Morality and Cannibalism in Ming-Qing Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Accounts of cannibalism from local gazetteers and historical records in China are generally linked to the desperation of famine victims. But in its literary representation in Ming-Qing fiction, cannibalism has a wide variety of types ranging from self sacrifice (not involving victimization) to aggressive and cruel devouring of innocent victims. Analyzed as a literary construct rather than an anthropological phenomenon or a historical event, cannibalism yields rich meanings in ethical, allegorical, metaphorical, and sometimes parodic aspects. This paper is a preliminary exploration of how cannibalistic portrayals problematize the issue of morality. The literary portrayals of anthropophagy related to famine, revenge, ritual, medicine, or disordered appetite, serve mainly as powerful symbols in the authors' discourse on morality and critique of society and humanity. Some authors depict *gegu* (割股) cannibalism and its variations as exemplary, showing an extreme form of martyrdom. Others portray the gormandizing of human flesh as heinous violation of morality. Using cannibalism as a moralistic metaphor, the authors connect the physical body, the body politic, and the cosmos in an ethical chain, thereby manipulating this topics for didactic and satirical purposes. Because cannibalism is so excessively atrocious, it lends itself well to explorations of moral questions and reflections on traditional morality.

KEY WORDS

Cannibalism
gegu (割股)
Sanguo yanyi (三國演義)
Xiyou ji (西遊記)
Shi dian tou (石點頭)
Xianyu jing (賢愚經)
Confucian morality
Ming-Qing fiction
Shuihu zhuan (水滸傳)
Sui Yangdi yanshi (隋煬帝艷史)
Xingshi yinyuan zhuan (醒世姻緣傳)

The practice of consuming human flesh is traceable to the remotest periods of prehistory in many parts of the world. Although skeptics such as William Arens have asserted that no one has ever observed cannibalism,[1] we do find reliable eyewitness reports. In China, cannibalism is a paradoxical theme that raises sensitive historical and political issues. There is a natural reluctance to admit that the "civilized" Chinese could engage in such a "barbarous" practice, since it is obviously easier to assign such cruel conduct to people other than one's own. We find that some Chinese historians showed much less restraint in recording instances of cannibalism from the previous, "fallen," dynasty, than in recording instances from their own periods. Most recently, some P. R. C. commentators have condemned the Chinese writer Zheng Yi's (鄭義) *Hongse jinian bei* (紅色紀念碑, *Red Memorial*), a literary reportage on cannibalism in Guangxi (廣西) during the Cultural Revolution, as a pure fabrication intended to discredit the Communist Party and the Chinese people.[2]

Accounts of cannibalism abound in Chinese history and in a number of literary works. We find examples in historical records such as Sima Qian's (司馬遷, 145?-86? B.C.) *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji 史記)*, *A Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Administration* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), *The Twenty-five Standard Histories* (*Ershiwu shi* 二十五史), and local gazetteers; in compendia such as *The Taiping Miscellany* (*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記), the tenth-century compendium of classical tales, and the mammoth Qing dynasty *Compendium of Books Ancient and Modern* (*Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成); in miscellaneous jottings such as Zhuang Chuo's (莊綽, Song Dynasty 宋朝) *The Chicken's Ribs Compendium* (*Jile bian* 雞肋編) and Tao Zongyi's (陶宗儀, 1316-1403) *Notes Taken When Ceasing to Plow* (*Chuogeng lu* 輟耕錄); in Buddhist

sutras and literature; and in poetry, drama, and fiction.

So far, the scholarship on cannibalism in China, as evidenced by the works of J. J. M. De Groot (1967 reprint), Kuwabara Jitsuzo (桑原騭藏, 1924), and Robert Des Rotours (1963, 1968), has gravitated towards its socio-historical aspects.[3] A more recent study written by Key Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China* (1990), presents ample examples and data, and rightly indicates some characteristics specific to cannibalism in China.[4] However, Chong's brief section on cannibalism in Chinese literature is sketchy, simplistic, and sometimes faulty. Moreover, Chong tends to take literary examples as supporting evidence for social history, thereby failing to interpret the rich meanings embedded in the texts.

Scholars are divided on the issue of cannibalism in China. De Groot, Kuwabara, Des Rotours, Chong, and Zheng Yi cite historical examples supporting the existence of cannibalism. Conversely, scholars such as Frederick Mote, Jonathan Spence, and Eugene Anderson are extremely skeptical. Mote doubts that gourmet cannibalism was really practiced and regards reports of famine cannibalism as symbolic of the severity of calamity (243). According to Spence, the familiar phrase in local gazetteers, "In this year people ate each other (*ren shi ren* 人食人)," was merely metaphorical (261). Anderson argues that fictional accounts of cannibalism in China such as those found in *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) were unreliable. Only "during desperate famines or in small quantities for medicine or revenge" did the Chinese eat human flesh (68, 226n3).

Indeed, as the ultimate transgression, cannibalism holds a special fascination for most people and is sometimes overplayed. For example, based on flimsy evidence, some scholars jump to the conclusion that Peking Man practiced cannibalism. However, further archaeological findings prove that this is incorrect (Anderson 8). Ulterior motives also play an important role in some scholars' writings. Written during war time, Kuwabara's works on Chinese cannibalism surely lent support to the belligerent Japanese government's colonial and political designs on China. In addition to reading histories more critically, we also have to realize that cannibalism is culture-specific.

In China, it is reasonable to separate cannibalism into two categories: aggressive and non-aggressive. The non-aggressive type refers to such self-sacrificial practices as *gegu* (flesh-slicing or thigh-gouging). Thus, the conclusion we can draw is that certain instances of "aggressive cannibalism" may have existed in China, but such cases were rare. While aggressive cannibalism is in general condemned, the non-aggressive *gegu* cannibalism presents greater ambivalence; because of its intricate connection to the Confucian virtue of filial piety, it can receive either praise or blame, depending on the circumstances.[5]

Accounts of cannibalism from local gazetteers and historical records are generally linked to the desperation of famine victims. By comparison, the literary representation of cannibalism is more varied and morally controversial. In Ming-Qing fiction, in particular, we find a wide variety of types. Various aspects of this theme range from cannibalism as a result of self-sacrifice (in which no victimization is involved) to the aggressive and cruel devouring of innocent victims. While scholars like Chong and Zheng Yi take literary examples as evidence for social history,[6] I feel that there is a need to understand fictional portrayals of cannibalism as figurative expressions of the authors' ideas. Analyzed as a *literary* construct, rather than an anthropological phenomenon or a historical event, cannibalism is rich in ethical, religious, allegorical, metaphorical, and sometimes parodic dimensions. As part of a larger study that examines the topos of cannibalism as a literary construct, this paper is a preliminary exploration of how cannibalistic portrayals problematize the issue of morality. I argue that literary portrayals of anthropophagy related to famine, revenge, ritual, medicine, or disordered appetite, serve mainly as powerful symbols in the author's discourse on morality and in his critique of his own society and of humanity.

In Chapter 19 of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), Liu Bei (劉備) is defeated by Lü Bu (呂布) and flees to join Cao Cao (曹操):

> When he ran out of food on his way, Liu Bei would go to the villages to beg for food. Wherever he went, the peo-

ple would vie with one another to offer him food and drink as soon as they heard that he was Governor Liu of Yuzhou (豫州).

One day, Liu Bei sought lodging at a house for the night. A young man of the family came out to greet him. When Liu Bei asked his name, the young man said he was Liu An (劉安), a hunter. Realizing that the visitor was Governor Liu of Yuzhou, Liu An wished to find some game to offer to Liu Bei as food. Since he was unable to find any game for the moment, he killed his wife to feed Liu Bei.

Liu Bei asked, "What kind of meat is this?"

"It's wolf meat," replied Liu An.

Without the slightest suspicion, Liu Bei ate until he was full. When it was night, he went to bed.

At dawn when he was about to leave, Liu Bei went to the backyard to fetch his horse. Passing by the kitchen, he suddenly saw the body of a woman who was killed, the flesh on whose arms was totally sliced off. Astonished, Liu Bei inquired about it and discovered that what he had eaten the night before was the flesh of Liu An's wife.

Liu Bei felt so sad that tears streamed down his face when he mounted his horse.

Liu An told him, "I had wished to follow you, but because my old mother is still alive, I dare not travel far."

Liu Bei thanked him and left. (179)

Judging from the narration alone, the reader will not feel that the author condemns Liu An. The seventeenth-century critic Mao Zonggang does not seem to condemn Liu An: "Because Yi Ya (易牙) (the imperial chef) killed his own son to serve it as food to the king, Guan Zhong (管仲) judged him to be acting against human feelings (*fei renqing* 非人情) and warned the king not to become close to him. Is Liu An's case not the same as that? In my opinion, they are different. Yi Ya does it for profit (*li* 利), while Liu An does it for righteousness (*yi* 義). Since his lord has not run out of food, Yi Ya's cooking of his

own son is cruel (*buqing* 不情, literally "unfeeling"). When one's lord has run out of food, then even someone like Jiê Zhitui (介之推), who slices off his own flesh (to feed his lord with), is not being excessive." (177). Comparing Liu An with two historical examples of cannibalism above, Mao obviously feels that he resembles Jiê Zhitui, the loyal retainer who goes into exile with his prince.

Ostensibly, the author is drawing a parallel between Liu An and Jiê Zhitui, thereby showing the episode as a variation on the prototypical thigh-gouging (*gegu*) cannibalism. The practice of *gegu*—severing a piece of flesh from one's own thigh or arm and cooking it in broth to offer it to a dying parent, husband, or master to feed that person during famine or in attempt to cure a malady—is a form of non-aggressive self-sacrifice. Rather than being repudiated, such cannibalism has been celebrated since early literature as an expression of such Confucian virtues as filial piety and loyalty. While the loyal Jiê Zhitui severed a piece of flesh from his own thigh and made a nourishing broth for the starving prince, saving his life, Liu An also offers human flesh to a lord. Like Jiê Zhitui who later retreats to the mountain with his mother and refuses to accept a position from the king, Liu An also gives up his political ambition because of his filial devotion.

But the similarity between the two soon gives way to differences. Through a closer analysis, the reader will make a different moral judgment of the two. The case of Liu An involves far more complex hierarchical relationships and a somewhat different form of cannibalism than that of Jiê Zhitui. Unlike Jiê Zhitui who cuts off *his* own flesh, Liu An cuts off *his wife's* flesh. Dealing with only ruler-subject relationship, Jiê Zhitui fulfills his duty to his lord through self-sacrifice. In addition to the ruler-subject relationship in which he is an inferior, Liu An is nevertheless superior to his wife in the husband-wife relationship. In order to please the superior, he is aggressive to his wife, sacrificing her by forcing her to take his place. Since Liu Bei is not really Liu An's lord, Liu An actually destroys the husband-wife relationship in order to fulfill an imagined ruler-subject relationship. The circumstances in which these two instances of cannibalism occur

also differ. While Jiê Zhitui offers his own flesh to save his lord because no other food is available, Liu An serves human flesh—which he believes to have a gamy flavor—simply because he wants to be "hospitable." Such "hospitality," however, is excessive even if Liu An reveres Liu Bei highly as a ruler or a paternal figure. Since there is no mention of famine, Liu An obviously could have offered rice and vegetables, or even whatever domestic animals he may have kept. The author, however, emphasizes Liu An's desire to offer Liu Bei a delicacy. In addition to respect for Liu Bei, Liu An may have wished to compete with other people by serving Liu Bei game as food. In any case, his obsessive desire leads to deceit; he uses his wife's flesh to camouflage his inability to provide game. By calling it "wolf meat," he even claims credit for a non-existent effort in capture. Moreover, his gesture of "hospitality" ironically implicates his guest in an act of atrocity. Aware of Liu Bei's reputation for being virtuous, he should know that Liu Bei would by no means approve of the killing of his wife.

This episode thus portrays Liu An as ostensibly following Confucian virtues but secretly undermining them. In attempting to please Liu Bei, whom he regards as a future ruler, Liu An's behavior actually comes close to Yi Ya's. Both offer their inferiors—son or wife—to their rulers. While wives and children, inferior to husbands and parents due to gender and generation, should be ready to serve them, neither Yi Ya's son nor Liu An's wife is a willing sacrifice. Nor are they offered for a justifiable purpose. Yi Ya butchers his son, making him into a tasty dish, for profit and political advancement. Although Mao Zonggang contends that Liu An does it for righteousness, in the novel Liu An actually receives 100 taels of silver from Cao Cao as a reward for cooking up his wife. The fact that Liu An had originally wished to follow Liu Bei also reveals that he is not without political ambition. In fact, Liu An is even more forward in pleasing his lord than Yi Ya. Yi Ya is prompted to cook his son by the king's remark that he had not had the chance to taste human flesh, while Liu An offers his wife's flesh on his own initiative, without Liu Bei's showing any desire for it. Liu An's excessive display of hospitality ends up

harming the proper relationships between host and guest, subject and ruler. The relationship between husband and wife is blatantly ignored, and even the relationship between mother and son is in danger, since Liu An's wife is in charge of taking care of his mother. Although the novelist does not tell us whether Liu An, as a host , partakes of his wife's flesh at dinner, or whether he keeps his wife's body for his and his mother's future consumption, it is clear that this type of cannibalism merely parodies the thigh-gouging (*gegu*) cannibalism and undermines the altruistic ideals behind it.

This episode offers a good contrast to the other two examples of husband-wife relationships examined in Chapter 19. Liu Bei abandons his wives when fleeing for his life, while Lü Bu listens to his wives' advice, refuses to fight, and is finally defeated. According to Mao Zonggang's judgment, "Lü Bu is foolish in being too attached to his wives, while Liu An is too hardhearted (*tai ren* 太忍) in killing his wife. Liu Bei alone obtains the middle path." (177). One of Lü Bu's followers complains about him, saying, "He cares only for his wives and children. He regards us as nothing but weeds." (186). By contrast, Liu Bei has been consistently depicted as showing more concern about his sworn brothers than about his wives or son.[7] When Zhang Fei (張飛) wants to commit suicide because he fails to protect Liu Bei's land and wives, Liu Bei stops him, saying, "The ancients have said that brothers are like limbs, while wives and children are like clothes (*Xiongdi ru shouzu, qizi ru yifu* 兄弟如手足，妻子如衣服). When the clothes are torn, you can still mend them. When your limbs are broken, how can you restore them?" (136). As if putting Liu Bei's words into action, Liu An treats his wife like clothes or any object that can be discarded or destroyed at any time. His excessive cruelty, however, makes his action less of a praiseworthy imitation and more of a parody of Liu Bei's.

Why does the novelist portray such a gruesome episode in connection with Liu Bei, a man repeatedly described as humane and virtuous? Of course, in eating the woman's flesh unknowingly, he can hardly be called a victimizer. As Mao Zonggang has indicated, even though Liu Bei has eaten human flesh, "he is still a good man." (179).

This episode contrasts Liu Bei and the far more ruthless Cao Cao by echoing an earlier episode in which Cao Cao, also a fugitive, murders his host's whole family out of the suspicion that they intend to kill him. (38-39). And yet, however unintentional Liu Bei's cannibalistic act is, it is still an atrocity. By associating Liu Bei with Liu An (who shares the same last name with Liu Bei and might be a distant relative), the author indirectly casts doubt on Liu Bei's virtues. In terms of plot development, this episode serves to foreshadow his future cannibalistic utterances and participation in revenge cannibalism. The young and still soft-hearted Liu Bei of this episode, who weeps when learning of the "sacrifice" Liu An has made on his behalf, later encounters many more harsh situations that change him. When his sworn brothers die, Liu Bei's fury transforms him into a ruthless man. He vows to eat his enemies' flesh, make mincemeat of them, and eradicate their clans (800, 822), and he personally carves out the traitors' flesh to sacrifice to Guan Yu (關羽) (822). In launching an unwise battle against the Wu (吳), he fulfills his personal duty by avenging his sworn brothers, but totally ignores the public good and ends up sacrificing many innocent lives.

The Liu An episode not only brings into question such Confucian moral values as loyalty and righteousness but also draws attention to many other atrocities worse than cannibalism. The cannibalistic act epitomizes the carnage wrought, however foolishly or unintentionally, by war and men. Wartime transforms human society into a devouring beast inviting cannibalistic images. Intent on destroying Liu Bei, Cao Cao has adopted the strategy of "making two tigers compete with and eventually eat one another" (*erhu jingshi* 二虎競食) (130), and when it fails, that of "driving the tiger to devour the wolf" (*quhu tunlang* 驅虎吞狼) (131). In the metaphor of Cao Cao's second strategy, Liu Bei is a wolf. Human beings are reduced to the level of beasts, which reputedly devour one another in their battle for survival. The weak, such as children and women, are butchered by the strong to provide nourishment—and even gourmet treats. Because of a supposedly gamy flavor, the flesh of Liu An's wife serves as "wolf's meat" for a cannibalistic feast.

The Water Margin (*Shuihu zhuan*) is notorious for its portrayal of revenge and gourmet cannibalism. The outlaws sometimes avenge themselves by killing and eating their enemies, treating their hearts and livers as "delicacies." In a typical scene, Song Jiang's (宋江) enemy Huang Wenbing (黄文炳) begs for a swift death, but Li Kui (李逵), viewing Huang with a cannibal's gaze and noting how plump Huang is, suggests that he slice off Huang's flesh and grill it. While Huang is still alive, Li Kui begins slicing the flesh off his legs. After carving all the flesh, Li Kui gouges out Huang's heart and has it made into soup. The various outlaw chiefs congratulate Song Jiang on the revenge and partake of the feast (513).[8]

The scene harks back to instances of revenge and punishment cannibalism in earlier literature such as *Zuo zhuan* (左傳) and *Shiji*, in which enemies or culprits are cut up or made mincemeat of and eaten. Just as in previous works, *The Water Margin* seems to take such cannibalism for granted and not condemn it. Commenting on the "cheerful moral indifference" to cannibalism in the novel, Anderson remarks that its "astounding unconcern with murder and mayhem is comprehensible only in terms of the totalitarian society of late Yuan and Ming" (226, n. 3).The cannibalistic scenes in the novel are narrated with such relish that the modern scholar Zheng Yi is led to lament the novelists' lack of moral reflection.[9] This particular scene appears to celebrate brute force as Li Kui, acting as the butcher, exhibits childlike delight. Such amoral violence is consistent with the vitality attached to the outlaws, who are the incarnations of the thirty-six Heavenly Spirits and seventy-two Earthly Fiends (Chap. 1).

And yet, however naively written it appears, this scene actually provides moral criticism in a number of ways. In sanctioning revenge cannibalism, the scene expresses the wish for an assertion of justice. According to the novel, these outlaws are charged with the duty of "carrying out the Way on behalf of Heaven" (*titian xingdao* 替天行道) and fulfilling the Confucian virtue of "loyalty and righteousness" (*zhongyi* 忠義, see, for example, 874). In killing Huang Wenbing, a wicked and hypocritical government clerk, symbolic of the corrupt state, the outlaws are supposedly performing their heavenly-

sanctioned duty.

However, this elaborate description of cannibalism—an extreme form of aggression in and of itself—places both the outlaws' claims and their violence under scrutiny. The outlaws do not just kill Huang Wenbing; they watch him suffer from the pain of having his flesh carved, and they annihilate his whole body by eating his flesh and his heart. Despite Li Kui's childlike joy, the outlaws are not depicted as a group of happy, innocent, primitive people, who simply torture the criminal and eat human flesh for fun. In fact, both Chao Gai (晁蓋) and Song Jiang, important leaders in this scene, are educated in the Confucian tradition, and harbor wishes for eventually surrendering to, and working for, the government. They torture and eat Huang in order to show contempt and anger for him, and to vent their hatred. This elaborate portrayal of cannibalism thus reveals their own cruelty and excessive self-righteousness, casting doubt on their claims of loyalty and integrity.

Depicting cannibalism—the most atrocious act people can commit upon one another—shocks the reader and pushes the reflection on moral issue to an extreme. Such a technique is not limited to writers of relatively realistic novels. In fact, in a largely fantastic novel such as *The Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記), the author has even more license to be inventive and exhaustive in dramatizing cannibalism, and the interplay of the different levels of reality can further problematize moral issues.

As Frederick P. Brandauer has pointed out, the pattern in *The Journey to the West* is "for a monster to be encountered, some form of battle or struggle to follow, and one or more of the disciples to kill or subdue the monster" (128). More specifically, the pattern is founded on hunger for food and food symbolism. On a number of occasions the pattern begins with Tripitaka's hunger, leading to the encounter with the monsters, he himself becomes food, but in the end he is rescued and his hunger is assuaged. When Monkey leaves to look for food for his master, the monsters find out about Tripitaka and disguise themselves to fool him. They capture Tripitaka and get ready to eat him, but Monkey returns, subdues the monsters, and saves his master.

Before they move on, the pilgrims finally have a chance to eat a good meal.

A main theme is the monsters' yearning to devour Tripitaka, a monk of pure *yang* (陽) whose flesh is supposed to confer immortality upon the eater. For the anthropomorphized monsters who want to live longer and enjoy their lives, Tripitaka becomes a great attraction. Revelling in anthropophagous fantasies, the author keeps the reader in suspense as to whether the deadly violence is to be done to Tripitaka's body. Although the author seems to portray the cooking and eating of human flesh and organs in an amoral and humorous way, many episodes are rich in moral and political meanings. The depiction of the monsters' desire to devour the Tang monk possibly reflects the Chinese people's subconscious fear of the "barbarians" who they believe to be monstrous man-eaters. In addition, some episodes about tyrannical foreign kings implicitly satirize the Chinese government. Furthermore, images of gluttony have religious and allegorical associations; since Buddhism prohibits killing and meat-eating, gluttony is a breach of the Buddhist injunction against greed and the taking of life.

Chapter 78 ridicules the pseudo-Taoist folk belief in ingesting human heart for medicinal purposes and for obtaining longevity, a belief that also underlies the practice of the *gegu* cannibalism accepted by Confucianism. Arriving at Bhiksu Kingdom, the pilgrims are surprised to find in front of each house a goose coop, inside of which is placed a little boy. They then discover that the king, because he has been under the influence of a Taoist, has ruined his own health through sexual indulgence with the Taoist's daughter. The king's father-in-law, the Taoist, claims to possess a secret formula which can lengthen the king's life. To be effective, his medicine needs to be taken with the soup made from boiling the hearts of 1,111 young boys. The boys in the goose coops are being fattened up before being butchered. This so distresses Tripitaka that he wants Monkey to find ways to save the boys. After Monkey has the boys in the coops swept away by wind, the imperial father-in-law suggests that the king ask for Tripitaka's heart, which is a much better medicinal supplement than all those boys put together (52).[10] When Tripitaka hears that the king

now wants his heart, he begs Monkey to save his life. Monkey disguises himself as Tripitaka, goes to see the king, and defeats the Taoist.

In this allegory, while satirizing the Taoist along with the superstitious belief attached to him, the author simultaneously presents the king as the Taoist's victim and a victimizer of his own subordinates, thereby condemning the gross violation of proper ethical relationships. As ruler and thus the father of his people, the king has turned into a devouring tyrant, eating the weakest of people—the children. The vice of an individual is thus broadened to symbolize that of the body politic, a monster of which the king is the head.

The episode in *The Journey to the West* also exposes Tripitaka's moral weakness. He may weep over the little boy's fate, but instead of helping them himself, asks Monkey to do the job. Above all, he is unwilling to sacrifice himself to save over a thousand boys. The author ridicules Tripitaka by depicting him pleading with Monkey, "If you can save my life, I'm willing to be your disciple and grand disciple" (53). Tripitaka not only exchanges roles with Monkey but also puts on a stinking mask made from the mud mixed with Pigsy's urine and molded in Monkey's image. On one occasion, Monkey perceptively points out Tripitaka's attachment to his mundane body—as evidenced by his constant hunger that leads to one calamity after another: " . . . your mind is full of vain thoughts: fearing the demons you are unwilling to risk your life; desiring vegetarian food you arouse your tongue; loving fragrance and sweetness you provoke your nose; listening to sounds you disturb your ears; looking at things and events you fix your eyes. You have, in sum, assembled all the Six Robbers together. How could you possibly get to the Western Heaven to see Buddha?" (553)[11] This selfish attachment to his own body and lack of compassion contrast sharply with the self-sacrificing ideal promoted in Buddhist tales. One such tale in *Xianyu jing* (賢愚經, Scriptures of the Worthy and the Foolish) recounts that when Buddha was a young prince, he sacrificed his body to a hungry tigress that was about to devour her cubs.[12] Another story tells of a king who, in order to save a pigeon threatened by a falcon, slices off the flesh from his own thighs

(*zi ge gurou* 自割股肉) and feeds it to the hungry falcon.[13] Tripitaka's fear of being devoured thus parodies Buddha's self-sacrifice and makes the reader question whether he deserves buddhahood in the end.

Like the author of *The Journey to the West*, the writer of the seventeenth-century novel *The Merry Adventures of Emperor Yang of the Sui* (*Sui Yangdi yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史, 1631 preface), also revels in his description of the cannibalistic act, though his tone of condemnation is unmistakable. The novel tells of a high-ranking canal overseer, Ma Shumou (麻叔謀), who loves steamed new-born lamb. In order to bribe him, some scoundrels butcher small children, cook them up into a delicious dish, and present it to him as lamb. By the time the gluttonous Ma finds out what he has been enjoying, he has become too addicted to the taste of young children's flesh to stop. As a result of Ma's unwillingness to curtail gustatory enjoyment, thousands of children are sacrificed to gratify his appetite—much to the anger of the helpless parents.[14] This particular episode recalls a Buddhist tale in which a king unknowingly eats a dish made from a child's corpse. Because he finds it extremely tasty, he asks the chef about it and discovers what it is. Instead of blaming the chef for using human flesh, he orders him to capture children secretly to satisfy his desire for this fare.[15] These two cannibalistic incidents involving perverted appetite present the same pattern: first the gourmand breaks a taboo unknowingly, then after the discovery, knowingly violates the taboo, finds repeating the act exhilarating, and becomes addicted. In the first stage, the gourmand is not morally culpable; in the second stage, however, he commits a criminal act.

On a metaphorical level, Ma Shumou's cannibalistic acts mirror Emperor Yang's many wicked deeds, including his construction of the Grand Canal, an extravagant and self-indulgent project that causes many deaths. Mimicking the debauched and selfish Emperor Yang, Ma indulges himself in gustatory gratification with full awareness of its inhumaneness. The sacrifice of innocent and defenseless children to gratify a disordered desire of an emperor's representative thus epitomizes the emperor's sacrifice of numerous commoners. The

author not only uses cannibalism to symbolize the utmost evil a person can commit but also uses this disordered desire to represent a disordered political state.

A story in the seventeenth-century collection *The Rocks Nod Their Heads* (*Shi dian tou* 石點頭), entitled "In Jiangdu A Filial Daugher-in-law Offers Her Body To Be Butchered" ("Jiangdu shi xiaofu tushen" 江都市孝婦屠身), presents an extreme extension of the *gegu* cannibalism as exemplary behavior. The story tells of a couple who are trapped during wartime in Yangzhou when it is besieged. When there is no more food, human flesh is being sold for food. The wife offers her body to be sold so that her husband can travel back home to take care of his aged mother.[16] While *gegu* cannibalism ordinarily involves only partial self-mutilation, the wife sacrifices her whole body. The description of how her body is chopped up and dissected for food suggests her providing for her husband just as a mother provides nourishment for her child from her own body. This depiction also emphasizes the pathos of wartime cannibalism, symbolizing the widespread carnage and cruelty.

Although the author appears to praise the woman's extraordinary martyrdom, his subtle depiction of the interaction between the couple problematizes the husband-wife relationship. The wife is portrayed as literate, intelligent, courageous, and virtuous, far superior to her ineffectual and often foolish husband. It is primarily due to the husband's inability to earn a living that they have to leave home, and it is through his carelessness and negligence that they lose their money on the way. When the wife suggests that one of them be sold so that the other can go home to serve the mother, the husband is frightened. Moreover, the wife takes control of the situation, goes to the butcher herself, and negotiates the sale—without the knowledge of her husband. Thus, the wife's fearlessness and presence of mind appear even more remarkable when contrasted with her husband's impotence and fear of death. And yet, though she is a somewhat willing sacrifice and mostly blames fate, it is clear that she cannot help but feel contempt for her husband. Because the husband, a superior in the husband-wife relationship, fails in fulfilling both his duties toward

his mother and his wife, the wife ends up shouldering the responsibility, taking care of the mother-in-law. Because the familial system prescribes that a daughter-in-law sacrifice herself for her parents-in-law, the daughter-in-law permits this violation of her body. Ironically, in abiding by one set of Confucian rules, she violates the Confucian injunction not to harm the body which is given by one's parents.

The wife's sale of her body for food not only stirs up questions about ethical relationships but also implicates the body politic as well as the cosmos. Knowing that she has violated one kind of injunction to fulfill another duty, she blames the times of war and appeals to the gods for testimony of her right intentions in the funeral oration she writes for herself (297). The miracles that occur after her death are a cosmic response to her appeal, showing the god's approval of her self-sacrifice.

The author of *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳), a seventeenth-century novel, takes a condemnatory tone in his depiction of cannibalism during desperate famines.[17] Putting human evil in a cosmic framework, the author shows how human vice incurs Heaven's wrath and how Heaven punishes people by visiting famines upon them. In his depiction, human vice includes examples of excess such as gluttony, avarice, lust, extravagance, and wastefulness, as well as violations of human relationships and transgressions of social boundaries.[18] The motif of food is employed to a great extent to illustrate transgressions on the figural level.

We find a rather realistic portrayal of famine and cannibalism in the novel:

> . . . They had been wasteful with extra grain, selling it cheaply in order to buy snacks and clothes. When suddenly encountering a famine year, rich, prominent families, at the sight of terrible crop failure, hoarded their grain and were unwilling to sell it. Since ordinary households of humble means had no grain to eat, how could they not be reduced to scraping bark, collecting tree leaves, sweeping up grass

> seeds, and digging up grass roots? Having finished eating these four items, they pulled out the rotten straw from their thatched roofs, ground it into powder, mixed it with water, and ate it. Not only did it fail to allay their hunger, but it proved to solidify into an indigestible lump that plugged up their intestines. If there were ten people who ate it, ten would die. There was no exception. Some people grilled pancakes out of the white chalky dust (*baitu* 白土, lime deposits) found on top of the mountain, and ate them. The pancakes similarly plugged up their intestines, making bowel movements impossible. If there were ten people who ate the cakes, five times two would die. Aside from these two inedible items, people had no other alternative but to butcher and eat the flesh of corpses. They soon went so far as to kill the living and eat them, and gradually even blood relatives began to kill one another. Since I cannot bear to describe these situations in detail, I simply touch upon them very briefly here.
>
> These cannibalistic monsters began to suffer from plague in the following spring. From door to door people perished. Among a hundred people not even one survived. Doesn't this indicate Heaven's severe warning to the people? Yet, after people's wounds were healed and they felt no more pain, they continued to commit evil deeds just as frequently as before." (391-392)

Food symbolism in this passage both reflects and critiques man's degradation. People are starving during a lean year because of their false sense of security and wasteful habits in the past, as well as the unwillingness of wealthier households to share their abundance of stored grain. As a result, many who are less well off are forced to eat indigestible, nauseating, repulsive, and even lethal things. Eating bark, leaves, grass, and rotten straw indicates people's degeneration to the level of herbivorous animals. Eating chalky lime deposits, which may contain decomposed bones of animals and even humans, reduces peo-

ple to the level of insects and worms. Further moral degradation is shown by a gradual downward process: people move from eating corpses for survival to murdering and eating live people, and from eating strangers to eating one's kith and kin. Scenes of mass cannibalism therefore symbolize the disruption of the cosmic order caused by man's infringement on ethical norms.

Using the human body as food is a dangerous pollution in that it confuses and transgresses the boundaries between the body that eats and the food that is eaten. Judging from the author's tone in his narration, eating the flesh of corpses is an outrageous violation of other people's bodies and one's own. Although twentieth-century ethicists would not condemn the eating of corpses during extreme times by famine victims, the author indicates that cannibalism can hardly be exonerated by showing that many cannibals, punished by the gods, contract diseases and die. Even more wicked than eating the flesh of corpses, however, is killing and eating live people, an aggressive and violent act. Further, killing one's blood relatives adds the violation of familial relationships to an already damnable act. A society punished by the gods, sickened by disease and plague, and stricken by many deaths, serves as a mirror to the morally decayed body.

The author may seem reluctant to dwell on cannibalism in this passage, but in Chapter 31 he describes in detail several cases of cannibalism after the flood. These cases include a young man eaten by a friend, and a teacher eating his pupils. A further transgression is found in the way human flesh is cooked or eaten. In one case, human flesh is cooked in the same pot with the flesh of a donkey—a grotesque image that dissolves the hierarchical order by obliterating the distinction between humans and animals. The author's description of how starving people eat uncivilized foods in a civilized fashion—their grinding rotten straw into powder, baking pancakes out of white lime deposits, and boiling human flesh in a pot—strikes one as an ironic comment on China's gastronomic culture. To indicate the civilization's further degeneration, the author portrays a change from eating something cooked to eating it raw. In some cases, starving people no longer bother about cooking human flesh; they vie with one another to

butcher weak persons on the street, presumably eating the flesh raw (451-454).

The author condemns the cannibals not only by assigning disease and death to some of them but also by wishing for their total destruction:

> "Before the famine, these vile creatures had stopped at nothing in doing evil. When encountering such famine, they not only failed to show repentance for their sins, but even set themselves against Heaven. In fact, it might have been better to have Heaven clouded up and chaotic so that all these monsters would meet their inexorable doom, and after one hundred and twenty thousand years, Heaven would create a new world and give birth to some virtuous people." (454).

While pitying the starving people and condemning those who aggressively devour innocent victims for violating moral codes, the author also blames the victims, on-lookers, and those indirectly involved in the cannibalistic act for being morally irresponsible. Anthropophagous acts and language are also used metaphorically to emphasize the cruelty unrelated to cannibalism. For example, in one of his asides to the reader, the author uses the following phrases to condemn the rich for their excessive miserliness and insensitivity to poor people's starvation: "Those rich and powerful are unwilling to give you anything unless you gouge out his back muscle with an awl. But have you ever seen anyone who asks for donation, using an awl to gouge out human flesh?" (459).

To conclude, portrayals of cannibalism related to famine, revenge, disordered appetite, or self-sacrifice become powerful symbols in the authors' discourse on morality. Some authors depict *gegu* cannibalism and its variations as exemplary, showing it as an extreme form of martyrdom. Others portray the gormandizing of human flesh as a heinous violation of morality. Because cannibalism is so excessively atrocious, it lends itself well to explorations of moral questions

and reflections on traditional morality.

According to Confucian notions, a person who is in a position of authority should cultivate his own virtues so that he can maintain harmony in his household. Only when he is able to put his household in order will he be capable of bringing peace and harmony to the state, the world, and the cosmos. This is particularly true of the emperor, since the body of a person in authority is the microcosm of the body politic. Thus, disorder in the human body symbolizes and causes disorder in the body of the state, and by extension, even the universe. In natural and orderly relationships, a ruler with the mandate of heaven should protect his subjects, just as a father should his son, and a husband his wife. The sacrifice of commoners, sons, and wives by authority figures, as these authors have shown, is a betrayal of trust and a violation of the natural order. Indulging one's disordered desires and perverted appetites both symbolizes and creates disorder in the state. Using cannibalism as a moralistic metaphor, the authors connect the physical body, the body politic, and the cosmos in an ethical chain, thereby manipulating this topos for didactic and satirical purposes.

NOTES

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[1] See Arens.

[2] See Zheng.

[3] See De Groot Vol. 4; Kuwabara; Des Rotours, "Quelques," and "Encore."

[4] See Chong

[5] See, for example, the discussion in Chaves.

[6] See Chong 127-144; Zheng Yi 229-235.

[7] See, for example, chap. 15, p. 136 and chap. 25, p. 248.

[8] All references are to *Shuihu quanzhuan* (水滸全傳).

[9] Zheng Yi argues that the authors of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi yanyi*) and *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) depict scenes of "moralistic" revenge cannibalism and murder with

great relish and without the least doubt or reflection. See Zheng Yi 229, 233.

[10] All references are to Wu Cheng'en's (吳承恩) *Xiyou ji.*

[11] English translation see Anthony Yu vol. 2, 284.

[12] See Takakusu 352-353.

[13] See Takakusu 351-352.

[14] See *Sui Yangdi yanshi* chaps. 22-23. There is a late Ming edition which can be found at the Harvard-Yenching Library.

[15] See Takakusu 425-426.

[16] See "Jiangdu shi xiaofu tushen" 279-305.

[17] for all references see *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan.*

[18] The five human relationships are those between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, friend and friend. The author is also concerned with the relationships between teacher and pupil, and master and servant. The relationship between teacher and pupil can be grouped under that of father and son, while the relationship between master and servant is parallel to that between ruler and subject. The concern with playing one's proper role can be traced back to Confucian teaching. When answering a question about government, Confucius said, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son." In *Lunyu* (論語) Book XII, Section 11. See Lau 114.

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