arisen

The Golden Ass

While the *Odyssey* has Circe turning her victims into various types of animals, in the first century Latin novel, *The Golden Ass*,[22] the protagonist actually becomes a donkey, but he does it to himself out of envy for the woman's magic. Lucius convinces his lover to let him secretly watch her mistress, Pampile, doing black magic. He sees Pampile smear herself with an ointment, flap her arms like wings, become an owl and fly off. He begs his lover to help him learn how to turn himself into an owl. When he attempts to follow Pampile's motions, he mistakenly turns into an ass instead of a bird. His lover tells him that he has only to eat some roses and he will become a man again.[23] The rest of the story involves many lusty adventures, as Lucius attempts to restore his humanity. Scobie categorizes Apuleius's novel under what he calls "Ass-tale traditions I," while he groups "Circe," "Banqiao san niangzi," and several others as "Ass-tale traditions II," since they share more basic common elements such as transformation into animals by eating and (in some cases) the magic farming motif.[24] With the exception of the detail that a man is turned into a donkey, *The Golden Ass* is radically different from "Banqiao san niangzi," but it shares a few plot elements with a much later story in *The Thousand and One Nights*, "Jullanar of the Sea," a tale we will now consider. These elements include a sorceress who has an ability to change into a bird, a man who spies on her and becomes envious of her magic, and who changes into an ass by means of magic.

"Jullanar of the Sea"

The pre-fourteenth century *The Thousand and One Nights* tale "Jullanar of the Sea"[25] shares not only basic elements with *The Golden Ass*, but also the most important and unusual key motifs of "Banqiao San niangzi." In the relevant episode, Queen Lab, a ravishing sorceress who controls her realm by turning men

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independently, and there is no convincing evidence available that indicates direct transmission. For the relevant *Mahavamsa* story, see Bullis 117-19.

[22] Walsh, trans., Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*.

[23] Walsh 53-54.

[24] Scobie 157-58; 229-30.

[25] No one knows when the individual stories of the *Arabian Nights* originated but some stories evidently circulated orally for centuries before being set down in manuscripts. All copies of different early manuscripts share a nucleus of eleven stories which must have formed the original *Arabian Nights*. This nucleus, including "Jullanar of the Sea," appears in the earliest circulating edition, a fourteenth century Syrian manuscript that has been recently studied by Muhsin Mahdi. For a useful introduction to the textual complexities of the collection, see Mahdi; Haddawy ix-xv.

into animals, falls in love with King Badr who has been shipwrecked on her shores.[26] The two become lovers, and one night after drinking and fornicating with Queen Lab, Badr spies on her as she rises and magically creates a stream in the room. On the floor she sprinkles a handful of barley, and wets it with the magical water. The barley grows into mature grain which she harvests and grinds into meal. Later Badr tricks her into eating this magical food, whereupon he sprinkles her with water, turns her into a mule, and rides her for a time.[27]

Other Arab Tales

The Thousand and One Nights is not the only source of Arabic tales comparable to "Banqiao San niangzi." According to D.B. Macdonald, the unusual farming and transformation plot appears in several Arabic stories dating from around 850-1200 C.E. An important early text is *Fākhir*, a collection of pre-Islamic proverbs by al-Mufaḍḍal ibn Salama (fl. ninth century), which contains the tale called "A hadith of Khurāfa." In Macdonald's study of this tale he provides detailed notes on five other early Arab versions and proves his point that the tale lacks "good technical standing as a Muslim tradition" and that "its starting-place was undoubtedly India."[28] In this tale a man rides a mare and leads a stallion, the two of which used to be his wife and a slave who had had a sexual affair. The woman had attempted to dispose of her husband by doing black magic in which she caused a rat to plow and to thresh some grain. Then she had ordered a hand mill to grind up the grain. When she tried to make her husband eat it, he cleverly tricked her, and the lovers ate the charmed grain, which turned them into horses. The similarity of the farming and eating motifs in "Jullanar" and "A hadith of Khurāfa" to those in the Chinese tale is striking.

Kashmiri Tales

Perhaps representing later versions of the source stories that Macdonald claimed came from India, several stories in the eleventh century Kashmiri collection *Kathāsaritsāgara* are similar to "Banqiao San niangzi." The first three might

[26] Herds of transformed men in the shape of mules, donkeys, and horses first try to stop Badr from landing there.

[27] Queen Lab's mother helps her to escape the animal form, and the women take their revenge on Badr. Not just this episode, but the entire lengthy tale is rife with power struggles between the sexes. Most of the women in the story are sorceresses like Queen Lab with the power to transform men into animals. In the end, Badr's mother, the mermaid Jullanar, emerges as the most powerful sorceress; it is she who finally conquers Queen Lab and rescues her son. Haddawy 383-428; Zhou and Sun 4-5; Liu 242-43.

[28] Macdonald 372-79; Penzer, Vol. VI 62-66.

be explained away as examples of the widespread folkloric motif of sorceresses turning men into animals that is featured in “Circe” and *The Golden Ass*, but the fourth features the transformational magic combined with the bizarre farming and feeding/substitution motif featured in the Chinese story and the Arab tales. The Indian anecdotes, like that in “Jullanar of the Sea,” all appear as brief episodes of long, winding sagas. The first of these appears in chapter thirty-seven, a series of linked stories that shows how women cannot be trusted—how they are fickle and may even be evil and dangerous. The chapter also features multiple instances of people turning into animals.[29] In the basic story, a young man named Nischyadatta encounters a female demon on a journey. She charms and eats his travelling companions, but the hero tricks her and uses her own charm against her. This little anecdote (*KSS* 1) superficially bears little resemblance to the Chinese tale, but upon closer examination it proves to tell the same story. Just as in the Chinese tale, a dangerous female charms men and destroys them. One man escapes her machinations by using her magic against her; he not only conquers her, but he ends up riding her to his destination. The danger of feminine wiles is, if possible, even more dramatically revealed than in the Chinese story, since the female demon becomes the agent in the eating motif and the men become eaten victims, but the end message is the same: men must take steps to protect themselves from dangerous females.[30]

After the anecdote in which he out-tricks the demoness, Nischyadatta continues on his way, eventually happening upon an enchanted monkey who is really a man. The monkey tells a cautionary tale (*KSS* 2)[31] about the fickle and “tangled maze” of a woman’s heart, a story in which a man’s beautiful but unchaste wife becomes angry at him for striking her in a jealous fit. She puts a magic string around his neck, turning him into an ox, whereupon she sells him to a camel herder. Another sorceress feels sorry for him and takes the string off his neck, once more rendering him a man.[32] Though it differs in many aspects, this story contains several of the motifs seen in the Chinese story—namely, it features the female sorceress who devalues men’s basic humanity by turning them into livestock to be sold, as well as the pitying and freeing of the first sorceress by another powerful person.

The third story (*KSS* 3) appears toward the end of the brief sixty-eighth chapter. The anecdote features an evil witch engaged in a love affair with a cowherd. She turns her husband into a buffalo by throwing dust in his face. When

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[29] Penzer, Vol. III 183-200.

[30] Penzer, Vol. III 187-89.

[31] *Ibid.*, 193.

[32] *Ibid.*, 194-95. In Vol. VI 59-62, Penzer appends a lengthy note on the widespread magic string/magic bridle motif in folklore.

he is sold to a trader, he is recognized by a good witch who releases him by sprinkling him with charmed water. She then gives him some magical mustard seed; he uses it to turn his unfaithful wife into a mare which he ties up and beats every day.[33]

The last episode (*KSS* 4), the one bearing the most resemblance to the Chinese tale, appears much later in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. In a long tale, a prince named Mṛigānkadatta has an adventure that ends with him spending the night in a room with a peacock in a cage. When he removes a magic string from the peacock's neck, the bird transforms into his long-lost minister, Bhīmaparākrama, who relates how he came to become a peacock. During his travels as he searched for his master, he lodged in the house of a certain woman, paying her for food. After he had slept for awhile he awoke and watched her surreptitiously; he saw her sprinkling barley on the floor of the room. She sprinkled the grain with water and mumbled spells over them. The grains of barley "sprang up, and produced ears, and ripened, and she cut them down, and parched them, and ground them, and made them into barley-meal. And she sprinkled the barley-meal with water, and put it in a brass pot."[34] When the woman left the room, Bhīmaparākrama substituted the meal in the brass pot with some from the meal bin, and got back into bed. The woman returned and offered him the meal from the brass pot, while she herself ate some charmed meal from the meal bin. She immediately assumed the form of a goat, which Bhīmaparākrama sold to a butcher.[35] This tale shares many motifs and even small narrative details with the Chinese story. The emphasis, like the Chinese tale, is on the clever ability of the man to trick the witch by beating her at her own game, since he is awake enough to observe her without her knowing it.

The Chinese Tale "Banqiao San niangzi"

The tales with similar motifs summarized above are far from being the only ones in existence; there are several other textual variants and many more in folklore.[36] Contrary to Yang Xianyi's claim, "Circe" and *The Golden Ass* are

[33] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI 4-7.

[34] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI 55.

[35] Unfortunately, the butcher's wife turned out to be the sorceress's friend, so she followed him when he left, and as he slept under a tree, she put a magic thread on him and he was transformed into a peacock. He was caught and kept as a pet in a cage until he was discovered by Mṛigānkadatta and made a man again. *Ibid.*, 55-58.

[36] Several very close variants include a Kirgiz tale (see Scobie 252) and a Mongolian one (see Ligeti

not obviously related to the Chinese story, though they do show an early, widespread context for the transformation motif in stories of male and female relationships. The Arab and Kashmiri tales, on the other hand, show probable specific influence on China due to the shared, extraordinary details of the magical farming and trickery. These stories provide material for reading the Chinese story in a more informed way. While it is certainly not common practice to read Tang tales with an eye on the tales' foreign or folkloric connections, when it is possible to do so, the rewards may be great. Taking Chinese tales out of their traditional textual vacuum allows readers to imagine new and deeper modes of interpretation. For example, the foreign tales all directly involve sex between men and women or are embedded deeply in tales with primary *foci* on finding a sexual partner, enjoying sex, the dangers of sex, jealousy because of sex, and so on. When we read the seemingly dry and cerebral "Banqiao San niangzi" as related to these stories, the mind opens to hidden nuances and subtexts not before considered, and one realizes that, though it does not openly talk of sex as the foreign stories and indeed as many Tang tales do, the tale may be more erotically charged than it appears on the surface. In the following section I will attempt to better understand the story "Banqiao San niangzi" by focusing on subtleties in the setting, the characterization, the motifs of spying, eating and drinking, and, most of importantly, the implicit dangers of woman-centric or woman-controlled, "inappropriate" sexuality. When helpful, I will raise comparisons with the foreign tales.

The Setting and the Woman

The Chinese story starts out, as many other Tang tales do, like a hero journey, with a man on the road, at a liminal place between home and away, where anything can happen. Indeed, all of the foreign stories share this feature. The protagonists of all the narratives, from Badr to Bhīmaparākrama, are displaced men, on their way somewhere, trying to find something: a lover, a lost master. The Chinese story alone does not have the protagonist trying to find something or someone before he meets the woman; he is merely presented as a traveler, a merchant. Zhao is unusual even in Tang tales, where usually the hero is a young (often unsuccessful) scholar heading somewhere in particular or returning home

339-57). Another late piece, one of the most interesting and rich modern treatments of the motif of a woman's transformative effect on men, is a Japanese story written in 1900 by Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花, (1873-1939) called Kōya Hijiri 高野聖, "The Holy Man of Mt. Kōya," in Inouye 21-72. In it a man takes a journey off the path of the modern world to the dangerous, old, feminine world of the mountain and waters. He meets an alluring woman who, like Circe and Queen Lab, is surrounded by a myriad of beasts—the unfortunate men she has transformed.

after having taken the civil service examination. It is only after he meets San niangzi that the merchant Zhao has a clear goal of copying and mastering the innkeeper's magical and greedy means of making an income. The locus for the action, like the Indian episode in *KSS* 4, is an inn—ostensibly a home away from home—and the proprietress, like the Indian witch, is someone who is paid to give a bed and food to the traveler. Unlike the other foreign stories in which the sorceress is often an alluring woman, the Chinese tale does not mention San niangzi's physical appearance, but simply states that she is a woman over thirty years of age who lives alone, with no husband, children or relations. To a reader of Tang tales, all of these qualities could have signaled danger. The setting and the innkeeper's gender are the first causes for concern: in most stories of the time, it is a commonplace that "things happen" while on the road and women whom travelers encounter are potentially dangerous creatures who are more (or less) than what they appear to be. The fact that San niangzi is unconnected to family of any kind is the next hint of the peril that she represents. A proper woman in traditional Chinese society, no matter whether of merchant class or *wenren* (literati) class, would have been identified by her relations with her parents, her husband, and her children. San niangzi has none of these identifying characteristics, so she falls outside categories for normal, human females. The next few sentences turn this first impression on its head, however, by saying that San niangzi is well thought of, that she is generous, wealthy, and that she takes good care of travelers. These initial lines already reveal the story to be sophisticated. The woman's lack of familial context shows the Tang reader that there is danger, but the woman's observable behavior tells him that the situation is safe. The reader wonders if perhaps the danger signal was false, and that maybe her inn really is a safe haven. None of the foreign variants has this layer of uncertainty regarding the female sorceress; the fact that the woman is not to be trusted is clear from the outset in all of them. The Chinese tale thus at the beginning conveys about the female character a sense of ambivalence that was typical of Tang tales and apparently pleasing to the contemporary readership. One potential reading that contemporary readers might have had at this point is that Third Lady would develop as a female *xia* 俠, or knight-errant, but of course, this is never developed, as the rather manly female xia often were portrayed as ultimately heroic, and having admirable goals that necessitated their antisocial or unwomanly behavior.[37] Two examples out of many are "Cui Shensi" 崔慎思[38] and "Nie Yinniang" 聶隱娘.[39]

[37] Hsieh 145-50.
[38] *Taiping guangji* 194.282-83.
[39] *Ibid.*, 194.283-85.

By contrast to many female knight-errant tales, in "Banqiao San niangzi" the female is not in the end portrayed as having an honorable set of values that justifies her questionable behavior. Also, rather than killing men as female *xia* often did for some righteous reason, San niangzi sells them for money. This selfish, materialistic goal makes her the perfect villain for a tale about merchants.

The Male Protagonist

Zhao Jihe arrives later than other travelers, and so is given a bed next to San niangzi's room, the "deepest" part of the inn (*zui de shenchu* 最得深處). Reading this tale as an adventure journey with its basic tripartite structure of home/transformative experience/home, life/death/life, self/other/self, or order/chaos/order, the protagonist has been thrown right into the dark interior world that so many protagonists must typically enter and emerge from, reborn or transformed in some way. Symbolically it is the most dangerous (farthest from the safety of the known) part of the experience, but it is not unexpected.[40] Immediately after mentioning the ominous place where Zhao will sleep, however, the scene shifts to the merry dinner table; this transition for the second time causes the reader to feel perplexed and to doubt his initial instincts: perhaps there will be no danger in that deep place, after all. The guests all eat and drink, but Zhao alone abstains from alcohol. In such a laconic narrative style every word and phrase is important, so his choice not to drink is likely not to be taken as an incidental piece of information. It is the one thing that saves him from the fate of the other guests, and that eventually allows him to emerge from the potential danger in the bowels of the inn. It is presented simply, in just a few words, "He was not in the habit of drinking alcohol." (*su bu yin jiu* 素不飲酒), yet in fact, Zhao's abstinence is crucial to the entire movement of the plot. It is the sole reason that he is able to spy on the magical ritual, to avoid eating the charmed food, and to escape from the ensuing transformation. The Chinese tale differs from the foreign stories, which simply present their protagonists as curious, observant, clever or lucky—in some of them, such as "Jullanar," the protagonist drinks (and sleeps) freely with the sorceress. The Chinese writer alone has presented a cautionary tale about drinking. The other stories, therefore, teach the message that sometimes men will inevitably fall under the spell of powerful women, and sometimes they will be clever or lucky enough to figure out how to bring the women under their own spells. "Banqiao San niangzi" adds a twist:

[40] Campbell 90-95. This common pattern is seen in many well-known Tang tales, such as "Du Zichun" 杜子春, "Nanke taishou zhuan" 南柯太守傳, "Zhenzhong ji" 枕中記 and "Li wa zhuan" 李娃傳.

it says that if you allow your mind and senses to be blurred when in a vulnerable spot you will not be alert and may fall into the clutches of a strong, clever woman who will overpower you and take away your manly identity. If you avoid drinking and stay awake, the story goes, you can remain stronger than the women that you meet and use them for your own purposes. This focus on the dangers of alcohol is seen in other Tang tales as well, such as "Nanke taishou zhuan" 南柯太守傳.[41] In "Banqiao San niangzi," Zhao's barely mentioned abstinence is the key to understanding the hero's movement from a potentially vulnerable to a powerful position. Zhao does not ever become dehumanized (or even temporarily become part of an animal or demonic world as in many Tang tales) and, unlike all of the foreign stories, he does not need another person or spirit to rescue him in the end. Because of this, in comparison to all of the versions the Chinese tale comes across as particularly appreciative of a man's innate abilities; he does not need luck or outside help because he can rely on his own strengths and positive qualities to succeed.

Food and Drink

The motif of forbidden food and drink is widespread and well known in folklore and myth worldwide. Of particular interest is the perceived danger of eating or drinking when in a liminal space.[42] This place may be the underworld, a fairy land, or, in the case of Chinese medieval tales, any *yin*-dominated 陰 place where a female holds sway. Food, not surprisingly, plays an important role in some of the foreign tales of transformation as well. Circe can only transform men after having fed them. All of the Arab analogues as well as the fourth *Kathāsaritsāgara* tale include the magical sowing of grain and making of charmed meal or cakes. In many of the stories the grain is barley. They also share with the Chinese story a male traveler who ventures into, enjoys, and then tries to emerge whole from a woman's magical world by means of first eating, and then not eating, her food.

In "Banqiao San niangzi" there are three places in which eating and drink-

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[41] One could argue that in that famous tale, the protagonist's drinking problem is the entire motive for his father to arrange the supernaturally transformative journey on behalf of his son. See my "Messages from the Dead in 'Nanke Taishou zhuan'" 121-30.

[42] When people go to the underworld in stories, there is often an injunction not to eat or drink the food there or else the traveler will have to stay there forever, as part of the family, so to speak. The best known example in the west is Persephone, who is doomed to live in the underworld for a period of each year after Hades tricks her to eat some seeds. This motif is known in folklore studies as the "Eating and Drinking Taboo," C211, or "Transformation by Eating or Drinking," D550-551. See Thompson, Vol. 1, 394-97 and Vol. 2, 43; Penzer, Vol. VI 133-36.

ing become significant. Not drinking represents the passing of the initial test of the hero Zhao Jihe; at supper, he has (possibly) eaten the woman's food but has not drunk her wine. Luckily for Zhao Jihe, the only dangerous part of the first meal turns out to be the alcohol. San niangzi's innocent evening meal is possibly meant to put at ease both the guests in the inn and the reader. It also paradoxically might have heightened the Tang reader's tension. Sarah M. Allen recently has studied a Tang tale in which a group of men eat a merry feast with otherworldly women, only to discover to their horror that the ale they have drunk is actually human blood.[43] With the possibility of such a plot twist in mind, readers would remain especially vigilant when Zhao sits down at the female innkeeper's dinner table.

The next time food enters the story, it is in the form of the magically conjured cakes. Because the hero did not drink alcohol the night before his suspicions were aroused; he is now able to observe the eating taboo as well and to escape intact even as he sees his hapless fellow guests start to bray and fall to the floor. The third time food becomes significant is when the hero uses the woman's own food to transform her. She does not think of holding to an eating taboo in her own sphere, so the traveler is able to trick her into becoming her own victim. San niangzi is a woman who has been making a living by generously providing nourishment and rest to men only to steal everything from them, including their humanity. She seems to be fulfilling the normal role of a woman in her nurturing of men, and her first meal proves to be safe. She provides a place to sleep and eat. The appearance of a man who "as a general rule does not drink" like other men and who is thus able to avoid her sinister nourishment, sets the scene for her to eat her own food and turn into a pack animal to serve him.

Spying

The motif of the benefits of overhearing or spying on something originally not meant for one's ears or eyes is a popular one in classical language Tang stories as well as in folklore worldwide. In one Tang tale, for example, originally a Korean folktale recorded in the ninth century miscellany *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, a good brother spies on a group of children playing in the mountains. They hit a magic golden awl upon a rock to make wishes for food and drink. The good man takes the awl and discovers that it works for him—he soon becomes rich. When his greedy brother follows in his footsteps, the magical children

[43] Allen, "The Fantastical Female in Tang Narrative."

believe that he is the one who stole their awl, and they mete out a terrible punishment.[44] In another moralistic tale with spying as an important motif, a man makes regular offerings to the Privy Spirit. As a reward for his loyalty, the Privy Spirit rewards him with such keen hearing that he is able to spy on the conversation of ants. The ants complain about the bitter cold they feel due to a trove of silver buried near their anthill. The man promptly digs up the treasure, and becomes rich.[45] Each of the many Tang stories like these combines the spying/overhearing motif with another, equally important one—a journey to the land of the dead, a reward for good behavior, and so on, all popular motifs in Chinese tales of the time. "Banqiao San niangzi" uniquely combines it with subtexts of sobriety (Zhao does not drink and remains a clever and successful human man) and eroticism (Zhao's looking into the dark bedroom and San niangzi's secret actions). In the foreign tales, the spying motif is equally important, but there is less suggested eroticism; this is simply because either sex has been blatantly discussed as a primary topic or the men and women in the story have openly been engaging in sexual activities. In none of the foreign tales, as mentioned above, is the message about not drinking combined with the overhearing/spying motif as in China.

The Sorceress and the Puppets

There is another very brief story in China, "Ni Lüke" 逆旅客, that might have been influenced by "Banqiao San niangzi" or by a folktale from which they both stemmed. In it a man performs plowing magic in his room, grows black locust trees, and sells the seeds to earn money.[46] This tale features similar magical farming but lacks the sexual suggestiveness of "Banqiao San niangzi" partly since the story is narratively undeveloped. It simply presents the magic in a laconic and straightforward fashion typical of *zhiguai* anecdotes, so that it reads like a factual news report. In "Banqiao San niangzi," however, the skillful treatment of the setting and the other elements completely changes how we read the tale. The fact of the woman's existence without a man has been made clear in the initial introduction to her. Though third Lady is not attached to a man socially and appears to be a successful, independent businesswoman, the farming magic that she performs is pregnant with implied sexual energy. The woman, a kind of

[44] Fang Nansheng 方南生, Xuji 1.199. This is the folktale type known as "The magic object that will not serve the usurper," 0569A.

[45] "Taizhou min" 台州民 in Wang Wen'gao 王文誥 (b. 1764), *Tangdai congshu* 唐代叢書 137.

[46] Ni lüke is from *Jishen lu* 稽神錄 by Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916-991), found in *Taiping guangji* 85.446.

mini agricultural creatrix, is not doing anything overtly licentious, contrary to what a man might expect when looking through a tiny hole into her bedroom. She is engaging in onanistic creation: she makes life (in the form of grain) without a man in her bedroom. Unlike in most myths with this mode of creation, here it is presented as done by a female, and it has unnatural and sinister consequences.[47]

San niangzi shuts the door and blows out her candle, and it is with this action that she symbolically and literally signals that the day is done. The text uses the words *biguan* 閉關 (shutting off the pass) here, to emphasize that she is not simply closing her door, but that she is cutting off communication and entering her own realm. Presently, however, Zhao Jihe hears the woman rummaging around and making noises. When he peers through a crack in the wall, he sees into the woman's dark, secret world. She takes a candle out from under an overturned vessel (*fuqi* 覆器). An overturned vessel is one that cannot be filled with water; it is a metaphor in Buddhism for a shameless heart that cannot be filled with the Way;[48] the author here is hinting with subtlety typical of Tang tales at San niangzi's evil nature and directly contradicting the earlier description of her as virtuous, or literally, "having the way" (*you dao* 有道). She lights the candle that comes from this lightless place; thus commences the ominous creative action of the night. She takes out a wooden man, ox, and plow, all six or seven inches long. We recall that the reader of Tang tales is predisposed to expect a sexual encounter between Zhao and San niangzi here; this is the most natural moment in the tale for things to become spicy. Her taking out the wooden tools at this juncture is a unique and bizarre twist that readers could not possibly have imagined. However, even though Zhao does not sleep with his hostess as expected, the little six- or seven-inch long wooden toys do retain an obvious and erotically suggestive nature. San niangzi spits water on the puppets and they come to life (*hanshui xunzhi erwu bian xingzou* 含水噀之二物便行走).[49] Zhao Jihe can see through the hole that the woman is in control of the

[47] Creation by a single being via masturbation, spitting (or both together), or verbal orders (the word) are all found in ancient creation myths, such as that of the Egyptian god Atum. See Sproul 17-18, 49, 77, 88-89, 134-35, 153, 287, 349, 353.

[48] Though there are variant interpretations of *fuqi*, I follow Okada, who cites Yan shigu's 顏師古 (581-645) commentary on the word 射覆 (shooting at the overturned) in Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) *Hanshu* 漢書 biography of Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 BCE); Yan says it means putting a variety of things under an overturned vessel (*fuqi* 覆器) and shooting at them. Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 65.2843; Okada 125. For the Buddhist sense of the word, see Ding 2795.

[49] In the foreign tales at this point the woman makes unnatural food only with her hands and with verbal spells, but the early Arab and the Chinese stories share the odd element of an intermediary who does the work for the witch. This intermediary, like a brush in the hand of a writer, emphasizes the woman's creative control of the action.

little wooden man she takes out of the chest, a puppet that is perhaps a veiled reference to a phallus and might have been both titillating and threatening to male Tang readers. It is significant that the woman controls the act in the bedroom—she brings the little man to life with water from her mouth, and she verbally tells him what to do. She makes her puppet work for her; symbolically she controls the act of creating life, which is represented by plowing and sowing seeds in the earth of her bedroom. In the tales that contain the motif of the magical farming, only the early Arab stories and "Banqiao San niangzi" have the woman ordering an intermediary to do the farming for her. The Arab story features mouse farmers while the Chinese story adds the detail of little wooden farming puppets. In "Jullanar" as well as *KSS* 4, the woman directly sows the seeds and harvests them, muttering spells all the while. In "Banqiao san niangzi," the puppets might exist partially to create a narrative balance in that the woman's manipulation and control of the farmer puppet parallels her later manipulation and control of the merchant men. The narrative structure is more pleasingly rounded than if she had simply used verbal spells to sow the seeds in the ground.

Plowing and sowing seeds as a metaphor for sexual intercourse is a folkloric motif seen in other cultures,[50] but the Chinese literary tradition is not entirely without examples of farming as a metaphor for sexuality. One early example that may be read in this way subtly presents side by side images of plowing fertile fields and sowing seed in them with those of human male and female relations and the place of the individual in the chain of ancestor to offspring is Mao 290 載芟 "Zai shan" in the *Shijing* 詩經,[51] which Arthur Waley translates as follows:

> They clear away the grass, the trees;
> Their ploughs open up the ground.
> In a thousand pairs they tug at weeds and roots,
> Along the low grounds, along the ridges.
> . . . .
> They mark out, they plough.
> Deep the food-baskets that are brought;
> Dainty are the wives,
> The men press close to them.
> And now with shares so sharp
> They set to work upon the southern acre.
> They sow the many sorts of grain,
> The seeds that hold moist life. (162)

[50] This motif is catalogued as Z197.3.4 and Z198.1.2. See El-Shamy 527.

[51] Mao 290. 載芟載柞，其耕澤澤。千耦其耘，徂隰徂畛；有嗿其饁，思媚其婦，有依其士。有略其耜，俶載南畝。播厥百穀，實函斯活。

Traditional *Shijing* scholarship does not include an interpretation of this poem that directly conflates sowing seed in soil with sexually producing children to continue that tradition (and ensuring the strength of the other thread in the family continuum—the honoring of ancestors with the harvested produce). However, in folkloric and mythological motif studies, both the placing of a hoe in fertile ground to ready it for seeds and feeding a loved one (seen here in the baskets of food the women bring to their farming husbands) are treated as obviously intimate and even sexual images. In this poem, the words *mei* 媚 (bewitching, fascinating, love, or as Waley puts it, "dainty") and *yi* 依 (press close to, intimately love) can be interpreted to be suggestive of marital intimacy.

Unlike the protagonists of this agricultural poem, men and women pressing close to each other to participate in age-old farming activities, San niangzi single-handedly fulfills all of the steps for producing food in the space of one night. The reader eventually learns that food made of grain grown in this unnatural way subverts the laws of nature and culture in order to transform men who eat it into beasts of burden that can be used or sold. The motif of a woman performing the act of farming and making grain is present in the Arab and Indian versions, but the detail of the wooden puppets is unique to this tale and seems, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to have been a brilliant creative detail added by the author. In fact, I have not found another similar treatment of the motif in any textual or folkloric tradition.[52]

The Transformation

In "Banqiao San niangzi," some men actually fall victim to the sorceress. In similar stories such as the early Arab pieces and *KSS* 4, no other men are involved; the protagonists are on their own with the women, and no one ever transforms except the woman herself. In each of those stories the implication is that the woman is planning to change the man into whatever animal she herself eventually becomes, but the plan never materializes, and there is no suggestion that she has done it before. In "Banqiao San niangzi," on the other hand, it is

[52] Karl Kao says in his editorial note to a translation of the tale that "the mode of imagination shown in the imitative ritual of 'farming' . . . [is] found in the native tradition of *wu-ku* magic." See Kao 309-10. However, I have not been able to find any reference to the specific kind of farming ritual seen in "Banqiao San niangzi" in Chinese texts discussing the preparation of *gu* 蠱 poison. I can see the relation to our story, though, in that *gu* is early on connected to excessive sex with women, and it is also described as a potent poison used to harm people and take their possessions and money. See Feng and Shyrock 1-30. Paul Rakita Golden discusses *nüde* 女德 (female potency) and *gu* in "The View of Women in Early Confucianism," in Chenyang Li 143-44.

clear that San niangzi has made a successful practice out of changing lodgers into animals.

Like in the otherwise less similar "Circe" story and *KSS* 2, one man stays outside the magical sphere or circle and watches other men get charmed. The reason for his eventual success in gaining an advantage over the woman differs between these versions. In "Circe," Odysseus receives divine help from Hermes. The protagonist of *KSS* 2 is simply quicker than the demon. In "Banqiao San niangzi," Zhao Jihe's personal attributes are more heavily emphasized than those of the other stories' protagonists; he does not need any divine assistance, and he relies on his sober-minded alertness rather than on any weakness in the woman. The presence of a strong woman and other male victims in "Banqiao San niangzi" heightens the sense of the hero's cleverness and alertness compared to both the woman and other men. It also lends one episode of highly dramatic action to the otherwise understated Tang tale.

In the morning, Zhao Jihe leaves the inn early. He hides and eavesdrops for the second time. This repeated action by the protagonist is typical of the plot structure of Tang tales; Tang readers obviously appreciated symmetrical and even circular plot lines—it is not seen in the foreign stories and, besides underscoring how prudent Zhao is, probably was an addition to the Chinese tale for reasons of aesthetic appreciation. Zhao sees the men all fall to the floor and start to bray,[53] and he sees San niangzi take the men's possessions. Now Zhao and the reader realize that the proprietress has become wealthy not only from selling the transformed donkeys for low prices but also by appropriating her guests' valuables and other personal goods.[54]

In a narrative culture where human to animal transformations are usually from fox to human or tiger to human and vice versa, the human to ass transformation must have struck the Tang readership as particularly weird, but it is not at all strange when one realizes that the animal is an ass here because the Chinese story inherited the ass motif from elsewhere—the early Arab stories, "Jullanar of the Sea" and the *Kathāsaritsāgara* anecdotes all feature primarily mules, asses or horses.[55] In other literary traditions asses are commonly thought

[53] This part of the story will possibly remind western readers of the modern tale of "Pinocchio." Interestingly enough, that tale not only features "bad" boys turning into donkeys, but also a wooden puppet that is able to function almost like a live person.

[54] In the other versions, the woman keeps the animal as a beast of burden, has it whipped daily, or sells it to be killed by a butcher. While the Chinese version might seem slightly mild in comparison, I argue that to a traditional Chinese literatus, the idea of being made into an animal and sold to travelling merchants as a pack animal must have been comparable to losing one's life literally.

[55] *KSS* 4 features a goat, which also has strong priapic associations.

of as representative of male sexuality and lust;[56] most readers of literature worldwide know of the priapic associations of donkeys and would possibly understand that the men have been turned into bestial manifestations of their lustful natures. This animal would not necessarily have had the same sexual association for Chinese readers. Possibly a Chinese reader would have missed any priapic connotation and simply read the asses as useful pack animals that are prized as possessions that can be ridden and sold. The notion of the actualization of men's bestial nature does not make sense on the surface of the Chinese tale the way it does in the foreign stories, in which sex plays a more overt role, and which teach a moral about the negative effects of love relationships. The unfortunate men in "Banqiao San niangzi" never get to sleep with the lady of the house, unlike other Tang protagonists with their fox or ghost lovers, but get turned into asses anyway. Since men's transformation into asses as opposed to other animals is unique for Chinese tales of the strange, and since it is not an overtly sexual image in that tradition, it serves effectively to heighten the sense of the unfamiliar more than if the men had been turned into foxes or tigers.

Gender Power Play

Similar only to Lucius in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Zhao Jihe envies the woman and her magic. The other tales speak of the hero observing the magic but not specifically of envying it. Zhao is initially more successful than Lucius, since he does not become an ass himself by misuse of the magic. In fact, he does not use the magic at all, but, like in "Jullanar" and *KSS* 4, he cleverly tricks the woman into using it against herself. The second time he comes to the inn, he substitutes a cake that he has made for one of hers that he has previously stolen. She is tricked because she lets her guard down, so the story almost reads as a competition as to who is paying the most attention. Unfortunately Zhao is never able to figure out how to use the wooden man, ox and plow to replicate San niangzi's method of getting rich. Nevertheless, he is able to ride her for several years, and she proves to be a sturdy mount that never misses a step. This suggests that although Zhao fails to learn her mysteriously creative rites, he is able to gain at least a small benefit by using his brain power. Through his wits, he dominates a woman who had made a practice of devaluing men. The image of a man riding a woman is only shared with *KSS* 1, "A hadith of Khurāfa" and "Jullanar of the Sea." The protagonist of *KSS* 4 sells the sorceress to a butcher to be killed for

[56] The ass was a symbol of lust particularly in Indian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman literature. See Rowland 20-28; Werness 20-23; Tresidder 49.

meat, which is a simpler, more violent, yet less satisfying solution than that in "Banqiao San niangzi." Zhao maintains his own self control throughout and thus learns to extend that control to the woman in his life; rather than a simple commodity as food, she actually serves an important purpose as Zhao's mount. The Chinese story puts women in their place in a powerful and yet non-violent way. Whereas in "Jullanar," Queen Lab quickly regains the upper hand and turns Badr into a bird,[57] disempowering him until his mother can save him, in "Banqiao San niangzi" Zhao is able to ride San niangzi for a number of years. The image of a successful man who is in firm control of his own affairs could not be stronger. After this lengthy and satisfying period of time, an old man recognizes the sorceress and asks Zhao to have mercy on her. He tears open the mouth of the donkey and splits the hide, and the woman hops out exactly as before and runs off. In this typically laconic and understated Tang tale, the description of San niangzi's sensational mode of escape from the animal skin recalls the one other vivid moment when the guests start braying and falling to the floor as animals. The rescue is shared with *KSS* 2, 3, and 4, as well as with "Jullanar." But in those stories it is the protagonist, not the antagonist, who is rescued by a third party. Here Zhao needs no rescuing. In fact, he is so successful that it seems the narrative swings slightly toward a sympathy for the witch, who has, in the words of the old man who rescues her, suffered enough.

The Lack of Context

The comparative reading presented here calls attention to the fact that the Chinese story is unrelated to its neighbors in a larger collection, in contrast to the foreign stories, which, without exception, are parts of winding strings of connected stories. The three Indian anecdotes and "Jullanar of the Sea," for example, are embedded in tomes that are full of examples of human to animal transformation of just this type. Time and time again, dangerous females use their charms to bring out the animal natures of men, and time and time again, the men turn the tables on the women. Magic is used on practically every page. Countless anecdotes about the romantic relationships between women and men feature overt warnings about the nature of females and the need for caution and restraint on the part of men. These elements are obviously endlessly fascinating to the narrators and presumably to the intended readers of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, but there they still are ubiquitous and thus

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[57] In *KSS* 4, Bhīmaparākrama was also turned into a bird by the friend of the butcher's wife.

seem almost banal. "Banqiao San niangzi" uses the understated Tang narrative style to showcase these same motifs that, in the Chinese literary milieu, stand out as remarkable and even as totally anomalous. Of course, since one of the primary goals of Tang tales since the Ming known as *chuanqi* is to transmit (*chuan* 傳) the strange (*qi* 奇), this is not surprising. The contextual vacuum caused by the lack of the company of related tales is striking, and it represents one of the clearest divergences between Chinese informal narrative such as *chuanqi* and *zhiguai* and stories of other cultures.

Conclusion

An exploration of the foreign and folkloric roots of "Banqiao San niangzi" is one way to enrich and deepen readers' understanding of Tang informal narratives. "Banqiao San niangzi" exhibits motifs that can be thought of as universal, such as human to animal transformation, so it is valid to posit that a story concerning them could have arisen independently in China and Greece. But the narrative element in which San niangzi performs magical plowing, reaping, and threshing to create food that transforms men to animals is exceptional, only shared with a very few Indian and Arab medieval texts. This fact strongly suggests direct transmission between the three geographical areas represented by these stories. Given how comfortably the tale fits in the Indian and Arab contexts contrasted with its utter uniqueness in China, it is clear that the direction of this transmission was into, rather than out of, China. It is often assumed that movement of stories from India to China probably occurred via written texts, but in many cases, such as "Banqiao San niangzi," there is no evidence for such a claim. It is more likely that this story and many others moved across borders, by sea or overland caravan, as lively oral tales recounted by tradesmen, entertainers, and even religious practitioners. The fact that the protagonists are of the merchant class suggests that traders carried this folktale and it was told by, about, and for the thriving merchant class in the Tang, before being written down by and for literati to enjoy.

It is crucial to foster our understanding of Chinese informal literature by reading tales with an awareness of similar stories in other literary traditions, of the different contexts in which the motifs lie, and of the interconnections between classical language stories and folklore. A close and careful reading of the tale in each of its contexts is also necessary. As part of his theory about this story, Yang Xianyi concludes that the place in the story was an actual crossroads where foreign merchants met and told tales; they spun this yarn and *when it added*

Chinese names, it became a Chinese story (italics mine).[58] But certainly a simple change of names is not all it took for this tale to take root in Chinese soil. Chinese tellers of the tale added a moral about not drinking in order to be on one's guard around women, like other Tang tales demonstrating the importance in the period of the motif of the dangers of alcohol. The Chinese tellers made the male hero even stronger, more independent, and cleverer than the strong, clever San niangzi and than the male protagonists of any of the foreign tales. They also added significantly more detail and some farming tools to the scene of magic, contributing a deep sense of unease and strangeness, satisfying the contemporary taste for *guai* 怪 (the monstrous or weird) and *qi* 奇 (the marvelous). Finally, they sublimated the frank eroticism found in the tale's literary relatives. This change interestingly also accentuated the sense of the weird, since it thwarted the expectations of readers of Tang tales, which often also contain open references to sexuality between men and the women they encounter far from home. The open references to sex and the warnings of the dangers of women in *The Thousand and One Nights* and *Kathāsaritsāgara* as well as in other informal Chinese tales are transformed in "Banqiao san niangzi" into suggestive hints that are narrated and understood at a symbolic level but not a literal one. The new reading presented here leads to the conclusion that the Tang author and his contemporary audience were more sophisticated and more aware of the tale's inherent irony and sexual innuendo than readers of recent times give them credit for. No modern critic to my knowledge mentions anything in this tale about gender power play or sexuality. But the reading of the tale given here demonstrates that, like the foreign stories and some other Tang tales, "Banqiao San niangzi" is still in fact centrally concerned with the dangers of female power and the importance of men retaining the upper hand when dealing with women. Even though or perhaps because it is brief and understated and lacks both clarifying context and generic familiarity, it likely delivered a powerful message to men in Tang China. "Banqiao San niangzi" proves that implication and restraint may hold as much, if not more, enchantment than what is shown openly, even as it reassures its male literati readers that they have the wherewithal to avoid falling prey to the very enchantment that delights them.

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房中耕作，桌邊驢鳴：〈板橋三娘子〉中的競爭與控制

摘　要

唐傳奇〈板橋三娘子〉收錄於薛漁思所著之《河東記》。故事主角四處遊歷之際巧遇身懷幻術之女店主，該女以房中耕種的蕎麥製成燒餅供應下榻的房客，房客食用燒餅後皆變成驢。此種幻術不曾出現在任何其他的中國文學作品中。我推斷這個故事源自印度，並進而探索這則傳奇與其他外國文學中類似的故事之間的關係。本文提出對於傳奇的新讀法，將之與印度和阿拉伯版本相互對照，並據以主張這則傳奇的主旨是性別間的角力。此傳奇作者凸顯出人們對於惡意殘忍、並且不需要男性協助、不擇手段的成功女性商人有所恐懼。更有甚者，這種女性可以利用男性以達到目的，甚或是奪取男性的身份。薛漁思傳達出男性只要小心防範、保持警覺，就能以其人之道還治其人之身，使之自食惡果。

關鍵字：唐傳奇，幻術耕作，三娘子，形變，〈板橋三娘子〉