

Migration, Identity, and Colonial Fantasies in a Fifth-Century Story Collection

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AT THE TURN of the fifth century, a story about a man contesting real estate with a ghost circulated in several different versions in South China. In one of the versions, a young man discovered three lacquer coffins when digging a tomb for his deceased father and had the coffins reburied elsewhere. That night, he dreamed of Lu Su 魯肅 (172–217), the powerful minister in the southern Kingdom of Wu, who angrily announced that he would exact revenge. He also dreamed of his late father, who told him that Lu Su was fighting with him over the gravesite. Later, the young man found copious blood on his father's seating mat.¹

In the early fourth century, after the fall of the Jin capital Luoyang to the non-Han nomadic peoples, the royal house of the Jin dynasty and the great families of the north crossed the Yangzi River and established the Eastern Jin (317–420), with Jiankang 建康 (modern Nanjing) as the new capital. In the story cited above, the deceased father, Wang Boyang 王伯陽, was likely a member of the aristocratic Wang clan from Langye (in modern Shandong), since his wife was none other than the niece of the famous minister Xi Jian 郗鑒 (269–339) of Gaoping (also in modern Shandong), as these northern aristocratic families maintained a strict code of intermarriage.² The Langye Wang clan had settled not far from Jiankang, formerly the capital of the Kingdom of Wu. The story reveals the southerners' resentment toward the northern migrants, who were regarded as intruders; it also shows how the northern migrants might have perceived the south: a treacherous land with old burial sites and angry ghosts, a region with its own past.

There were, according to the historian Tan Qixiang, four large waves of migration from north to south in the course of one hundred years, beginning with the “Disorder of the Yongjia Era” (307–13).³ These waves of migration, taken as a whole, constituted

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¹Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Youming lu* 幽明錄, comp. Lu Xun 魯迅 and collat. Wang Genlin 王根林, in *Han Wei liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* 漢魏六朝筆記小說大觀 [A collection of Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties stories] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 724 (subsequently Liu 1999). See also Liu Yiqing, *Youming lu*, annot. Zheng Wanqing 鄭晚晴 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1988), 121 (subsequently Liu 1988).

²Richard B. Mather, “Intermarriage as a Gauge of Family Status in the Southern Dynasties,” in *State and Society in Early Medieval China*, ed. Albert Dien (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 211–28.

³Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, “Jin Yongjia luanhou zhi minzu qianxi” 晉永嘉亂後之民族遷徙 [The ethnic migration after the chaos during the Yongjia era of the Jin], in *Changshui cuibian* 長水粹編 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 272–98.

a momentous event in Chinese history that precipitated a series of social and cultural changes. Although the south had long been a part of the Qin and Han empires, it had a distinct, self-conscious regional tradition and identity and remained culturally peripheral to the northern heartland. From the fourth to the sixth century, the south was transformed into a new cultural center and a potent empire,⁴ but when the northern migrants first arrived, they found themselves in an alien world populated by hostile locals, unreasonable gods, and wayward shamans. It has been referred to as “a world of diglossia” where the southern elite spoke a different language than their northern counterparts,⁵ but in reality, the south might be better described as a world of multiglossia inhabited by different ethnic groups: the southern elite spoke the Wu 吳 dialect, whereas northern émigré elite spoke the northern dialect of Luoyang, the former Jin capital; the southern elite could and did speak the northern dialect in court and in polite company, although some persisted in speaking Wu; and the ethnic peoples in the south spoke different languages or dialects.⁶ Jin Emperor Yuan 晉元帝 (r. 317–23), who founded the Eastern Jin with the help of the Langye Wang clan, initially had trouble securing the support of the southern elite when he first crossed the Yangzi River. He reportedly said to a southern noble, “Taking up lodging in other people’s land, I often feel embarrassment.”⁷ This is a revealing statement: rather than regarding the south as an integral part of the Jin empire, which it was in the administrative sense, Emperor Yuan was filled with a sense of alienation upon his arrival.

The social structure established in the south by the northern émigré elite perpetuated the sense of alienation. It was a stringent hierarchy of elites (*shi* 士) and commoners (*shu* 庶), with great northern clans at the top, followed by great southern clans, lower gentry, commoners, and non-Han ethnic peoples at the bottom, with the northern émigrés always taking precedence over native southerners.⁸ In contrast with immigrants who left home to integrate themselves into an existing polity, the fourth-century northern settlers asserted their sovereignty over the indigenous peoples of the south, enjoying greater political and economic privileges over the southerners.⁹ As one historian put it, “Large hordes of Han people from North China fled to various southern regions, not only disrupting the life of the aboriginal people, but also applying various forms of oppression and ruling over them as lord and master.”¹⁰ The result was persistent

⁴Xiaofei Tian, “Representing Kingship and Imagining Empire in Southern Dynasties Court Poetry,” *T'oung Pao* 102, nos. 1–3 (2016): 1–56.

⁵He Da'an 何大安, “Liuchao Wuyu de cengci” 六朝吳語的層次 [The layers of the Wu dialect in the Six Dynasties], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishiyuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 64, no. 4 (1993): 867.

⁶Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2078; Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 484, 1007.

⁷Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, annot. Yu Jiaxi (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 29.

⁸Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (501–557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 27–38.

⁹William Crowell, “Northern Émigrés and the Problem of Census Registration,” in Dien, *State and Society in Early Medieval China*, 184.

¹⁰Lü Chunsheng 呂春盛, “Wei Jin nanbeichao shidai de Laozu yu xi'nan tuzhu shehui de bianqian” 魏晉南北朝時代的“獠族”與西南土著社會的變遷 [The Lao people and the transformation of

discontent and antipathy from court to commons, with frequent, violent uprisings of the non-Han aboriginal peoples. While the northern émigrés have been called “colonialists,”¹¹ this article adopts the term “settler colonialists” in an attempt to define more precisely the identity of this immigrant community, insofar as settler colonialism is “essentially about the establishment and consolidation of an exogenous political community following a formative displacement.”¹²

The uneasy engagement of these settler colonialist with the south finds a focused manifestation in *An Account of Hidden and Visible Realms* (*You ming lu* 幽明錄), a fifth-century story collection. Compiled by a royal prince and a representative of the northern émigré elite, this story collection is a precious source that offers us a unique perspective on the complex aftermath of the waves of the migration that took place in this period.

You ming lu (hereafter *YML*) consists of about 250 brief prose pieces that are largely narrative in nature. The book was lost some time after the twelfth century but later was reconstituted from encyclopedias and commentaries.¹³ It was compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–44), a prince of the Liu Song 劉宋 dynasty (420–79) that replaced the Eastern Jin. *YML* is primarily devoted to stories about the interaction of the human and spirit worlds. While a modern reader may regard these stories as “supernatural,” for an early medieval reader, the paranormal was a part of the natural world order.¹⁴ Indeed, many *YML* stories also appear in standard dynastic histories, presented as historical facts.

Traditionally *YML* is classified as a work of “anomaly accounts” (*zhiguai* 志怪). This Chinese term refers loosely to a type of writing that uses straightforward, plain language to record strange occurrences in a matter-of-fact manner.¹⁵ The early medieval period saw a proliferation of such works; a well-known specimen is the southern author Gan Bao’s 干寶 (d. 336) *Soushen ji* 搜神記, translated as *In Search of the Supernatural*.¹⁶ However, *YML* differs sharply from its famous predecessor and other similar works on two accounts. First, the *YML* compiler was a prince of the blood of the ruling dynasty,

the indigenous society of the southwest in the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties], *Chengda lishi xuebao* 35 (2008): 53.

¹¹Arthur F. Wright, “The Sui Dynasty,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 3, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 49; and Stephen Owen, “Xia Jiangnan: Guanyu Dong Jin pingmin de huanxiang” 下江南: 關於東晉平民的幻想 [Going south: fantasy about the Eastern Jin plebian], in *Xia Jiangnan: Suzhou daxue haiwai Hanxue yanjianglu* 下江南: 蘇州大學海外漢學演講錄 [Going south: Overseas Sinologists’ lectures at Suzhou University], ed. Ji Jin 季進 and Wang Yao 王堯 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 27–41.

¹²Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 15.

¹³Zhenjun Zhang, *Hidden and Visible Realms: Early Medieval Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), lii–lvi.

¹⁴Robert Ford Campamy, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015), xxiv–xxvi.

¹⁵For a comprehensive study of the *zhiguai* writings in early medieval China, see Robert Ford Campamy, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

¹⁶Gan Bao 干寶, *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*, trans. Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J. I. Crump (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

which is singular among *zhiguai* authors from this period. Second, unlike *Soushen ji*, many of whose stories were taken from earlier literature, *YML* contains a large number of stories that cannot be traced to older texts; in contrast, three-quarters of its stories record incidents from the Eastern Jin and the Song itself,¹⁷ a fact that highlights the compiler's deep concern with events in recent times, events that took place after the northern émigrés settled in the south.

Indeed, many *YML* stories are tied to specific sites in various southern locales: the capital Jiankang and its vicinity, where Liu Yiqing had spent many years in the 420s; Jingzhou 荊州 (in modern Hubei) and Jiangzhou 江州 (in modern Jiangxi), where Liu Yiqing had served as governor from 432 to 440. The intensely local nature of the stories forms an intriguing contrast with the identity of the compiler, who, as a nephew of the Song founding emperor, represented the imperial center and the northern émigré elite. Whether the stories were collected and transmitted by the prince himself or by the writers on his staff,¹⁸ they are the products of geographic dislocation of a community of settlers in a land with its self-sufficient cultural and religious system, to which the prince and the imperial center he represented were outsiders. Many protagonists in the stories of otherworldly encounters are northerners, whose sense of disorientation as “lodgers in other people's land” is poignantly palpable.

Anomaly accounts have been fruitfully investigated, often across different collections, by scholars of literature and religion for the light it sheds on early medieval Chinese literary history, religious practice, social life, and material culture. This essay proposes to focus on one particular collection as a whole and read it as a cogent expression of the northern settlers' attempt to grapple with a set of complex issues of class, ethnicity, and gender in their confrontation with the southern indigenous peoples. I will discuss four aspects: first, the fear and loathing of non-Han ethnic peoples in the south; second, the intertwined concerns with ethnic and class identity, and a desire for purity, intensified by the prominent presence of ethnic others both inside and outside the southern regime; third, the negotiation with local cults and deities unique to the southern locales that had traditionally been condemned for their love of “excessive/loose rites” (*yinsi* 淫祀); fourth, the subjection of the sexualized body of the southern woman to fantasy, violence, and domination.

Ultimately, the essay calls attention to the importance of stories in articulating ideological and psychological realities as opposed to official histories and other public forms of writing, especially in the wake of a traumatic event such as migration. The stories are multiple locations of emotions, both at the level of the narrative as it unfolds in the storyworld and at the level of the broadly defined authors (i.e., those who presumably reported the incidents orally and those who eventually wrote them down) and contemporary readers. They afford us a unique point of entry into history.

¹⁷Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tangqian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi* 唐前志怪小說史 [A history of pre-Tang *zhiguai*] (Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 392.

¹⁸That the prince's staff had contributed to the compilation of *YML* is a speculation entertained by some scholars. See Liu Sai 劉賽, “*Jingzhou ji yu Youming lu* chengshu guanxi zhi kaocha” 盛弘之荊州記與幽明錄成書關係之考察 [Sheng Hongzhi's *Record of Jingzhou* and its relationship to the composition of *You ming lu*], *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 2 (2008): 18. See also Zhang, *Hidden and Visible Realms*, xlv.

FISSURES IN THE EMPIRE: INDIGENOUS CREATURES AND OTHERWORLDLY BEINGS

The Eastern Jin and Liu Song regimes in South China faced ethnic others both outside and inside. To the north, there was the Northern Wei dynasty founded by the Tabghatch clan; the south was widely populated by non-Han ethnic groups, referred to as the Man 蠻 (“southern barbarians”). According to Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (483–537), the compiler of the *History of the Southern Qi*: “The Man species are numerous, and they speak different languages. They all live in the mountains and valleys, spreading all over the five prefectures of Jing, Xiang, Yong, Ying, and Si [largely modern Hubei and Hu’nan].”¹⁹

Throughout the Southern Dynasties, the Man peoples frequently had armed conflicts with the state, which intensified in the 430s and 440s. Shen Yue’s 沈約 (441–513) *History of the [Liu] Song* (*Song shu* 宋書) includes a lengthy account of the violent revolts and brutal suppressions of the ethnic peoples in the “Biographies of Yi and Man Barbarians” (“Yiman zhuan” 夷蠻傳). According to Shen Yue, numerous Man groups in Jingzhou and Yongzhou (in modern Hubei) lived “in precipitous mountains where few people set foot.”²⁰ The government tried to encourage them to submit to Song rule by granting them exemption from corvée labor and lighter taxes than what regular commoners had to pay, but this created more social problems, as regular commoners would flee and join the Man to evade the heavy taxation and corvée imposed on them. Thus, the Man groups grew even larger, and there were constant revolts. In 440s, after a series of bloody battles, about 145,000 Man were captured in total and sent to the capital region to become “military households” (hereditary soldiers serving in government troops), whose status was much lower than regular commoner households.²¹ This number does not include 45,000 tribals who “surrendered” (*xiang* 降) and might have been treated differently from those “captured” or “taken” (*qin*, *huo*, *lu* 禽, 獲, 虜). At least in one case, two cities were built to accommodate and separate 25,000 tribals who “surrendered.”²²

The Man peoples of Yongzhou and Jingzhou, where Liu Yiqing was governor in the 430s, were regarded as “the descendants of Panhu.”²³ Panhu 槃瓠 was a mythological dog who married a human princess and fathered twelve children, six male and six female. The story is recorded in Gan Bao’s *Soushen ji* and appears in the “Biography of the Southern Man and Southwestern Yi Barbarians” in the *History of the Later Han* 後漢書, compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), a contemporary of Liu Yiqing. Fan Ye describes Panhu’s children thusly: “Their clothes were variegated, and their speech was garbled. They preferred mountains and ravines and disliked level, open country....Their offspring multiplied, and have since been called ‘Man and Yi barbarians.’”²⁴ The Man peoples,

¹⁹Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 1007.

²⁰Shen, *Song shu*, 2396.

²¹Shen, *Song shu*, 1996–98. See also Chen Yuping 陳玉屏, *Wei Jin nanbeichao binghu zhidu yanjiu* 魏晉南北朝兵戶制度研究 [A study of the institution of military household in Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties] (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1988), 148–49.

²²Shen, *Song shu*, 1998.

²³Shen, *Song shu*, 2396.

²⁴Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 2829.

with their purported canine origin, were so dehumanized in contemporary cultural imagination that one of the Man groups was known as “Dog and Sheep Man” at the time.²⁵ In a number of *YML* stories, these cultural and ethnic others are cast as straddling the border of human and bestial.

The following *YML* story gives an account of wild creatures in the mountains of Dongchang (in modern Jiangxi) that “look like human beings”:

They are four to five feet tall, stark naked with unbound hair. Their hair is five to six inches long. They normally dwell among the crags in the high mountains. They make sound in a hoary voice, but cannot form speech. They can whistle and call out to one another. They hide themselves in the dark and are not often seen. Once some woodcutters stayed overnight in the mountains. After they went to sleep at night, these creatures, holding their babies, came over to the fire left by the woodcutter, cooked the shrimps and crabs they got from the ravine, and fed them to the babies. At the time, one of the woodcutters was not asleep yet. He quietly woke the others and whispered to them; then, all of a sudden, they leapt up to attack those creatures. The creatures fled and dropped their young, who cried just like human babies. The creatures then led a crowd of males and females to throw rocks at the woodcutters, and would not stop until they got their babies back.²⁶

These “creatures,” regarded with fear, loathing, and fascination, might very well have been speaking one of the indigenous languages that sounded incomprehensible to the narrator. After all, it was a standard practice of the day to refer to non-Han peoples as “nest-dwellers” whose speech resembled “bird talk.”²⁷ Another *YML* story describes “Tree Dwellers” in the mountains as a subhuman species: they “would bury their dead *like humans* and trade with humans;” they had hands and feet “as sharp as hooks,” although their “head, face, and speech are *not all that different from those of humans*”²⁸ (italics mine). The common framework of reference used by the narrator is *ren*, humans, as these creatures always are described in terms of being similar or dissimilar to humans, a rhetorical strategy that foregrounds their perceived subhuman nature.

Another entry describes a local community site that seems to have been abandoned:

In the Shixing County [in modern Guangdong] there is a State of the Gao Emperor. It extends well over ten leagues through the ups and downs of the mountain. There are multiple layers of ditches and moats, and field paths criss-cross. In the city one can see the foundations of halls lying in ruins and strewn with broken tiles, although the holes for the pillar bases are still there. To the east there is the mausoleum of the Gao Emperor. Nobody knows who this emperor was.²⁹

²⁵Shen, *Song shu*, 1998.

²⁶Liu 1999, 744. All translations from *You ming lu* in this article are my own.

²⁷Shen, *Song shu*, 2266; Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 2860.

²⁸Liu 1988, 18.

²⁹Liu 1999, 692.

The wording in this entry—“field paths crisscross”—appears verbatim in the well-known “Account of Peach Blossom Spring” (“Taohua yuan ji” 桃花源記), written by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427), hailed as one of China’s greatest poets.³⁰ In Tao Yuanming’s account, a fisherman from Wuling 武陵 (in modern Hu’nan) climbed through a hole in the mountains and accidentally stumbled upon a utopian community, where the farming community had no knowledge of the polity in the outside world and were not burdened with taxation and corvée. Wuling was one of the dwelling places of the Man,³¹ and the resemblance between this utopian community and the Man dwellers has not failed to strike scholars.³² Notably, Tao Yuanming himself was a southern native, and his great-grandfather Tao Kan 陶侃 (259–334), an Eastern Jin general, had been contemptuously referred to by the northern elite as a “Xi dog,” with Xi being the name of a southern ethnic group.³³

In *YML* stories, the empire has many fissures. Encounters with otherworldly beings, be they frightening or divine, often take place through those holes and crevices. One of the best-known *YML* stories is a good example: two men from the first century CE, Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao, while gathering paper mulberry bark, lost their way in the mountains but stumbled on a marvelous realm and were matched with beautiful goddesses; later, when they went home, they found several centuries had passed, and they finally left the human world again in 383 CE.³⁴ Although they meet beautiful goddesses in the hills rather than a utopian farming community, the nature of the encounter remains consistent; that is, it is almost always an accidental discovery of a paradise, negatively marked by the absence of taxation and corvée. Indeed, in the final analysis, monstrous creatures and divine beings are but the two sides of the same coin, depending on who views them: a prince-governor and an elite settler who aspires to conquer and sinicize the barbarian region, or a subject of the empire who yearns to join the Man barbarians and elude imperial control.

HYBRID BODY AND IDENTITY THEFT

The prominent presence of the ethnic others inside and outside the southern regime led to intense anxiety. The capital Jiankang itself was a large metropolitan city that had an ethnically diverse population, with the aforementioned Man “military households,” and with foreign merchants and Buddhist monks and nuns coming from Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.³⁵ The proximity of the foreign residents and the threat

³⁰Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 [Tao Yuanming’s collection], annot. Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 165–66.

³¹Shen, *Song shu*, 2396.

³²Tang Zhangru 唐長孺, *Wei Jin nanbeichao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢 [Studies in Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern dynasties history] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 622–35.

³³Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1782.

³⁴Liu 1999, 697–98.

³⁵See Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, “Jiankang and the Commercial Empire of the Southern Dynasties: Changes and Continuities in Medieval Chinese Economic History,” in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600*, ed. Scott Pearce, Audrey Shapiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 35, 49–51.

from the northern non-Han regimes, fused with the émigré elite's desire to maintain the purity of bloodline and class distinction by intermarriage only with socially compatible families, gave rise to potent apprehension about mixing and contamination in *YML* stories.

One story, tinged with a dark racist humor, took place during the reign of Jin Emperor Yuan, the first and foremost of the northern elite migrants.³⁶ In the story, a nobleman died of a sudden illness only to be told by the God of Lifespans that he still had some years left, and he was to return to the world of the living. However, his feet were sore and he was unable to walk. The worried clerks of the Underworld reported the matter to the God of Lifespans, who said, "It so happens that a Sogdian named Kang So-and-so has just been summoned here and is currently outside the western gate."³⁷ This man is destined to die, but he has healthy feet. Let them exchange their feet." The nobleman accepted reluctantly and was revived.

He looked at his feet—lo and behold, they turned out to be a pair of Sogdian feet that had clumps of entangled hair and reeked of a Hu stench! Now, Mr. So-and-so was a member of the nobility and loved to fondle his own hands and feet. Now that he suddenly got himself those foreign feet, he could not bear looking at them. Even though he had come back to life, he was so upset that he wanted to die. There were people who knew that the Sogdian man was dead but his body was still at home, which was close by at the Eggplant Ford. Mr. So-and-so went over there to see for himself. At the sight of his own feet on the Hu body, which was about to be interred, he burst into tears.

The nobleman had to live with the consequences of feet-swapping, as the Sogdian man's children missed their father and would seek Mr. So-and-so out, hug his feet, and burst into tears; they would also rush to embrace him and cry whenever they ran into him on the road. Mr. So-and-so had to order a servant to guard his house against them. "All his life he was so repelled by his feet that he never made the mistake of looking at them. Even on the hottest summer days he would wear multiple layers of clothing, never exposing those feet for one moment."

The Sogdian children exemplify the virtue of filial piety cherished in the Han Confucian tradition; yet the physicality of the Hu feet—the body part that is, ironically, for moving about and crossing boundaries—becomes a site of ethnic difference and alienation. Although the man has returned to the visible world of the living, he keeps his feet covered, an intriguing comment on the *you* (invisible/dark) and *ming* (visible/luminary) of the title of Liu Yiqing's story collection. The hybridity of his body literally embodies a profound sense of anxiety about the dangerous proximity of the self and other.

Another *YML* story of exchanging body parts involves the head, which, much more than feet, is the most distinguishing and distinguished part of the human body.

³⁶Liu 1999, 704.

³⁷Kang 康 was a Han Chinese surname often adopted by the Sogdian people from Kangju, a Sogdian kingdom in Central Asia. The term used in the story to refer to the man is *Hu* 胡.

Jia Bizhi of Hedong, whose baby name was Yi'er, was well-versed in all sorts of clan genealogies. During the Yixi era [405–18], he served as adjutant on the staff of the Prince of Langye. One night he dreamed of a man who had many pimples on his face, a thick beard, a big nose, and eyes with much white showing. He pled with Jia: “I love your appearance; may I exchange heads with you?”³⁸

Jia refused, but he had the dream again the second night. He was so perturbed that he finally acquiesced. When he got up in the morning and went to the prince's establishment, everyone was terribly alarmed upon seeing him. His family likewise reacted with shock and revulsion. They only believed him after he went to great length to explain himself. Later, Jia Bizhi was reputedly able to “weep with half of his face and smile with the other half, hold one brush with each hand and each foot as well as with his mouth, all at the same time, and write simultaneously.”

Unlike the ethnic hybrid in the previous story, the anxiety about swapping heads was closely associated with that the fear of identity theft, although the physical attributes of the man in the dream—a thick beard and a big nose—were often regarded as specific to non-Han peoples in medieval China.³⁹ This body stereotype has become so ingrained that a modern scholar takes for granted that the man in Jia Bi's dream was a Hu, even though this is nowhere stated in the story.⁴⁰ Regarded as an Other by colleagues and family alike, Jia Bizhi, whose baby name Yi'er 翳兒 (literally, Concealed) eerily foreshadows his transformation, turns into a different person with a new skill set.

Significantly, the protagonist of this story, Jia Bizhi 賈弼之 (also known as Jia Bi), was the foremost early medieval expert on family genealogy in the Eastern Jin.⁴¹ More than anyone else, Jia Bi would know the perils of a compromised bloodline and the danger of hybridity. Contamination of genealogy was a serious matter in early medieval China. The distinction between gentry and commoners had to be guarded jealously for the sake of defending the identity of a privileged social class and all the powers and rights associated with it, and perhaps more importantly, because the state depended on the commoners for taxation and corvée labor.⁴²

Another YML story of exchange demonstrates the dire consequences of mistaken identity and messed-up lineage. Chen Su, a well-to-do gentry member, yearned for a son. His wife finally became pregnant but gave birth to a girl, so she secretly made an exchange with the wife of their neighbor, a commoner, who had given birth to a boy at the same time. When the boy reached the age of making offerings to their ancestors, an old maidservant with clairvoyant abilities claimed that a group of commoners ascended the spirit seats and enjoyed the offerings while Chen Su's ancestors had stopped at the gate of the house without entering. Chen Su investigated, and his wife confessed.

³⁸Liu 1999, 718.

³⁹Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuj, 1974), 2281; Fang et al., *Jin shu*, 2792.

⁴⁰Xie Mingxun 謝明勳, “Liuchao zhiguaixiaoshuo ‘hua Hu’ gushi yanjiu” 六朝志怪小說“化胡”故事研究 [A study of the ‘transformation into Hu’ stories in the Six Dynasties *zhiguai*], *Donghua huanxue* 1 (2003): 45–69.

⁴¹Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1462.

⁴²Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 26–38.

They subsequently returned the boy to his biological parents and took their daughter home.⁴³

Identity theft sometimes involves a particular kind of animal metamorphosis: an animal spirit assumes the form of a specific person. Metamorphosis from animal to human and vice versa had had a long tradition, but this subtype of specific animal transformation stories began to appear frequently only in the fourth- and fifth-century *zhiguai* collections. One story relates how a member of a prominent northern émigré clan died but came back to life and slept with his wife; later he turned out to be the neighbor's old yellow dog.⁴⁴

Such stories reflect a deep-seated anxiety about mixing with and being contaminated by the other. The animal spirits' sexual transgression constitutes a symbolic parallel with the human violation of social hierarchy. In a famous memorial to the throne written in 490 impeaching a nobleman for marrying his daughter to the son of a wealthy merchant of a commoner class, Shen Yue declares, "If one is not of our own species, [then their heart must be different from ours]—that is the aphorism of the former wise men. Fragrant plant and stinky weed do not mix together: this much we have heard in the ancient canon."⁴⁵ Besides a strict ban of intermarriage between gentry and commoners, there also existed an equally powerful unwritten rule about making socially appropriate matches within the gentry circle.⁴⁶ The northern émigré elite tended to form marriage alliances among their own kind. Studies of recently excavated funerary inscriptions of several members of the great Xie clan of Chen Commandery (in modern He'nan), beginning with Xie Kun 謝鯤 (281–323) and ending with Xie Chong 謝琨 (buried in 421), show that they did not marry out of the northern émigrés for a hundred years.⁴⁷

Interestingly, in an attempt to secure support from the great southern clans, Wang Dao 王導 (276–339), a distinguished member of the Langye Wang clan, had tried to form a marriage alliance with a southern great family but was rejected, and the head of the southern family, Lu Wan 陸玩 (ca. 277–340), cited the same saying—"fragrant plant and stinky weed do not mix together."⁴⁸ Who was the fragrant plant in this case? The northern émigré elite and the native southerners might have very different perceptions.

Again, an *YML* story drives the lesson home. During the Liu Song, a clerk of the Yongxing County (in modern Zhejiang) was longing for his mistress when she suddenly appeared to him and gave her lover a handful of cloves as a gift. When he invited her to have some, too, the woman said, "My breath is naturally fragrant; I have no need for it." But soon afterward, she was mauled to death by a dog and turned out to be an otter. "The fragrant clove in Dao's mouth became otter droppings, and he immediately

⁴³Liu 1999, 708–9.

⁴⁴Liu 1999, 721.

⁴⁵Xiao Tong 蕭統, *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 1816.

⁴⁶Mather, "Intermarriage as a Gauge of Family Status," 211–28; Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 37–38, 51–52.

⁴⁷Zhu Zhiwu 朱智武, "Nanjing Sijashan chutu Xieshi muzhi yanjiu: liuchao liuyu guizu de wange" 南京司家山出土謝氏墓志研究: 六朝流寓貴族的輓歌 [A study of the tomb inscriptions of the Xie family excavated at Sijashan of Nanjing: A dirge for the Six Dynasties displaced aristocrats], in *Huiwang rumeng de liuchao: liuchao wenshi lunji*, ed. Li Hongtian (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2009), 388.

⁴⁸Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 24.

felt a stench in his mouth.”⁴⁹ Cloves, an exotic spice native to the Southeast Asia, had been given as a breath-sweetener to palace attendants in close proximity to the emperor in the Han.⁵⁰ A county clerk’s craving for it becomes an occasion when the class difference is exposed and derided, mirrored in the hierarchical difference between man and otter, and the animal spirit is punished for its theft of a human female’s identity.

NEGOTIATING WITH LOCAL DEITIES AND LOCAL CULTS

A large part of south China, in particular Jingzhou and Jiangzhou where Liu Yiqing served as governor, was within the ancient domain of Chu, conceived as “barbarian” in early times, where shamanism is described as a key part of its religious culture. As observed by scholars, Han historians and Confucian ministers had for centuries condemned the southern culture for their “excessive/loose rites” (*yinsi*) and their worship of “ghosts and spirits” that fell outside officially sanctioned rites.⁵¹ In the capital as well as in the provinces, the northern émigré elite had an uneasy relationship with local deities and cults. A good example is the famous cult of Marquis Jiang 蔣侯, which had originated, and was primarily centered, in Jiankang.⁵² Marquis Jiang was Jiang Ziwen 蔣子文 (fl. late second century), who had been a wine-loving and womanizing Jiankang police sheriff while alive; after death, he was deified through a demonstration of efficacy, and his worship was sanctioned by the ruler of the southern Kingdom of Wu in the early third century. Some scholars consider Jiang Ziwen to be the protector of the southern regimes established by the northern émigrés,⁵³ but under close examination, the northern settlers’ relationship with this powerful local god was rather fraught and complicated. One telling sign of this ambivalence is that in the dynastic histories authored by southern court historians, rulers or princes who most ardently worshipped Marquis Jiang were often usurpers or the last rulers of a dynasty.⁵⁴

Wang Dao was Jin Emperor Yuan’s prime minister who had played a crucial role in the founding of the Eastern Jin. When his favorite son fell sick, Wang Dao was so agitated that he could not eat much for days.

Suddenly he saw a man who was stalwart in appearance, wearing armor and carrying a sword. Wang Dao said, “Who are you, sir?” The man replied, “I am Marquis Jiang. Your Lordship’s son is not doing well. I will petition for his

⁴⁹Liu 1999, 741.

⁵⁰Shen, *Song shu*, 1236.

⁵¹Constance A. Cook and John S. Major, *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 3–4, 136; Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1970), 1666, 2760.

⁵²Liang Mancang 梁滿倉, “Lun Jiangshen zai liuchao diwei de gonggu yu tigao” 論蔣神在六朝地位的鞏固與提高 [The consolidation and elevation of the status of the god Jiang Ziwen], *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 3 (1991): 58–68.

⁵³Yao Xiaodong 姚瀟鵬, “Jiang Ziwen Xinyang yu liuchao zhengzhi” 蔣子文信仰與六朝政治 [Jiang Ziwen worship and Six Dynasties politics], *Xueshu yanjiu* 11 (2009): 111–16.

⁵⁴Shen, *Song shu*, 1857, 2433; Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 105.

recovery, that's why I am here. Don't you worry anymore." Wang was overjoyed. The man asked for food, and ate several liters of it. People in Wang Dao's household had no idea what was going on. After he finished eating, the man suddenly put on a sad look, and said to Wang: "The Vice Director's life ends here. It is beyond help." As soon as he said that, he vanished.⁵⁵

The caprice of the god is startling and puzzling. The matter-of-fact narration makes it difficult to gauge the tone of the story, but the rhetorical device of contrast—Wang Dao's loss of appetite versus the god's voracious food consumption, and the dramatic change in Wang's mood from anxiety to joy and presumably to consternation and despair, entirely at the god's mercy—betrays an irony at the northerner's expense.

Another local deity in Jiankang was held responsible for the death of none other than Jin Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝 (r. 373–96). The "Lord of the Drip-drop" (Lincen jun 淋淅君), a god of the pool in the imperial park, revealed himself to the emperor, who threw a knife at him. The knife went through the god as if slicing through air, and the enraged god left with a threat. Soon afterward the emperor died, and "people all believed it was the god's doing."⁵⁶ In reality, Emperor Xiaowu was murdered by a palace lady,⁵⁷ but the attribution of an emperor's death to a minor deity of the pool in the imperial park is indicative of the power perceived to be held by such local gods and, conversely, the weakness of Eastern Jin rulers.

Many YML accounts of the northern émigré's encounters with local deities and shamans make the reader question the validity of the orthodox Confucian attitude toward ghosts and spirits. Suo Yuan 索元, a general whose family had originated from the town of Dunhuang on the northwestern frontier,⁵⁸ fell sick while serving as Magistrate of Liyang (in modern Anhui). A young woman came forward and claimed that she could cure him, but Suo Yuan had the woman executed in the marketplace for witchcraft. Before her death the woman swore to "make Suo Yuan understand his crime in ten days." Rather than reaping reward for his morally correct behavior, Suo Yuan died at the appointed time.⁵⁹ Another northern migrant, Zhen Chong 甄衝, was appointed the magistrate of Yundu (in modern Hubei) and repeatedly pressured to marry the daughter of a local god. Zhen adamantly refused for all the right reasons, including the fact that he was already married, yet the story ends abruptly with the death of Zhen Chong's human wife.⁶⁰

We will conclude this section with a story about Wang Dao's grandnephew; this is, moreover, a story that ties the last years of the Eastern Jin regime with the time of the YML compiler, and shows a thematic continuity in the tension between northern elite settlers and southern plebeians. In the story, a local shaman played a prank on Wang Ningzhi 王凝之 (d. 399) by turning his cap into a lotus leaf. This happened when Wang Ningzhi was governor of Jiangzhou, just as the prince-compiler Liu Yiqing

⁵⁵Liu 1999, 705.

⁵⁶Liu 1999, 717.

⁵⁷Fang et al., *Jin shu*, 242.

⁵⁸Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 647.

⁵⁹Liu 1999, 714.

⁶⁰Liu 1999, 730–31.

himself was half a century later. The Lord Governor went about his business completely oblivious to his vegetal headgear, to the shock of his colleagues and subordinates.⁶¹ Once again, the joke was on a member of the most prominent of the northern clans. It is also noteworthy that the shaman chose to turn Wang's cap into a lotus leaf, the aquatic plant that came to be closely associated with the south.

SEXUALIZED BODY OF THE NATIVE WOMAN AND GENDERED VIOLENCE

The northern émigré elite's fascination with the southern culture mixed with dread and abhorrence is often sexually charged, finding much resonance in the eroticization of the other and the structuring of imperial authority in gendered terms observed in studies of colonial discourse.⁶² Many *YML* stories are about a human male's encounter with a native woman, who is often figured either as a ghost or as an animal spirit, especially an animal from an aquatic habitat, such as an otter, heron, or swan, as the south was referred to as "water country."⁶³ The encounter often ends violently. In one story, a woman with a "petite body" and "pale white skin" was caught stealing silk from a merchant; the merchant somehow "suspected she was not human" and tied her up; she changed into a white egret, and was cooked and eaten: "her flesh was not very tasty."⁶⁴ A fox woman who sang love songs to her human lover was mauled to death by hunting dogs even before she got out of bed.⁶⁵ But the most unusual story involves a girl picking water chestnuts and reciting poetic lines from the *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chu ci* 楚辭).

The *Lyrics of Chu* is an anthology of late Warring State and Han poems with a strong association with the distinctive meter, imagery, and expressions of ancient Chu. There was a much-heightened interest in this anthology during this period: the bibliography of the *History of the Sui* (*Sui shu*), compiled in the early seventh century, shows that since it was compiled and annotated by Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. 110s–130s), a native of Chu, in the second century, the anthology did not acquire any other commentary until the northern elite migrant Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324),⁶⁶ and several glossaries were subsequently produced in the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties. We can only speculate that the *Lyrics of Chu* provided the northern émigré with a culturally familiar canon that helped them orient themselves in the old south. Wang Gong 王恭 (d. 398), a member of the Langye Wang clan, had famously said, "A distinguished gentleman need not have any remarkable talent. As long as he has a great deal of leisure, drinks heartily, and knows his *Li sao* [the first poem in the *Lyrics of Chu*] really well, he can be called a distinguished gentleman."⁶⁷ Another clansman, Wang Huzhi 王胡之 (d. ca. 364), once chanted two lines describing a deity from "The Nine Songs" of the *Lyrics of Chu* when he was at a

⁶¹Liu 1999, 711.

⁶²See, e.g., Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia," in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Post-modern Era*, ed. Micaela di Leonardo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 51–101.

⁶³See, e.g., Fang et al., *Jin shu*, 1220.

⁶⁴Liu 1999, 706.

⁶⁵Liu 1999, 725.

⁶⁶Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 1055.

⁶⁷Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 53.

large gathering at the minister Xie An's 謝安 (320–85) house; later he told people, “At that moment, I felt there was nobody else in the entire hall.”⁶⁸

In the *YML* story, a “wealthy and handsome” northern migrant, Lü Qiu 呂球, was sailing on the Qu'e Lake near Jiankang. Stopped by an unfavorable wind, he moored by the reeds. There he saw a young girl picking water chestnuts. It was a common sight in the south, except that the girl was clothed entirely in lotus leaves.

He asked: “Are you a ghost, young miss? Why do you wear such things for clothes?” The girl, with a look of fear, replied: “Haven't you heard, ‘Lotus robe, orchid sash; / suddenly arrives, just as suddenly departs’?” Yet she seemed afraid. Turning back her boat, she slowly rowed away. He shot her from afar, and got an otter. Her boat turned out to be entirely made of plants such as duckweed, silvery wormwood, and algae.⁶⁹

Shortly after, Lü Qiu ran into an elderly woman looking for the girl. He shot her as well, and she turned into an old otter. He was told by lakeside residents that the girl had often been seen picking water chestnuts on the lake: “She was exceedingly beautiful. Sometimes she visited people's homes, and had many lovers.”

It is an unsettling story because of the senseless, wanton violence done to the indigenous creatures of the lake. While familiarity with the *Lyrics of Chu* is supposedly a hallmark of a “distinguished gentleman,” the young girl's recitation of the lines from the very same Chu song cited by the northern aristocrat Wang Huzhi fails to validate her or save her from brutal murder. It backfires, just as her lotus-leaf attire arouses suspicion instead of inspiring admiration for the divine. Knowledge inappropriate to social class and gender is punished rather than commended.

The problem is, then, not her promiscuity: thrown in at the end of the story, it is literally an afterthought for the narrator to perhaps justify the brutal killing of her (though not the old woman); rather, the problem is her attempt to simulate a goddess from the high cultural tradition of the northern elite. Seen from one perspective, this is an ironic debunking of canonic literature and an awakening to the absence of divinity in the southland romanticized in the *Lyrics of Chu*; from another point of view, it is the fulfillment of a sadistic colonialist fantasy about a sexualized Southland and a brutal rejection of its seductive allure.

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In the fourth century, waves of northern migrants involuntarily came to “other people's land,” seeking both refuge and dominance. Traumatized by their dislocation, they also brought trauma to the land in which they settled. Migration and colonization are essential to human survival and diversification; they are also a process fraught with deprivation and violence. The discontent of native southerners resonated throughout this period. Qiu Lingju 丘靈鞠 (fl. 470s–480s), one of the southern elite who insisted on speaking the Wu dialect in public, said in a great huff that he wished to desecrate the grave of Gu Rong 顧榮 (d. 312), a southerner who had played an important part

⁶⁸Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 12.

⁶⁹Liu 1999, 73.

in the establishment of the Eastern Jin regime.⁷⁰ The Man peoples, at the lowest rung of the social ladder, suffered the worst oppression, and their bitter resistance left a strong trace in official historiography, often in a court historian's praise of the accomplishments of generals who quashed the Man revolts.

The *YML* stories do not represent a single, coherent religious or intellectual vision. The only constant, reiterated through the stories, is that the spirit world was real, but how to successfully deal with the spirit world is not as obvious as some scholars might prefer to believe. The best way to approach *YML* is not to impose any forced unity on the discordant stories, but rather to see them as the northern settler colonialists' attempt to sort out their anxieties and insecurities about the old "barbarian south," where multiple ethnic groups, including a much earlier stratum of Han Chinese, dwelled in conflict and tension with one another.

In a recurrent episode, a northern settler would encounter a demon extending its arm through the window late at night. This allegedly happened to Xie Kun soon after he "crossed the River," and to Yin Zhongzong (fl. 400) when he was traveling through Fuling (in modern Sichuan) to take up a government post.⁷¹ It is perhaps not a coincidence that such experiences always occur in the post-station, a liminal space belonging to the empire rather than to the locale itself. Surrounded by the dark and the unknown, the temporary lodging occupied by the lone traveler is penetrated by a mysterious force. The monstrous arm through the window is emblematic of the perils of the land he has come to inhabit, and of the fragility of civilization and the polity. It is, in hindsight, a subliminal projection of his own crossing and transgression.

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⁷⁰Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 890.

⁷¹Liu 1999, 703, 719.