CHINESE SOCIAL BANDITS AND THEIR ROLE IN HISTORY: SOME POSSIBLE SINO-WESTERN PARALLELS

by

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese social bandit (yu-hsia 游俠) tradition is a time-honoured and vital element of Chinese cultural expression. It has been present from the earliest Chinese written works and continues to appear in the contemporary Chinese cinema and paperback novel. Nevertheless, the subject has been virtually untouched by social historians.

The present discussion is, therefore, an attempt to establish the value of this tradition for the student of Chinese social history and to suggest particular problems in the study of the yu-hsia which appear to warrant future investigations.

Specifically, this thesis suggests that the yu-hsia may be seen as the Chinese equivalents of Western social bandits such as Robin Hood and that the female yu-hsia (nū-hsia 女俠) may be seen as equivalent to the amazonian figure in European culture.
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INTRODUCTION

From the folktales, ballads and popular fiction of past centuries, to the contemporary cinema and paperback novel, the heroic figure of the yu-hsia or Chinese social bandit, has continued to play a major role in Chinese cultural expression. However, there is at present a paucity of secondary literature devoted to the study of the yu-hsia and a general absence within this literature of discussions of interest to the social historian. Therefore, in the following thesis the discussion will range over an extensive time period and encompass elements of seemingly diverse cultures in an effort to indicate that the neglect of this tradition by historians is unwarranted. In addition, this study will attempt to establish an awareness of the benefits for the social historian which would accrue from an intensive analysis of the yu-hsia tradition at some future date and to suggest particular aspects of that tradition which appear to warrant such thorough investigations.

The study of the yu-hsia is primarily an investigation of literary materials. At present there is little agreement among historians as to the correct approach to such sources. Therefore, the first chapter will be devoted to a discussion of an appropriate methodology for use in the study of the yu-hsia.

The second chapter will concentrate on the available secondary literature devoted to the hsia and in particular, on the attempts to define the fundamental characteristics of these heroic figures.
In the third chapter the subject of social outlawry will be examined and an attempt will be made to demonstrate in what respect the *yu-hsia* may be seen as part of the tradition which includes Robin Hood and certain American outlaws.

While the *yu-hsia* tradition in general has received little attention from social historians, the *nü-hsia* or female social bandits, have received virtually none. Therefore, the final chapter of this thesis will be devoted to a discussion of these unusual Chinese heroines who have been variously described as anti-women, amazons and as the antithesis of the ideal Confucian woman.
I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

In the early months of spring, when those who had lived together [for the winter] were about to disperse, an official messenger would stand on the road and shake a wooden-tongued bell in order to collect popular songs. The songs were submitted to the grand master who regulated them in accord with notes and tunes for presentation to the prince. Thus it is said: though a prince does not watch beyond the window and the door, yet he knows the world. 1

While the means employed by the social historian to gather evidence may differ from those of the prince, the ends are the same. For through an examination of particular forms of popular culture both attempt to familiarize themselves with aspects of various communities. The historian however, separated in time from the singers of the tales, is less able immediately to discern all that the songs may be saying about the milieu from which they arose.

At present, there seems to be little agreement among historians as to what is to be discovered about a society from a study of its cultural expressions and there is less agreement on the means to be employed in such investigations. As one historian notes:

...George Sand describing the February uprising in letters to her friends is an eyewitness, to be treated no differently from any other witness at the bar of history even though she also wrote novels: Flaubert evoking (however meticulously) the storming of the Tuileries in 1848 is also a witness, but the examination of his evidence in the form in which it appears in his novel L'Education sentimentale is another, and more intricate operation. Or should be.

...In both ancient and modern history...little systematic attempt has been made to put imaginative literature to a more extended form of cross examination than that accorded to direct evidence or testimony. 2
As the study of the *yu-hsia* is primarily an investigation of literary sources, the following chapter will attempt to outline a suitable methodology which may be employed by the social historian for just such an examination.

In order to determine what sort of evidence literature may be expected to yield, one must first ascertain the relationship which exists between a society and its literary products. According to many works on the sociology of literature, literature (and in particular the novel) is often considered to reflect society in the sense that it provides documentary illustrations or photographic images of various aspects of historical communities.3

This view of literature would seem to be one which is held by many historians for, as one writer notes:

One of the principal reasons for the almost complete absence in France of a social history is the existence of great works of literature, which certainly look like irrefutable documents, and which, moreover, by their verbal magic solidly reconstruct things past and generate, so to speak, a recurrent experience of them. 4

In such cases a literary product is seen to resemble a museum through which the researcher has merely to wander, noting such things as methods of transportation and housing, styles of furniture and clothing and the state of laws, social structure and institutions. Among the reference works consulted for this study, there are many examples of scholars who approach literature in this manner.

Eric Hobsbawm, for example, in his book *Bandits* states that he frequently relies on literary material as a source of information on the realities of social banditry. 5 His discussion of haiduk bandits, for instance, is based on "songs and ballads, which are one of the chief
sources for our knowledge of this type of banditry." 6 From these sources Hobsbawm discovers, among other things, that "the motive to become a haiduk was strictly economic" and that runaway girls often joined haiduk bands. 7

In this same chapter Hobsbawm refers to the medieval Chinese novel Water Margin as a source of information on haiduk banditry in China. Sa Meng-wu, in his study Shui-hu-chuan yu Chung-kuo she-hui also uses this novel as a documentary source in his discussion of traditional Chinese society. As an example of usury in this period Sa Meng-wu cites an episode from the third chapter of Water Margin in which a wealthy neighborhood bully forces an impoverished singing girl to hand over daily the larger half of her earnings in repayment of a supposed debt owed to him. 8

Two other examples of scholars who employ literature as a documentary source are Jaroslav Prušek and H. F. Schurmann. Prušek in his article "Les contes chinois du Moyen-age comme source de l'histoire economique et sociale sous les dynasties des Sung et des Yuan", culls from the San Yen collection of short stories, evidence on such things as the legal status of women, the price of concubines and trading patterns between north and south China. 9 Schurmann in, "On Social Themes in Sung Tales", also uncovers information on the status of women as well as on social mobility and marital relations. 10

Scholars such as these who turn to literature for documentary illustration or an elegant allusion, tend to regard the fictional characters as "living beings responsible for their actions" 11 and as representative or typical of their supposed counterparts in the nonfictional world.

In order to insure the typicality of this documentary evidence the investigator must rely on a belief that an author has served, to a greater
or lesser degree, as a witness, gathering together in a literary form the fruits of a largely disinterested exploration of his or her society.

Therefore, according to Lucien Goldmann, scholars would prefer to rely on writers who have given proof of less creative imagination by employing images and experiences for the purpose of simple illustration rather than as symbolic expressions of transcendent truths.

However, Louis Chevalier in his book *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes*, contends that even in the works of such imaginative writers as Balzac there is a passive or lower level which merely records "facts, persons and places, undistorted by the interposition of any subjective viewpoint." Chevalier compares these passages to "files of archival material" and he uses them as such in his work claiming that analysed carefully this literature provides "a mass of facts previously uncompiled."

The problems with this approach to the evidence of literature are manifold but here I will outline just a few. To begin, it must be recognized that even the most mediocre or unimaginative work is the product of some process of selective observation and reconstruction. This process is governed, in part, by the following: First, the conventions of a particular art form. As Joan Rockwell notes:

> When we consider how not just some people, but all people, spend their time between getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, it becomes evident that the novel is remarkably selective for emotional rather than emotionally neutral events.

In this context it is interesting to note that Chevalier, with the aid of considerable nonliterary material, was able to ascertain that many of Balzac's descriptions of crime were heavily influenced by earlier genres.
of picaresque literature. Thus they were not a reflection of the social situation in the writer's own time and would have been very misleading had they been approached as such.

Secondly, the selection process is governed by the degree to which an author has been socialized by a particular group or community and thus is able to record only what she or he has been taught to see and in the manner in which they have been taught to see it. Thus, for example, the personalities and experiences of women are often not 'reflected' in literature so much as they are 'refracted' through received patriarchal notions of female character and place. This might seriously affect some of the social facts concerning women in traditional Chinese society which such scholars as Schurmann and Sa Meng-wu claim to have discovered in Chinese literature.

Finally, the process is governed by the extent and effectiveness of overt social pressure exercised by means of official censorship and/or public approval in the form of financial support or honorary awards.

The above factors tend to encourage a writer not to produce photographic images but to record the biases which result from a particular group's meditation upon itself and society in general.

The author's depiction of society and the researcher's interpretation of that depiction are further governed by the complex problem of realism in art. In the preface to Les Paysans, Balzac noted that the novelist (or historian of manners):

...obeys harsher laws than those that bind the historian of facts. He must make everything seem plausible, even the truth, whereas in the domain of history properly so-called, the impossible is justified by the fact that it occurred. 16

The extent to which an author must make a story 'seem plausible' and
the methods employed in so doing are governed in the first instance by
the agreed upon biases which were discussed above. They are further governed
by the conventions of realism which are attached to certain art forms at
various times. As Northrope Frye notes, "when the public demands likeness
to an object, it generally wants the exact opposite, likeness to the pictorial
conventions it is familiar with." 17 Lastly, realism is governed by the ex­
pertise of both the author and public in regard to the aspects of society
being portrayed and the accepted myths which accumulate around unfamiliar
features.

The researcher's approach to literature which seems plausible often
reveals more of the character of the investigator's mental framework than
of the literary product itself. Thus speaking of the Tale of Genji, Diana
Spearman writes that:

"...it is sufficient to say that there is nothing in it that
could not have happened, although the incidents are sometimes
explained in terms that we should not now accept, the idea for
example, that illness is caused through possession by some
evil spirit. 18"

For Spearman then, the material world of the Tale of Genji and those
experiences therein which are recognizable in the sense that they fit
within some vague definition of reality, can be referred to as somehow
comparable to social fact while ghosts and evil spirits must be placed
under the rubric of superstition.

It is sufficient to say that the definition of reality is in great
part culturally defined 19 and that if literature is to be used as a
document then an unconcious application of the researcher's definition of
reality to historical literature would tend to result in the reconstruction
of a society not sufficiently remote from the student's own.
This is a special problem for the Western scholar who is investigating the *yu-hsia* tradition. Unfamiliar with elements of the martial arts, the student may label as magic or fantasy what is in fact a depiction of consummate skill.

Recognition of the above problems suggests that a more fruitful approach to the evidence of literature would be a study of the values and attitudes which it expresses. As Maurice Keen remarks in reference to the outlaw legends of medieval England, "they are useful to the historian primarily because they can tell him what his records so often conceal, what it was men really believed in and what they really desired." Consequently, in this paper *yu-hsia* literature will not be approached as documentary sources for the study of material aspects of traditional Chinese society. Instead, representative works from this tradition will be examined as expressions of certain values and attitudes. The problem remains however, to outline a method for the identification and analysis of these sentiments.

John Goodlad in his book *A Sociology of Popular Drama*, suggests that culture should be considered as consisting of two elements:

...an expressive element concerned with the way people reveal their understanding of their environment, their beliefs about it and their effective reaction to it, and an instrumental element through which people seek to exercise control over their environment.  

As Goodlad and other sociologists recognize, individual cultural products contain these two elements and it would seem that the social historian would profit from the ability to identify and explain these two elements in historical literature.

In his study of *ludruk* drama, James Peacock discovered that even when direct observation is possible, cultural products provide a unique
and superior form of information about some aspects of society. Peacock writes that:

> Because daily actions must take place under conditions not totally of the actors' choosing, the actors cannot totally express their ideals through their daily actions... But on the ludruk stage, they can construct in fantasy... conditions which allow them to express their ideals in pure form. ... Ludruk lays bare aspects of Javanese existence that cannot be seen with the naked eye. It leads to a more acute diagnosis of daily Javanese life. 23

With this in mind, it is possible to go beyond Robert Ruhlmann's statement that Chinese fiction "may well be the only available source for the study of certain values and attitudes..." and say that narrative fiction, including drama, may well be the best possible source for the study of such attitudes and thus an excellent tool for the study of social history.

Even more than simple expressions of social values and norms, cultural products seem to indicate areas of stress in a particular society, or as Goodlad would say, the 'effective reactions' to the environment. Popular culture often deals with and expresses emotions at areas of social life in which tensions are regularly felt. Tensions may be seen to result, for example, from the disparity, observed or imagined, between an ideal system of justice and the inequities which abound in daily life. Or they may be seen to result from the attempts to reinforce the artificial polarization of various groups, such as men and women, within the society.

The way in which literature and drama deal with these tensions is a component of the instrumental element of culture as defined by Goodlad. A cultural product is instrumental in that it is either functional or dysfunctional. If it is functional it serves in various ways to maintain and stabilize the social order and to justify and sanctify its existence.
If it is dysfunctional, the effect is the reverse. Goodlad maintains that popular culture is almost always functional. This thesis is of interest to the student of the *yu-hsia* tradition for it has often been described as a literature of popular protest and as being potentially subversive.  

Popular culture can be functional by a) providing some form of release for the tensions which were mentioned above and/or b) by instructing members of the community about the social structure and about acceptable behavior within that structure.

One method of providing release is in the portrayal of a social situation, which will be a disguised or exaggerated expression of a situation with which the audience is familiar. The audience will be encouraged to relive or re-experience the tension of the incident, tension which will subsequently be released as they also experience the resolution of the conflict. As Peacock notes:

*Ludruk* portrays these people's daily conflicts in such a way that it 'cures' or relieves tensions which they develop as a result of such conflicts. Having been cured, they can return to their daily chores with renewed spirit, or decreased anxiety and resentment. They also may be less likely to quit their chores, which is another way of saying that they may be less likely to rebel against the increasingly modernized daily patterns in which they are involved.

In a similar way anti-social impulses are controlled by allowing the listener to experience the feeling of being a wrongdoer but also of suffering the punishment for such deeds.

Comedy is also a form of release, not only because laughter is therapeutic in itself but also because, as Goodlad states, "in the permissive atmosphere of comedy it is possible to discuss openly what cannot be mentioned in normal social intercourse."
One of the many subjects which it is difficult to discuss overtly on a public level is the doubt that society functions and is structured in the best or only possible way. This doubt is, I believe, expressed in comedy and drama through incidents of mistaken identity where it is momentarily possible to mistake a woman for a man or an upperclass person for a commoner. Mistaken identity is a fundamental characteristic of the outlaw legends which will be reviewed in chapter three of this study. In these tales, the outlaws are constantly mistaken not only for law abiding citizens but for agents of the law itself. In order to remain functional however, such drama must resolve the confusion in the end by clearly redefining characters and putting them back in their proper places.

The formula of mistaken identity is closely related to, and often overlaps, the practice in fiction and drama of role reversal or symbolic inversion. As mentioned previously, tension may develop because of dissatisfaction with the artificial polarization of various groups within the community. One way of dealing with this tension is to allow people to temporarily change places in fiction or in festivals.

One of the more common types of role reversal is that involving the sexes where both men and women temporarily adopt the clothing, characteristics and status normally assigned to the opposite sex. In European tradition the masculinized woman is most often represented in cultural products by a variation of the amazon type, such as Tasso's Clorinda and Spenser's Britomart. In the final chapter of this thesis, the nü-hsia or female social bandit, will be discussed as a possible parallel to the amazon in European tradition. In the third chapter, the possibility of labelling
the outlaw legends as somewhat different forms of symbolic inversion will also be investigated.

Symbolic inversion allows people to express doubts about the way society is structured but controls the doubt by putting people back in their proper clothes at the story's or the festival's end. Symbolic inversion also emphasizes the distinctness of roles and defines the 'normal' by contrasting it with the abnormal. This is then, also an example of how a cultural product can be functional through instruction.

In order for a social system to survive it is necessary that all members be cognizant of the rules which maintain the structure and of the expected behavior which corresponds to certain acceptable roles. It is also necessary for the community to be assured that although the system may have its shortcomings, ultimately it is just.

To acquire a thorough understanding of the rules of society it is beneficial to see 'an intelligible arrangement of social phenomena' which appear in daily life to be haphazard. Literature and drama provide this pattern of phenomena by spotlighting a limited number of situations and responses to those situations embodied in accepted role models.

In his article "Values, Roles and Personalities" 31, Arthur Wright notes that in China, where the didactic purpose of culture was particularly stressed, exemplary figures and their situations became especially symbolic and illustrative of social values and norms. For this reason, Wright and his colleagues contend that the study of the lieh-chuan or collected traditions, (of which the yu-hsia lieh-chuan of Ssu-ma Ch'ien are an example), provides an unparalleled opportunity for the study of these sentiments.
In order to remain functional, the minatory characters of fiction must be punished in this world or the next, just as the virtuous must be rewarded. While the punishment of the unjust or evil may be seen simply as exemplary retribution for the purpose of assuring the community that (somewhere) justice prevails, it may at times serve the same function as a ritual exorcism which seeks to restore the balance of things. I would suggest that the ritualistic murders of the adulteress P'an Chin-lien and of P'an Ch'ia-yun the informer wife of Lu Chun-i, in the novel *Water Margin*, are examples of the exorcism of what were felt to be pre-eminent incarnations of female evil.

While Goodlad may claim that popular culture is functional, censors fear and revolutionaries hope that cultural products have the power to be dysfunctional. Thus when asked how China could be saved, a young Mao Tse-tung is reported to have said "Imitate the heroes of *Liang Shan P'o*." As Joan Rockwell notes:

> The assumption here is that the fate of imaginary people... will have the power to mobilize public opinion, change the accepted values and norms and force a change in social relations themselves. 33

In an article entitled "The Chinese Novel as a Subversive Force" C.P. Fitzgerald seems to concur with the early opinion of Chairman Mao as to the incendiary potential of the novel *Water Margin*. Written in 1951, Fitzgerald's article was heavily influenced by contemporary criticism of this novel in mainland China. During the 1950s in articles such as Li Hsi-fan's "A Great Novel of Peasant Revolt" *Water Margin* was hailed as a realistic novel which truthfully reflected the social structure of the Sung dynasty. More importantly, it was seen as a work of art which
had served as a textbook for peasant revolutionaries. This was not the first time that revolutionary potential had been ascribed to the *yu-hsia* tradition. In the early twentieth century the revolutionary martyr Ch'iu Chin (1879-1907) took to wearing a short sword and styled herself Chien Hu Nü-hsia or the female *hsia* from Shao-hsing. In her poetry she equated her actions and her cause with those of both the male and female *hsia* of romantic literature.

In light of this, will a study of representative works of the *yu-hsia* tradition reveal that it is in fact an anomaly in the thesis that popular culture is functional? On the strength of internal evidence can *yu-hsia* literature be seen to express, unlike *ludruk* for example, unacceptable norms and values which are potentially dysfunctional?

Before these questions can be studied it is necessary to review the available secondary literature on the *yu-hsia* and to comment in particular on the problems encountered in the attempts to define the fundamental characteristics of the *yu-hsia*.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


10. Ibid., p. 62

11. Jean Chesneaux's studies of secret societies, which Hobsbawm refers to in his general bibliography, actually provide closer models of what he defines as haiduk banditry. However, he does not refer to these works in the haiduk chapter.


NOTES TO CHAPTER I (Con't)


13 L. Chevalier, Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes, pp. 31 and 59

14 Ibid., p. 40

15 J. Rockwell, Fact in Fiction, p. 86


17 Ibid., p. 132. For discussions of this topic see also E. Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953) and J. Prušek, "Realistic and Lyric Elements in the Chinese Medieval Story," Chinese History and Literature 385-395


20 M. Keen, The Outlaws of Medieval Legend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 7

NOTES TO CHAPTER I (Con't)

22 See for example the discussion in M.C. Albrecht, "The Relationship of Literature and Society."


26 An analysis of collections of French folktales and a study of Wolfram Eberhard's work in Taiwan (Studies in Taiwanese Folktales, (Taipei, 1971) led me to conclude that many folktales dealing with kings, queens, princes etc. are disguised expressions of tensions within the family and that folktales told by nonprofessional storytellers are of value for psychological rather than sociological insights.

27 J. Peacock, Rites of Modernization, p. 238

28 The peculiar qualities of oral culture (of which traditional Chinese popular culture is an example) enhance the release and instructional functions. Feng Meng-lung, in the preface to Ku-chin Hsiaoshuo, speaks of the effects of the professional storyteller:
   ...they will gladden you, startle you, make you weep for sorrow, make you dance and sing; some will prompt you to draw your sword; others will make you want to bow in reverence; or strangle yourself...Although a man from his childhood days intone the Analects of Confucius or the Classic of Filial Piety, he will not be moved so swiftly or so profoundly as by these storytellers. (translated by Cyril Birch in Stories From a Ming Collection, p. 8)

What Feng Meng-lung describes here is, I believe, what the ancient Greeks called mimesis, which described the tendency of oral presentation to draw the listener into complete identification with the character being portrayed. The listener is encouraged, not only to live through the character but to take away from the performance a vivid memory of his or her actions for future reference in daily life. The form of the presentation is governed by these ends. Characters are clearly defined and their
qualities exaggerated. Rhythmic speech and song, the use of percussion instruments, formulaic expression and dance not only hypnotise the audience so that they can be effectively drawn into the character and situation, but also act as mnemonic devices. Obviously the very attendance of the audience at such performances will prove to be cathartic.

29 J. Goodlad, *A Sociology of Popular Drama*, p. 44

30 F. Fearing quoted in Ibid., p. 4


33 J. Rockwell, *Fact in Fiction*, p. 40


For examples of further discussions on *Water Margin* in mainland China during the 1950s see *Shui-hu yen-chiu lun-wen chi* (Peking: Tso-chia ch'upan-she, 1957)

II. A REVIEW OF THE SECONDARY LITERATURE ON THE YU-HSIA

In the final chapter of his book *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, James Liu notes in passing that:

We have seen such a varied gallery of characters, real or ficticious, to whom the term 'knight-errant' [yu-hsia] has been applied, that the reader may question the justification of its use. However, on reflection he might be convinced that there are in fact certain common denominators among those who have been graced with the appellation. 1

What are the 'common denominators' which serve to encompass such a disparate group of characters within the yu-hsia tradition? This question is a major concern to the authors of the secondary literature on this subject. Consequently, this chapter will review their attempts to isolate the fundamental characteristics which define the yu-hsia as a distinct group. The ongoing debate which centers on the correct translation of the term yu-hsia is one indication that the problem has yet to be convincingly resolved. The source of this problem seems to reside in the yu-hsia lieh-chuan (Collected Traditions of the Yu-hsia) of the Shih Chi and Han Shu, the texts which serve as the core of the discussions found in the secondary literature.

The seminal works of the yu-hsia literary tradition are the yu-hsia lieh-chuan found in the Shih Chi written by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (c. 145–86 B.C.) and in the Han Shu written by Pan Ku (A.D. 32–92). It would seem that problems concerning the identification of the fundamental attributes of the hsia begin with the interpretation of these two works. The challenge facing the researcher who examines the yu-hsia lieh-chuan is aptly summarized by Burton Watson who writes in reference to Pan Ku that:
It is difficult to determine just what in Pan Ku's eyes, qualified a man to be called a knight (hsia) or a strongman (hao), outside of a certain swaggering contempt for conventional morality, an elaborate concern for honour, and a fondness for the grand gesture. 3

The initial difficulty arises when the lieh-chuan are approached as if they were documentary sources of general information or insouciant records of factual material on the history of the yu-hsia. Thus, in James Liu's study, the lieh-chuan serve as the basis for his discussion of 'The Historical Knight-errant' or the facts of the yu-hsia as opposed to the fictions of literature. However, internal evidence suggests that the lieh-chuan were not intended by their authors to serve as the equivalent of archival documents.

In the first place, examples of hsia are scattered throughout the histories and it is assumed that the reader is familiar with the general nature of hsia-type activities. Most of the authors seem to be aware of this for in their studies they discuss such individuals as Ching K'o and Nieh Cheng who are included in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's Collected Traditions of the Assassin-Retainers 44, or Liu Pang founder of the Han dynasty. 5 In spite of this, discussions in the secondary literature invariably center on the yu-hsia lieh-chuan which are approached as primary sources of information on such social facts as hsia class origin, general activities and moral code.

In addition to the forgoing, two further characteristics of the lieh-chuan seem to have been overlooked by the researchers. The first is that, as one historian has noted:

...the contents of the traditions (lieh chuan) draw heavily on a body of semi-folklore and oral tradition rather than
upon the documentary records of the professional annalists.

... With regard to this semi-fictional and folkloristic aspect of the lieh-chuan it is perhaps worth mentioning that many scholars see in the Records of the Historian (Shi Chi) not only the beginning of the conventional form of dynastic history, but also the seeds of fiction writing. 6

For this reason alone it would seem unsound to approach the lieh-chuan as if they were equivalent to archival documents. However, in addition to the above observation, one must take into account the respective historians' views of the function of their work in society. As Burton Watson notes 7, Ssu-ma Ch'ien's opinion of the role of the historian was heavily influenced by the Kung-yang and Tso-shih commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals. These texts stressed the view that Confucius compiled the Annals not as a disinterested record of historical events but as a work intended to elucidate his moral principles. The same may be said of Pan Ku as will be demonstrated.

Therefore, the yu-hsia lieh-chuan should be approached with the understanding that they are in great part collections of legends which have subsequently been molded to the respective moral and didactic purposes of Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku. Statements made by these historians, particularly in their eloquent prefaces, must be seen as elements of this larger moral purpose and be analysed as such.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien's chapter on the yu-hsia is primarily a collection of stories about an exceptional group of commoner hsia who, in the face of a variety of misfortunes were able to lead such exemplary lives that they left their names to posterity. The moral seems to be that righteous and virtuous men, though dressed in rags and hidden in a sea of commoners, will be recognized and rewarded by having conferred upon them the immortality of history.
Poverty is one element of their misfortune and to emphasize this Ssu-ma Ch'ien compares these hsia to Confucius' disciples Chi Tzu and Yuan Hsun who did not join fellow Confucian scholars in finding fame and fortune through becoming prime ministers and high officials. Instead they lived in obscurity, "in barren hovels with vine-woven doors; wearing rough clothes and eating coarse food." Yet because of their virtue their disciples were still writing of them four-hundred years later.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien goes on to mention hsia like Meng-ch'ang and Chun-shen who, though worthy men, achieved fame easily because of their wealth and connections with the influential people of their time. In contrast to these men he notes that:

...there were others, knights of the lanes and byways who, though they had no such advantages were so upright in conduct and careful of their honor that their reputation was known all over the empire and there was no one who did not praise them as worthy men. This is not quite so easy to do. 9

In the most frequently quoted passage of the lieh-chuan Ssu-ma Ch'ien characterizes the conduct of these commoner hsia. He writes that:

As for the wandering knights, though their actions may not always conform to perfect righteousness, yet they are always true to their word. What they undertake they invariably carry out. Without thinking of themselves they hasten to the side of these who are in trouble, whether it means survival or destruction, life or death. Yet they never boast of their accomplishments but rather consider it a disgrace to brag of what they have done for others. 10

According to the author, the immense power wielded by these men was the direct result of their righteous reputations, in contrast to the corrupt hao-tsu or powerful families 11 who abused their power "making the poor serve them, arrogantly and cruelly oppressing the weak and helpless." 12

Another element of the misfortune with which these hsia had to contend was the chaotic times which were apparently responsible for the fact that
they "sometimes ran afoul of the law in their day." In the hsia legends which the historian adopted, it is likely that the extra-legal activities of these individuals were already portrayed as being somehow different from ordinary crime. However, it seems that under the brush of Ssu-ma Ch'ien the biographies were further subjected to the principle of hui, or avoidance, another legacy of the Spring and Autumn Annals.  

Hui in the Shih Chi may simply involve the scattering of elements of a person's life over various chapters of the history in order to achieve the desired image for each section. Thus in the yu-hsia lieh-chuan, the poverty of Chu Chia is stressed, while in another section we are told that he was a land owner who had easy access to prominent officials. In another instance of hui, Ssu-ma Ch'ien seems to neglect to relate the extra-legal activities of many of the hsia or at least to mitigate or justify them. It has been said of Ssu-ma Ch'ien that if a person had ten faults and one merit he would take special care to record the one merit. The merit in the case of the hsia was a reputation for righteousness, the faults were their criminal activities, which the author attempted to avoid.

Pan Ku criticized Ssu-ma Ch'ien's attempt to portray the hsia's criminal activities as misfortunes when he wrote in the preface to his yu-hsia lieh-chuan that:

...they [the hsia ] allowed themselves to drift into a shabby and inferior way of life. That they brought death to themselves and destruction to their families was no mere stroke of ill fortune. 16

Pan Ku's didactic purpose is to illustrate the results of a failure to abide by a strict rule of law and order. According to his preface it seems that he too will focus on commoner hsia, but for the purpose of intensifying, for his readers, the ominous results of this neglect of the
law. Thus he mentions that it was bad enough that young nobles engaged in hsia activities, but:

How much more, then, have those like Kuo Hsieh offended who, though mere commoners in rank, arrogate to themselves the authority to take human life! The guilt that they incur by so doing is too great to be excused from punishment. 17

One would suppose that Pan Ku, intent upon this message of maintaining the status quo, would proceed to portray the hsia in such a way that their crimes would indeed not appear to be the result of misfortunes, but a fundamental aspect of their activities. Yet he seems to have been infected by the romance which surrounds these individuals for even in his 'fire and brimstone' preface, he writes that:

When we observe their kindness and universal lovingness, when we see them aiding the distressed, helping those in trouble, behaving in a modest and retiring fashion and not boasting of their deeds, then, to be sure we recognize in them qualities that are far removed from the ordinary. But what a pity they could not have proceeded in accordance with the Way and virtue! 18

The ambiguous portrayal of the yu-hsia begins in his preface, but the confusion is compounded when Pan Ku proceeds to adopt verbatim, three stories from Ssu-ma Ch'ien which, as has been suggested, were constructed in order to convey the 'one merit'. Furthermore, Pan Ku structures his new hsia stories in exactly the same manner.

Therefore, to reiterate the points of this brief review, the yu-hsia lieh-chuan seem to be collections of legendary material which have been structured, unsuccessfully in the Han Shu, to illustrate moral lessons. To approach them as archival documents and to take their statements at face value will clearly lead to unwarranted conclusions and understandable confusion on the part of researchers when they attempt to characterize the yu-hsia.
The secondary literature, as previously mentioned, approaches the yu-hsia lieh-chuan as primary documents and the authors accept at face value statements made by the respective historians. Adopting the structure of the lieh-chuan they attempt to define the hsia mainly in terms of their common class origins and their exemplary moral conduct.

The majority of the writers state that the hsia were a social group of commoners by birth or circumstance. They are content, like Ho Ping-ti, that Ssu-ma Ch'ien "is as specific as a modern student can expect about the social origin of the prominent hsia of Han times." They all draw attention to the phrases lu-hsiang chih hsia, hsia of the lanes and byways, and p'i-fu chih hsia, hsia of the commoners, and seem to agree that:

...the social origin of the hsia leaders of early Han times was as a rule so humble, obscure and unmistakably plebian that Ssu-ma Ch'ien deeply regrets the almost complete absence of records of their conduct and deeds in the works of the Confucian and Moist schools. But whenever their family background is given, it is invariably humble and poor. For example, Chu Chia never had any money in his house....

On the basis of this information the writers advance various theories on the hsia. Lao Kan suggests that the yu-hsia were originally unemployed or displaced artisans and peasants who turned to hsia activities as a profession. In his book Pien-shih yi Yu-hsia, T'ao Hsi-sheng speculates that the hsia were not all commoners by birth but included in their ranks members of the warrior class who had fallen on hard times. These men likely became the leaders of hsia groups because of their military and organizational skills.

In the above studies commoner status is posited as one of the fundamental characteristics which defined the hsia as a separate group.
However, as previously mentioned, the histories do not state that even the majority of the hsia were commoners but dwell on their supposed poverty for a didactic purpose.

Continuing the effort to define the yu-hsia, Tatsuo Masubuchi and James Liu contend that, in Liu's words, "being a knight-errant was more a matter of temperament than of social origin and that knight-errantry was a way of behavior rather than a profession." 24 There is little disagreement among all of the writers as to how to characterize this way of behavior. They simply refer to Ssu-ma Ch'ien's statement quoted above on page 23, a passage which Ch'ü T'ung-tsü describes as "this authoritative statement [which] gives a vivid description of the activities of the yu-hsia." 25

As the hsia, in spite of these honorable activities, were ignored by the Confucians and the Moists, it is understandable that the researchers attempt to compare and contrast this hsia 'ideology' with the various major schools of philosophy. Lao Kan inspired perhaps by popular notions of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's Taoist sympathies, attempts to compare the yu-hsia and Taoist philosophies. The connection arose, he believes, primarily because both groups shared commoner origins. In his essays on the origin of the Moist philosophy 26, Feng Yu-lan discusses the similarities and contrasts between the Moists and the hsia. James Liu reviews aspects of the Legalist and Confucian philosophies in relation to the hsia. It is particularly important for the purpose of Liu's study to illustrate a conflict between the Confucians and the hsia for, as he states in the preface to his work:

Recently, scholars in the West have come to realize the inadequacy of the popular image of traditional Chinese society
as a monolithic one in which everyone conformed to a rigid Confucian code of behavior...[An] important illustration of the spirit of protest and nonconformity in China is knight-errantry. 27

As Liu notes, the attempts by Lao Kan and Feng Yu-lan to define the yu-hsia through comparative studies of their philosophy are unsuccessful. 28 Liu's own attempt to set the hsia against Confucianism and traditional social norms in general is rather forced. All of these discussions are however, highly speculative and based on the flimsiest of evidence. In the end, this approach fails to resolve convincingly the problem of yu-hsia identity.

In spite of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's efforts to bypass the subject of criminality, three historians have suggested that extra-legal activities are a third fundamental element of the yu-hsia way of behavior. Ho Ping-ti writes that:

From the standpoint of social history, it may be said that the most fundamental characteristic of the hsia as a social group was its reliance on illegal and violent means to establish and maintain its power. 29

For Ho Ping-ti, Tatsuo Masubuchi and Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, the yu-hsia lieh-chuan can also be used as documents for the study of underworld activities in the Han dynasty. Ch'ü contends that on the basis of the histories, the yu-hsia appear to have been one of the powerful families of hao-tsu, of their time, along with groups such as imperial relatives, consort families and officials. He further suggests that their power was based primarily on physical force rather than on wealth or political power. 30 The other two authors however, accept Ssu-ma Ch'ien’s inference that the influence of the hsia was based on their reputations for exemplary conduct. 31
All three authors emphasize that the extra-legal activities of the hsia seem to have been justified and separated from common criminality because, as one writes, "there were kinds of social grievances and injustice which only the hsia could redress through extra-legal means and channels."  Ch'ü adds that the injustice was often committed by officials who thus "became the target of the redressing [of wrongs] and many officials were murdered by the yu-hsia."  

This criminality is further tempered, according to these scholars, by the moral code which is outlined in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's preface. However, in attempting to appear more objective, they are careful to point out that Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku were discussing a few extraordinary hsia who managed to live up to this code while the majority most likely fell far short of this ideal.  

These scholars are to be commended for their observation that no matter how exemplary Ssu-ma Ch'ien attempted to portray the hsia, he could not separate them from criminal activities and remain credible. It would seem that they are justified in pointing to this aspect of the hsia legends as a fundamental quality of their identity. However, they persist in the practice of approaching the lieh-chuan as archival material, and they are rather arbitrary in their choice of elements which 'seem plausible' to them as historians and the dismissal or explanation of other elements which seem to them to be exaggerated.  

While these scholars come closest to a working definition of the yu-hsia, I would suggest that in their discussions they have confused three separate topics of study: illegitimate or extra-legal power groups and activities; the yu-hsia legends which are the romanticization
of the individuals involved in these extra-legal activities, legends which are used to a moral end by the historians; and finally the study of criminals who seek to identify their activities with this romantic tradition. As will be shown in the next chapter, this confusion is common to the study of outlawry.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is interesting to note the various translations which have been proffered for the term *yu-hsia*. As Ho Ping-ti notes, the most common translations are 'knight-errant' or 'wandering knight' terms which are used, for example, by James Liu and Burton Watson. The major difficulty with these translations is of course their association with a particular class and a code of chivalry during the European medieval period and the tendency of both reader and researcher to attempt to mold the *hsia* into Chinese Lancelots. The power of suggestion is evidenced in the work of James Liu who, though admitting that the *yu-hsia* are closest in spirit to the Robin Hood ballads, proceeds to devote the bulk of his discussion to a comparative study with the European knights. However, in recognition of the importance of extra-legal activities in the definition of the *hsia*, knight-errant is particularly inappropriate.

Ho Ping-ti suggests the terms 'underworld leaders' or 'underworld stalwarts' as translations which emphasize the criminal element. They do not, however, express the separation of the *hsia* extra-legal activities from common criminality. In an attempt to rectify this, Ch'ü T'ung-tsu suggests the cumbersome translation 'redresser-of-wrongs'.

While the term *yu-hsia* may be beyond a perfect translation, I would
suggest that 'social bandit' or 'social outlaw' are the most representative terms. In proffering these translations, I am suggesting that the yu-hsia are part of the tradition which includes Robin Hood and certain American outlaws. In the following chapter, the fundamental characteristics of the social outlaw will be reviewed and an attempt will be made to indicate the similarities which exist between the yu-hsia and these legendary heroes.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


2 Quotations in this chapter from the Shih Chi and Han Shu are taken from:

3 B. Watson, Courtier and Commoner, p. 222

   For discussion of these individuals as yu-hsia see for example, J.J.Y. Liu, The Chinese Knight-Errant, p. 25 and T'ao Hsi-sheng, Pien-shih yu Yu-hsia (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933), p. 75


   A similar observation is made by Watson: "It is clear from his use of the word chuan here that Ch'ien had in mind the tales or legends told about men of ancient times, and in addition that he was well aware that these old tales were sometimes of questionable authority." Ssu-ma Ch'ien Grand Historian of China (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 96

7 B. Watson, Ibid., p. 85

8 Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Shih Chi vol. 10 p. 3181
   B. Watson, Records of the Grand Historian of China vol. 2 p. 453

9 Shih Chi vol. 10 p. 3183
   Records of the Grand Historian ... vol. 2 p. 455
NOTES TO CHAPTER I (Con't)

10. Shih Chi vol 10 p. 3181
Records of the Grand Historian vol 2 p. 453

11. For a discussion of the hao-tsu see Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 160

12. Shih Chi vol 10 p. 3183
Records of the Grand Historian vol 2 p. 455

13. For a discussion of hui see B. Watson, Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China pp. 81-83


15. B. Watson, Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China p. 96

16. Pan Ku, Han Shu vol. 8 p. 3699
B. Watson, Courtier and Commoner, p. 222.

17. Pan Ku, Han Shu vol. 8 p. 3699
B. Watson, Courtier and Commoner p. 224.

18. Han Shu vol 8 p. 3699
Courtier and Commoner p. 224

T'ao Hsi-sheng, Pien-shih yu Yu-hsia, p. 73
Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure, p. 189

20. Ho Ping-ti, "Records of the Grand Historian. . .," p. 177

21. Ibid., p. 177
NOTES TO CHAPTER I (Cont')

22 Lao Kan, "Lun Han'tai ti Yu-hsia," p. 239

23 T'ao Hsi-sheng, Pien-shih yü Yu-hsia, pp. 73-74

24 J.J.Y. Liu, The Chinese Knight-Errant, p. 3
   Tatsuo Mašubuchi, "The Yu-hsia and the Social Order in the Han Period," p. 85

25 Ch'Ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure, p.186

26 Peng Yüli'an, Chung-kuo Che-hsueh Shih-Pu (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), pp. 1-49 and 49-60

27 J.J.Y. Liu, The Chinese Knight-Errant p. xi

28 Ibid., pp. 11-12

29 Ho Ping-ti, "Records of the Grand Historian...," p. 179

30 Ch'Ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure, p. 160

31 Ho Ping-ti, "Records of the Grand Historian...," p.177
   Tatsuo Mašubuchi, "The Yu-hsia and the Social Order in the Han Period," p. 85

32 Ho Ping-ti, "Records of the Grand Historian...," p. 177

33 Ch'Ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure, p. 179

34 Ho Ping-ti, Records of the Grand Historian...," p. 179

35 Discussions of the translation of Yu-hsia are to be found in:
   Ch'Ü T'ung-tsu, Han Social Structure, p. 186
   Ho Ping-ti, "Records of the Grand Historian...," p. 176
   J.J.Y. Liu, The Chinese Knight-Errant, p. 209
   Tatsuo Mašubuchi, "The Yu-hsia and the Social Order in the Han Period," p. 87
   B.Watson, Courtier and Commoner, p. 222
III. A DISCUSSION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL BANDIT

Social banditry is a form of outlawry defined by Eric Hobsbawm and discussed most extensively in his book *Bandits*. In this book, Hobsbawm attempts to outline the fundamental characteristics of both the myth and the reality of social banditry, which he describes as "one of the most universal phenomena known to history and one of the most amazingly uniform."¹ Social bandits, according to the author, are distinguished from common criminals by popular opinion, for while the state regards them as outlaws they remain within the moral order of the community. They are "considered by the people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported."²

Two shortcomings of Hobsbawm's analysis of social banditry are of special importance for this study. The first is that the author fails to distinguish adequately between the social bandits of myth and legend and the bandits of the nonfictional world. This may be the result of Hobsbawm's excessive reliance on novels, ballads, songs and folktales as sources of documentary information. The second shortcoming is that Hobsbawm's analysis fails to penetrate these literary materials in any depth.

In the final chapter of *Bandits* Hobsbawm writes that:

We have so far looked at the reality of social banditry and at their legend or myth chiefly as a source of information about that reality, or about the social roles bandits are supposed to play (and therefore often do) the values they are supposed to represent, their ideal—and therefore often also their real—relationship with the people. ³

Despite these claims, the author has difficulty producing convincing
evidence of bandits who measure up to Robin Hood, a figure characterized by Hobsbawm as "the international paradigm of social banditry." When he does attempt to produce historical Robin Hoods, they are invariably introduced with such qualifying statements as, "Just so in real life (or was it contemporary legend?), Zelim Khan the Robin Hood of early twentieth century Daghestan...", or, "the Catalan brigands of the sixteenth century, at least in the ballads, must kill only in defence of their honour."

It is interesting to note that another historian has encountered similar difficulties in his attempt to unearth evidence of the existence of actual Robin Hoods. For a chapter entitled "The Outlaw in History", Maurice Keen searched through fifteenth and sixteenth century English administrative documents for instances of outlaws matching the description of Robin and his band of merry men. What he uncovered were some fascinating references to permanent outlaw bands which, as early as the 1400s, were attempting to identify themselves with the bandit romances. However, Keen concluded that in the end "it is impossible to portray [them]... as being in any true sense upholders of the cause of social justice."

Hobsbawm's analysis of social banditry is similar to much of the secondary literature on the yu-hsia in that it is a combination of sources and discussion of various forms of outlawry; of the social outlaw or romanticization of the outlaw; and of attempts by many extra-legal individuals and organizations to identify themselves with this romantic tradition. As Anton Blok has pointed out, on the basis of available information the social bandit must be seen primarily, if not exclusively, as a cultural expression. For, as we are told in the Robin Hood ballads:
So curteyse an outlawe as he was one
Was never none yeounde. 11

While the myths and legends of the social outlaw may not correspond to actual experience, they do provide an excellent opportunity for the study of certain values and attitudes. Therefore, the following pages will be devoted to a discussion of the social outlaw in fiction, the major characteristics of these heroic figures and some of the values and attitudes which the outlaw tales express.

While actual social banditry may not be the most universal social phenomena, social bandit tales are remarkably similar. In this discussion it will be shown in what respects the yu-hsia are part of the universal phenomenon which includes such figures as Robin Hood and Billy the Kid. 12

What are the fundamental characteristics of the European and American social outlaw? First, and most importantly, the social outlaw is clearly distinguished from the common criminal by virtue of the fact that he does not possess a natural criminal temperament. This is emphasized in a number of ways. For example, the social outlaw's character is idealized to the point where he appears to be supra-moral and thus not only within the moral order of the community, but an embodiment of its most respected values. One of Robin Hood's most pronounced attributes is his courtesy and respect for the social conventions. He and his men are particularly courteous in respect to their social superiors. Robin's reputation for fairness and benevolence in addition to this courtesy is responsible for inducing many of the men who have been sent to capture him into joining his band.

Robin Hood is portrayed as an extremely devout man. Not only does he hold three masses a day, but he also seems to enjoy divine protection in
the person of the Virgin Mary who is often responsible for saving his life.

Finally, despite their 'jollity' and the references to feasts in the ballads, Robin and his men are depicted as leading a Spartan existence, in contrast to the soft life of the evil sheriff. Forced to spend a night living in the forest with the band, the sheriff exclaims:

This is a harder order...  
Than any anker [anchorite] or frere,  
For al the golde in Mery Englonde  
I wolde not longe dwell here. 13

Some of these qualities were transferred to the American Robin Hoods. Jesse James was represented in legend as a devout Baptist who taught in church singing school. The James boys were always "polite, defferential and accomodating." 14 Billy the Kid's saintly character was enhanced by the exaggeration of his youth and diminutive size. As one historian notes, in his legends Billy "has a little bay mare, and all he wants to do is sing a little, dance a little and live out his own little adventurous life." 15

Social outlaws are further distinguished from the common criminal by virtue of the fact that they were forced into outlawry through some unfortunate circumstance or social injustice rather than as a result of some defect in their character. While the medieval English ballads do not record Robin's entry into outlawry, later ballads portray him as the wronged Earl of Huntington, bankrupted and hounded into the forests by the evil abbot of St. Mary's.

In American folklore, Billy the Kid was forced into outlawry after he avenged the assassination of his friend John Tunstall. In the legend, Tunstall was portrayed as a brave citizen who stood up to the powerful and corrupt trading combines of New Mexico which handpicked the law officers and exploited the poor Mexican farmers. As K. L. Steckmesser writes, the
Kid's pursuit of Tunstall's killers "gives his biography the aura of a holy crusade." 16

Unlike the ordinary criminal, the social outlaw is admired and helped by the citizenry and is often able to assume the identity of an ordinary member of the community. In the Robin Hood ballads, the outlaw receives help from many law abiding citizens including the knight Richard atte Lee and an old woman who tells him that:

If thou be Robin Hood...
as thou dost seem to be,
I'le for thee provide, and thee I will hide
From the bishop and his company.

For I remember one Saturday night,
Thou brought me both shoes and hose;
Therefore I'le provide thy person to hide,
And keep thee from thy foes. 17

One of the more intriguing aspects of the outlaw legends is the number of disguises which are assumed throughout the tales as the bandits leave the wilderness and enter into the towns and villages. This, I believe, is meant to indicate that the outlaw is at heart the same as the ordinary citizen. Thus we find Robin Hood entering Nottingham at various times dressed as a potter, a monk, and a butcher. The ultimate test of the outlaw's innate respectability is the face to face encounter with the agents of the law in which they are not recognized as outlaws. Thus Lytell Jon lives in the sheriff's home as a retainer for many months under an assumed identity. Robin has dinner with the sheriff in his guise of a potter and is mistaken another time for the knight Sir Guy.

In American legend, Billy the Kid attempts to settle down and live as an ordinary citizen on numerous occasions and at one point marries into an aristocratic Mexican family. However, he is prevented from doing so by
the vindictive agents of the law who force him back into the outlaw's life. According to other tales, the outlaw "Sam Bass liked to go into town posing as a Texas Ranger and ask farmers' opinions of his outlaw career. Jesse James assumed the dialect and manner of a country bumpkin and joined the posse which was searching for himself." 18

The forgoing discussion illustrates how the social bandit is distinguished in temperament from the common criminal. However, the social bandit is further removed from the criminal by virtue of the fact that his crimes are not ordinary crimes but are just or backed by some cause.

Thus Robin Hood kills only in self defense or in just revenge. He kills the sheriff, whom he has freed on many occasions, precisely because the sheriff betrays Robin's friend Richard and attempts to execute the knight. When Robin beheads the sheriff, the ballad further justifies this murder by having Robin proclaim:

Lye thou there, thou proud sheryf,
Eyll mote thou thryve;
There myght no man to thee trust
Thee whyles thou were alyve. 19

This same quality is found in the American outlaws. The Kid "shot only to protect himself" and "those he killed deserved what they got."20 Of the James brothers it was said that "they do not kill save in stubborn self defense. They have nothing in common with a murderer." 21

One of the most common practices ascribed to the social bandit of legend is that he "robs from the rich, to give to the poor". It is important to recognize that even in the legends this phrase is somewhat like a formulaic expression which describes a more complex situation. Social outlaws do not rob indiscriminately nor do they distribute money in an arbitrary fashion.
While the earliest Robin Hood ballads intone the fact that he “dyde poor men much goode”, the most celebrated recipient of his aid is the knight Richard atte Lee who has been unjustly robbed of his lands by the evil abbot of St. Mary's. Not only does Robin give Richard the money to buy back his land, but he also arrays the knight in resplendent attire which the outlaw feels is the proper dress for Richard's station. He is also presented with a horse and an esquire because the merry men contend that:

It were grete shame...
A knyght alone to ryde. 22

It is important to note that not only is there no expression of identity or solidarity with the peasantry in these stories, there is also no depiction of multitudes of the poor to whom Robin and his men give aid. Instead, they aid those who have been unjustly deprived and this does not seem to include those born to poverty. In the same respect, it is important to note that Robin will steal from everyone, except women and children. In one ballad he actually tries to take money from a beggar who is passing by the forest. However, if the victim is honest and just Robin will return, sometimes half, sometimes double the money that he has taken. If they are wicked, as most friars in these tales are, then he keeps it all.

In American legend, the fat friars are replaced by big banks and railroads. According to his legend:

Jesse James was a man, a friend to the poor,
He would never see a man suffer pain.
And with his brother Frank, he robbed the Chicago bank
And stopped the Glendale train. 23

At the same time that Jesse James was distributing money to the deserving, Billy the Kid was being hailed as the American Robin Hood because
"he'd steal from the white people and give it to the Mexicans." 24 Once again in spite of these formulaic references, actual incidents of these outlaws giving to the 'poor' are extremely rare.

A third attribute which distinguishes the social bandit, not only from the common criminal, but from the ordinary person as well, is what may be termed his skills of survival. These skills may include cleverness, feats of strength and expertise in the use of weaponry. Robin Hood was "reachless in a roote" and was able to evade the sheriff's men on many occasions. He is renowned, of course, for his use of the bow and arrow;

Thryes Robin shot about
And always he slist the wand. 25

In the American legends, these skills have been translated into tales of eluding posses, dealing single-handedly with hundreds of Indians and the fast draw.

The only time in the ballads when Robin misses the mark with his arrow is when he is competing in an archery contest before the king. This incident is used to symbolize the fourth characteristic of outlaw legends, loyalty to the ultimate font of justice, be it God or the king.

In this tale the king has ridden to the forest disguised as a rich monk in order to attract and thereby confront Robin Hood. When the outlaw demands alms from the monk, the disguised king immediately gives Robin all that he has and tells him that if he had more money Robin should have it all. The outlaw is impressed with this stranger and invites him to dine with the band. During dinner Robin confides to his guest that:

I love no man in all the worlde
So well as I do my kynge. 26
The outlaws then proclaim an archery contest in which the loser will receive a buffet from his master. For the first time Robin loses and as there is no other master in the band he hands his arrow to the guest. The disguised king rolls up his sleeve and deals Robin a mighty blow, knocking him to the ground. From this humble place Robin looks up into the face of the king and recognizes him for the first time. Thereupon, he begs the king for a pardon for both himself and his men and the king, having witnessed the true nature of these outlaws, grants the pardon. So impressed is he with the outlaw's virtue, that he dones Robin's livery of Lincoln Green and rides out of the forest leading Robin and his men.

The final characteristic of the outlaw legends is that the outlaw, because of his invincible nature and supra-moral temperament, must die by treason. Robin is betrayed by his trusted cousin the prioress of Kirkley to whom Robin has gone to be bled for a minor ailment. The prioress instead bleeds him to death. Betrayal runs throughout the tales of American outlaws. As Kent Steckmesser writes:

Jesse James was betrayed by Robert Ford, a 'dirty little coward' according to the ballad interpretation. Billy the Kid was shot down by a onetime friend turned Judas, Pat Garrett. 27

Thus in the end, the saintly character of the social outlaw is reiterated by portraying him as a martyr, done to death unfairly by a lesser human being.

Therefore, to reiterate, the most constant elements of the social outlaw legends are: the social outlaw is not a criminal by nature but is in fact an exemplary figure; all of the social outlaw's crimes can be somehow justified; the outlaw is skilled in the use of weapons and in feats of strength; he is loyal to the ultimate font of justice; and finally, he
dies through betrayal.

In order to ascertain to what extent the *yu-hsia* tradition resembles the aforementioned bandit legends, four representative *yu-hsia* will be analysed for the fundamental characteristics of the social outlaw. The four personalities are: Kuo Hsieh and Yuan She from the *yu-hsia lieh-chuan* of the *Shih Chi* and *Han Shu*; Sung Chiang, the bandit leader of the novel *Water Margin*; and finally, Shih-san Mei, the heroine of the popular, but little studied nineteenth century novel *A Tale of Compassionate Heroism* (*Erh-nü Ying-hsiung chuan*).

There are few stories in the *Shih Chi* and *Han Shu* which lend themselves to the type of analysis possible in the Robin Hood ballads, for most of the tales lack the circumstantial detail necessary for such an analysis. Some of the stories merely record the fact that certain men were engaged in *hsia*-type activities with no elaboration of these activities or of the background of the individuals. Therefore, the following discussion will be restricted to two of the more complete biographies, those of Kuo Hsieh, found in the *Shih Chi* and *Han Shu* and of Yuan She found only in the *Han Shu*.

In his youth Kuo Hsieh was given to petty crime but even at this stage of his life he did not hesitate to avenge the wrongs of his friends or to aid the distressed. The story, however, emphasizes his later years when, we are told, Hsieh mellowed and his conduct became exemplary. He rewarded: "hatred with virtue, giving generously and expecting little in return. When he saved peoples' lives he did not boast of it." Hsieh's respect for justice is such that he excuses the murderer of his nephew because he recognizes that his relative was in the wrong. As a result of this moral rectitude, Hsieh enjoys unparalleled respect in the community which enables
him to influence local officials and to act as an arbiter in many family and community feuds.

Led to accept Hsieh's power as being based on a reputation for exemplary conduct, the reader is prepared to accept as unjust the recommendation by evil officials that Hsieh and his family be transported along with other powerful families. In revenge for this act, the father of the official who ordered the transportation is murdered by one of Hsieh's retainers. Hsieh must flee because he is suspected of having perpetrated this crime. The authorities are thwarted for a considerable time in their efforts to capture him because of the willingness of admiring citizens to harbour the fugitive. One host commits suicide in order to avoid having to give information on Hsieh's whereabouts.

Finally he is apprehended but after a fair trial he is judged innocent. At this trial however, a scholar is overheard to vilify Hsieh as a common criminal and is forthwith murdered by one of Hsieh's retainers. In spite of this apparently, the tribunal forwards their innocent verdict to the emperor.

At this point, an imperial secretary intervenes, convincing the emperor that, "Even though he did not know the man who murdered the Confucian scholar, his guilt is greater than if he had done the deed himself." The official is successful for Hsieh and his family are subsequently executed.

Yuan She, the son of a former governor of Nan Yang, resigns from his job as a government clerk with the intention of avenging the murder of his uncle. Before he can carry out this deed, the enemy is dispatched by some admirer of She's among the citizenry.
She is constantly surrounded by admirers and some of the wealthier give him money to erect an elaborate tomb for his father. While he lavishes money on this tomb however, She and his family remain destitute and the story tells us that, "His only concern was to relieve the poor and troubled, for he regarded it as his duty to aid those who were in distress."

The story never elaborates on any of Yuan She's crimes but as in the case of Hsieh, portrays his retainers as the bane of his existence. He is arrested countless times for the crimes apparently committed by these people and takes a position as a government official in an attempt to separate himself from them.

Wang Yu-kung, a minor official who, for some unknown reason, holds a grudge against She, convinces his superior Lord Yin, that the grave of She's father must be destroyed because it oversteps the bounds of propriety and that if Lord Yin were to submit a memorial reiterating all of She's crimes he would most likely receive a promotion. Lord Yin follows this advice and Wang Yu-kung is subsequently dispatched by She's retainers.

Later, while staying at the home of a friend, She encounters Lord Yin and is insulted by him. Thus, doubly wronged, She has Yin assassinated. She's friend persuades him to go to the prison officials and beg for a pardon which, he is assured, will be sufficient. The friend however, betrays Yuan She and is responsible for having him executed and his head hung in the market place.

While these two stories are not as developed as the Robin Hood ballads, they do contain many of the fundamental characteristics of the social outlaw tales. Both men are carefully differentiated from common criminals by
virtue of their exemplary conduct and just deeds. They are forced into outlawry and continually suffer for crimes committed by someone else. In the end, because they are admired by all good citizens, their deaths are the result of unfairness and betrayal.

In contrast to the laconic style of the yu-hsia lieh-chuan, the description of the social outlaw in the vernacular novel is more admissible to the type of analysis which is possible in the Robin Hood ballads.

By far the most popular tale of the yu-hsia tradition is the story of the Water Margin, first completed in the fourteenth century. Of the many outlaws who populate this novel, none comes closer to the paradigm of the social outlaw than Sung Chiang, the leader of the outlaw band. In the one hundred and twenty chapter version of this novel32 both his manner and his experiences are quite similar to those of Robin Hood.

As in the case of Robin Hood, Sung Chiang is portrayed as a man of exemplary character and his civilized manner is thrown into sharp relief by the contrasting character of the anarchical Li Kuei. Like Robin Sung enjoys divine protection, in this case the goddess Chiu-t'ien Hsuan Nu who protects him from his enemies and gives him guidance in the form of heavenly books. While Sung Chiang does not hold three masses a day, he is responsible for organizing a week long Taoist ceremony in which the services are held three times daily in thanks for the divine assistance accorded the outlaw band.

"So curteyse an outlawe" is equally descriptive of Sung and like Robin his courtesy is responsible for inducing many of his enemies to join his band. His supra-moral nature is further illustrated by contrasting him with 'bad' outlaw leaders such as the miserly Chou Tung who
attempts to force a marriage with a local landlord's daughter. 33

Sung's munificence is indirectly responsible for forcing him into outlawry. A woman who Sung Chiang aids, subsequently forces her daughter upon him. When the daughter attempts to blackmail her benefactor, Sung murders her. His reputation for benevolence and moral integrity is such that the local magistrate is prepared to overlook the incident. However, the mother of the victim persists until Sung is forced to flee.

Many of the other characters of Water Margin are also "forced to climb Liang Shan". Lu Ta, for example, is forced into outlawry after he kills a butcher who had been exploiting innocent citizens. Yang Chih flees after killing a neighborhood bully and Wu Sung after murdering the adulteress P'an Chin-lien.

The opinion that Sung Chiang and many of his band are not natural criminals, is stressed by the disguise element mentioned in connection with the Robin Hood ballads. At various times members of the band are able to enter towns and villages undetected, dressed as porters, hunters, priests etc. At the same time many of these men are aided by reputable citizens and at the end of the story assume positions as government officials.

Sung Chiang's crimes are not simple crimes. He kills only in self defence or just revenge. His murder of Yen P'o-hsi is made to seem just by exaggerating her evil nature. Sung kills the family of a magistrate whose wife betrayed him. He also avenges himself on a minor official who seeks preferment by unjustly accusing Sung of rebellious intentions. It is important to note that throughout the novel Sung Chiang orders his
men to spare the innocent when their villages have been taken in battle.

Stealing from the rich to give to the poor is particularized in *Water Margin* as in the Robin Hood ballads. There are no pitiable masses to whom the band gives aid, but certain deserving individuals. Gifts and money are distributed to the guests at the bandits' lair no matter what their station. When the bandits succeed in taking a village they leave half of the food and part of the other booty to the innocent among the villagers.

As for robbing the rich, perhaps the most celebrated theft is that of the birthday gifts destined for the evil minister Ts'ai Ching. The robbery is just, not only because of the nature of the intended recipient but also because the money for these gifts has been squeezed unjustly from the people.

As for skills of survival, these seem to be distributed throughout the band. However, Sung Chiăng himself is an invincible general.

Sung Chiăng, like Robin Hood, is loyal to what he believes to be the ultimate font of justice, in this case the emperor. For much of the story he reiterates his devotion to the emperor and his hope for a pardon from him. Like the king in Robin's story, the emperor visits the bandits' lair and has a chance to see the righteousness of the outlaws for himself. Though the visit is only in a dream it is equally significant. Outside of the dream, the emperor pardons Chiăng and his men and makes them government officials. Sung subsequently fights many battles against outlaw bands on behalf of the emperor.
Finally, like Robin Hood, Sung's death is the result of betrayal. In the final chapter of *Water Margin* Sung is given wine which has been poisoned by the four evil ministers who have stood between him and the emperor throughout the tale.

Shih-san Mei is the heroine of the popular novel *A Tale of Compassionate Heroism*, written by the Manchu official Wen K'ang in 1844. As Shih-san Mei is an example of the *nu'-hsia* or female *hsia*, her story will be examined in greater depth in the final chapter of this paper. However, at this point it is necessary to examine the story for the fundamental characteristics of the social bandit legend.

Speaking of the heroine, Wen K'ang writes that:

>This individual, possessed of both a heroic temperament and a compassionate nature, was a valiant among the group of rouged and powdered, foremost in the circle of the virtuous and just *hsia*. But she harboured a grievance which penetrated her bones and made her heart bitter. As a result of this, though she was a young woman, yet it aroused in her the inclination to 'restrain the powerful and aid the weak' and to follow the activities of those who kill and scatter money. If she saw an injustice in her path, she would pull out her sword to help. Once she had made an alliance, she would carry loyalty to the utmost extent. If she encountered the corrupt kind, though their power burned to heaven, yet to her they were like clay pigs and ceramic dogs. However, if she encountered just people, though they were poor and cold and begging for food, yet she loved them like the awesome phoenix and the dazzling unicorn. Clearly she was a mercurial dragon spirit, to be compared to the merciful Boddhisattva.

As the author indicates, Shih-san Mei's character is a mixture of compassion and heroism. In the novel she is moved by the filial devotion of a young scholar and does not hesitate to aid him in various ways to free his father from an unjust prison sentence. She herself is a model of filial piety and lives a Spartan existence in a thatched hut on a lonely mountain and refuses any reward for her services.
The bitterness in her heart is the incident which forced her into the life of an outlaw. Her father was thrown into prison by an evil official in retaliation for his refusal to allow Shih-san Mei to become the concubine of the official's son. When her father dies in jail, Shih-san Mei has to flee in order to save her own life and that of her mother. The major purpose of her life after this is to assassinate this official but she delays this project until the death of her mother.

Even as an outlaw, Shih-san Mei commands respect and is especially revered and aided by the Teng family. That she is at heart a good citizen is illustrated most clearly when a respected official decides that she will be a fit wife for his son.

Shih-san Mei's crimes are not ordinary crimes. She single-handedly dispatches ten monks and the mistress of the head monk, who apparently rob and murder visitors to their monastery. The poem which she leaves on the monastery wall explaining the justice of this crime, is accepted by a passing official, and the incident is forgotten.

The heroine robs in order to support her aged mother. As she explains to one group of people, "I'm nineteen years old and I don't know how to do needlework. You could tell me to sew on buttons for a living but I wouldn't know where to begin. I have to rely on my sword and crossbow in order to search out 'masterless money' for my expenses." When asked to explain what is meant by 'masterless money' she answers:

If it's like that money in the sack which you got in exchange for your land and will give to the officials to save your father, then it's legitimate money. And again, if it's like the money which a capable official saves up from his rightful salary, or the wealth which a merchant
saves as the result of his toil and travelling, or finally like the extra clothes and food which the villagers gain as a result of their plowing and sowing, then it is legitimate money.

On the other hand, there are corrupt officials who disregard their reputations and have little regard for the lives of the people, who travel around with their pouches stuffed with money. In addition there are the minions and lackeys of the powerful families who profit when their masters make money at court. But when their masters fall, then they stuff money into a sack and flee. Finally, there are those crafty scoundrels who befriend local officials in order to exploit the naive rustics, and who rely on money to behave in total disregard for the law. They are capable of committing every crime under the sun. All of this money can be referred to as masterless money.

Shih-san Mei uses this masterless money not only to support her mother but also to aid the distressed. For example, she gives the young scholar money to help save his father and gives a poor family money for their daughter's dowry.

Like Robin Hood, Shih-san Mei is exceptionally skilled in the use of weapons and is also renowned for her strength and her ability to leap over high walls.

The form in which loyalty and respect for the ultimate font of justice is expressed in this novel is somewhat less dramatic. After her mother's death the heroine prepares to carry out her plan to assassinate her father's murderer. However, she learns that her enemy has been dispatched by the emperor, the greatest hero on earth or in heaven. Apparently, on being informed of this official's crimes the emperor ordered him to commit suicide.

Finally, the theme of betrayal is barely suggested in the case of Shih-san Mei and is largely absent from the nü-hsia tales in general. As will be seen in the final chapter, when these women have finished with
their social bandit careers, they either disappear or marry and become conventional Chinese wives and mothers.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, representative personalities from the *yu-hsia* tradition bear a remarkable likeness to bandits such as Robin Hood. The resemblance is such that they too can be referred to as social outlaws. There remains the task of deciding what general sentiments these social outlaw tales express.

In the first chapter of this paper, John Goodlad was quoted as suggesting a division of cultural products into expressive and instrumental elements. How are these two elements manifested in social outlaw literature?

Overall, the social outlaw legends are declarations of faith in the status quo and sanctions of the accepted norms and values and are not protests against these. In the tales there is no animus directed against the legal system, against rank or against wealth as such but rather the emphasis is on social solidarity.

The outlaws accept social ranks, reproducing a graded hierarchy in their bands and displaying a respect for their social superiors including just officials. Their ultimate loyalty is, of course, to the king or emperor who is at the apex of the hierarchy. Not only is there no animus directed against the rich, but in fact many of the recipients of the outlaws' munificence are wealthy individuals who have momentarily run into financial difficulties or who are to be rewarded for some good service.

While 'steal from the rich, to give to the poor' is a frequent cliche of these stories, we never see great masses of poor for whom we
feel pity. Rather poverty is particularized, like instances of injustice, and appears to be an exception rather than a norm. In this form it is also speedily rectified through gifts from the outlaw.

Outlaw legends may well be one of the most powerful sanctions for a community's system of values. The outlaw leaders are portrayed as free and able to survive without the protection of a community. And yet, of their own free will, they choose to abide by and to exemplify the system of values which the community knows to be right.

The tales also express the understanding that from time to time evil elements appear in society which upset the harmony and cause injustices to be perpetrated. In the ballads this evil is most often enshrined in corrupt officials who by rights should be the opposite in character and conduct to the outlaw. However, it is they who possess the natural criminal tendencies and they are innately evil, unlike the majority of good officials. These evil officials act somewhat like distorting mirrors refracting the benevolent rays which emanate from God or the emperor and which usually guarantee a harmonious society.

The foregoing are aspects of the expressive element in outlaw literature. How do people seek to control their environment in these tales? In the legends, the outlaw is an agent who helps to maintain and stabilize the social system. There is also a powerful cathartic element in the outlaw tale.

The outlaw is 'status-less' and is placed outside of the town limits. His system of values reflects those of the citizenry and defines him as their agent but at the same time he is invested with extraordinary
powers which cannot be tolerated for long in the community.

In the tales, the citizenry arms the outlaw, both physically and psychologically, in order that he may combat the forces of evil. This act is in part a recognition of the fact that in order to exist in harmony the members of the community must disarm themselves through compromise. The outlaw acts outside of the community and on behalf of the citizens to rid them of aberrant elements.

The outlaw is the symbolic inverse of the font of justice, be it God the emperor or the king. These individuals are outside and above the social system, the outlaw is outside and below it. The outlaw sees injustice where the emperor cannot and thus acts as his agent as well. This is why the outlaw meets the king or emperor face to face and often joins his household or his staff. And ultimately, because he is after all a temporary expedient, the outlaw or his outlaw activities must come to an end. His death or reintegration into the social fabric is an indication that harmony has been restored.

There is also a cathartic effect in the outlaw ballads. In the frequent and bloody battles between the forces of good and evil, justice is convincingly meted out and evil is seen and felt to be purged from the environment.

The social outlaw legends may therefore be described as functional in regard to their societies for they serve to maintain and stabilize and to justify and sanctify the social order. They encourage the idea that injustice is a particularized aberration which can be dealt with through heroic sacrifice and not mass revolt.
Therefore, studies of individuals or groups who identified their activities with the social outlaw will most likely reveal that these elements encouraged conservatism or at the most reformist sentiments. They will also show that for these groups injustice was particularized and easily remedied and that they acted as agents on behalf of the larger community and not as inciters of mass rebellion against authority.

In light of this it is interesting to note that the most recent communist criticisms of the novel *Water Margin* support some of the points of this discussion. These criticisms are an attempt to rectify the evaluations of the novel which were made in the 1950s. At that time *Water Margin* was described as a great novel of peasant revolt and Sung Chiang was lauded as a great revolutionary leader. It was seen as an example of classical realism, truthfully portraying social conditions in the Sung dynasty and serving as a textbook for revolution. At present the novel is no longer described as realistic but as a legend which has been twisted by the ruling classes. It is no longer viewed as a textbook for revolution but indeed is seen to teach through negative example. Sung Chiang has now become a minatory figure, a capitulationist unlike the revolutionary Chao Kai. As one communist critic explains:

Sung Chiang from the start wants to serve the emperor; before going to Liangshan he opposes the peasant revolt; after reaching Liangshan he sabotages the revolt from within. This novel extols his capitulationist line while relegating to a secondary position true rebels... By having Sung Chiang and his lieutenants poisoned by Kao Chiu and other wicked officials after they have suppressed Fang La's revolt, the novel presents Sung Chiang as a tragic hero. This serves to project the theme that these men are loyal subjects dying for their cause who oppose corrupt ministers but remain loyal to the emperor.
In answer to the question which was posed at the end of the first chapter, it can be seen that the yu-hsia tradition in general and the novel Water Margin in particular, confirm the thesis that popular culture is generally functional.

However, if the yu-hsia tradition itself is functional, can the same be said for the female yu-hsia? The following chapter will deal with the problem of the nü-hsia, characters who appear to conflict with the norms of behavior and place usually ascribed to women in traditional Chinese society.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


2 Ibid., p. 13

3 Ibid., p. 109. This approach to his sources is reaffirmed in an article entitled, "Social Bandits: Reply," Comparative Studies in Society and History vol 14 no. 4 (1972): 503-504. In this article Hobsbawm asks of the pure Robin Hood, 'Does he exist at all?' His answer is that: The strongest evidence for his existence lies in the sharp distinction which rural public opinion makes between bandits who do and those who do not play the role of Robin Hood... Such distinctions can be traced in conversation, in song and story... p. 504

4 E. Hobsbawm, Bandits, p. 15

5 Ibid., p. 36

6 Ibid., p. 38

7 in M. Keen, The Outlaws of Medieval Legend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 191

8 Ibid. p. 197

9 Ibid. p. 206


NOTES TO CHAPTER III (Con't)


13 J. Ritson, *Robin Hood*, p. 36

14 K. Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw," p. 351


16 Ibid., p. 100

17 J. Ritson, *Robin Hood* p. 172

18 K. Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw," p. 352

19 J. Ritson, *Robin Hood* p. 62

20 K. Steckmesser, " Robin Hood and the American Outlaw," p. 352

21 K. Steckmesser, Ibid., p. 352

22 J. Ritson, *Robin Hood*, p. 16


24 K. Steckmesser, "Robin Hood...," p. 350

25 J. Ritson, *Robin Hood*, p. 52

26 Ibid. p. 69

27 K. Steckmesser, "Robin Hood...," p. 353
NOTES TO CHAPTER III (Con't)


29 B. Watson, Records of the Grand Historian... p. 457

30 Ibid., p. 461

31 B. Watson, Courtier and Commoner..., p. 242

32 The one hundred and twenty chapter version is the one referred to in most critical studies. In this discussion I have had to rely on Richard Irwin's summaries of chapters 72-120 and his translation of the final chapter. R. G. I. Irwin, The Evolution of a Chinese Novel: Shui-hu-chuan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953)

33 In chapter five of the novel

34 Translated from Erh-nü Ying-hsiung Chuan (Hong Kong: Ta-tung shu-chü, no date), p. 47

35 Ibid. p. 66

9

36 Ibid., p. 66

37 J. Goodlad, A Sociology of Popular Drama, p. 3

38 Shih Chung, "What Sort of Novel is Water Margin?" Chinese Literature vol. 12 no. 12 (1975) p. 86. In the same volume see Chih Pien, "The Current Criticism of Water Margin," p. 82. See also the collection of recent criticisms of the Water Margin, K'ai-chan tui Shui-hu te P'ing-lun (Hong Kong: Sheng-huo; Tu-shu; Hsin-chih; San-lien shu-tien, 1975)
IV. A DISCUSSION OF THE AMAZONIAN FIGURE IN CHINESE FICTION

In the preceding chapter, through an analysis of the character Shih-san Mei, it was shown that in most respects the nu-hsia display the same fundamental attributes and express similar values in regard to the general structure and functioning of society as do their male counterparts. In addition to their role as social bandits however, the nu-hsia may also be examined as one form of the cultural stereotype of the martial woman (nǐ chǎn-shíหァ戰士). Whether dressed for battle or for bandit activities, the fictional characters reviewed in this chapter are invariably portrayed as law breakers. However, the laws which are transgressed by these viragoes are those which define the cultural ideals of conduct appropriate to the sexes.

As their titles, female social bandit and woman soldier indicate, these militant women in masculine attire are depicted as engaging in roles usually associated with the male in Chinese society. Indeed one historian has described them as the "antithesis of the ideal Confucian woman." ¹

However, Chinese martial women appear to contravene a more universal ideal of womanhood: some Western scholars have referred to them as anti-women and as amazons. ² Amazon is a term used in Western culture to denote a cultural type defined as a "vigorous female who scorns domesticity, belittles matrimony, invades masculine occupation such as war, and even
subjugates men." 3 "Amazon" is also used to designate the Western myths of the barbaric countries of women.

While lack of space prohibits an in depth analysis, I hope to demonstrate briefly that the amazons and the nü chan-shih shared a number of fundamental characteristics and that these attributes did not seem to change significantly over a long period of time. This chapter will also investigate the ways in which the studies of the amazonian figure may contribute toward an understanding of the role of the martial woman in Chinese culture.

The study of the nü chan-shih is beneficial to the social historian primarily because it provides information on the cultural evaluations of men and women and the ideal delegation of roles, temperament and behavior between the two sexes. Therefore, while these characters suggest a number of problems for study, this chapter will confine itself to the following two: First, what are the fundamental characteristics of a representative sample of nü chan-shih which have provoked their description as anti-Confucian and amazonian? 4 Second, as in the case of the social bandit, how can we account for the existence of cultural stereotypes which appear to contravene accepted norms and values?

In a recent collection of essays entitled Woman, Culture and Society 5 a number of scholars developed and illustrated the thesis that, underlying and encouraging the almost universal asymmetry in the roles, behavior and cultural evaluations of men and women was an equally universal ideal, if not real, division of various societies into domestic/female and public/male spheres. 6 This general thesis is exhibited in the traditional Confucian ideals of social structure. Throughout the Book of Rites 7 and in particular in the section entitled the Nei Tze 8 , the desire for a strict
separation of the sexes is repeatedly expressed. It is manifested in the prescribed rules of conduct which forbid men and women to handle the same utensils, to sit on the same mat or to hang their clothes on the same rack. The Book of Rites also expresses the sentiment that the affairs and activities of the extra-domestic sphere are appropriate to men, while women are to be confined to the domestic sphere. While in reality only the gentry were in a financial position to enforce this arrangement, the ideal seems to have transcended the boundaries of class. As one scholar notes:

The ideal woman was she who concentrated all her efforts on her household tasks, she who was the nei-jen, she who is within. Participation in outside affairs and especially in public matters was abhorred and branded as the root of all evil and the cause of the downfall of the great dynasties. 9

In the Book of Rites it states that at the age of ten "a girl ceased to go out (from the women's apartments). Her governess taught her (the arts of) pleasing speech and manners, to be docile, and obedient...to learn all woman's work..." 10 In sharp contrast to this, the stories of the nü chan-shih indicate that at an early age these young women were separated from the domestic sphere. In the late ninth century short story Yinniang the Swordsman for example, Yinniang is kidnapped from her home at the age of ten by a mendicant nun. She is transported to a wild area populated only by exotic animals such as tigers and monkeys. There, instead of the domestic arts, Yinniang is taught to climb along the cliffs, to fly, to kill animals (and eventually humans) with deadly accuracy and to employ various forms of magic.

In many tales, the separation from the domestic sphere is suggested by the young woman's identification with her father who is usually engaged in some military career. At an early age, Shih-san Mei, the heroine
of the nineteenth century novel *A Tale of Compassionate Heroism*, began training in the military arts with her father, initially because the general had no son but later because Shih-san Mei displayed a talent for such activities. 11

In *Madame Yang Studies the Stars*, a village play recorded in the early twentieth century and based on a legend which predates *Water Margin*, Madame Yang's daughter Ch'iu Chu heeds the instructions of her dead father in a dream and goes off to battle to save her brother. 12 In so doing she ignores her mother's pleas to remain at home and Madame Yang complains that she has no control over her daughter. A minor character comments that the Yang family appear to have no domestic regulations. 13

In addition of course, these young women are separated from home and from other women while involved in their masculine occupations. Shih-san Mei refuses to live as a guest in a large household but chooses instead to inhabit a hut on a lonely mountain and is continually wandering about in search of evil officials to rob. Hua Mu-lan and Ch'iu Chu go far from home in order to fight in wars. Yinniang constantly travels on her magic donkey from patron to patron. Purple Silk and Hung Hsien fly hundreds of miles a day in the service of various friends.

Separation from the domestic sphere and identification with the father are also important elements in the European amazon tales. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, when the father of Camilla is banished from his kingdom, he takes his infant daughter with him on his endless journeys through lonely mountains where wild beasts lurk. He dresses Camilla in tiger skins and teaches her the military arts. 14 Clorinda, in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, is abandoned at birth by her mother and taken on a long journey by a faithful eunuch,
in her mother's service. She also is identified with wild animals and learns the military arts while roaming in the lonely areas between cities.  

Finally, in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the magician Merlin gives King Ryence an enchanted mirror which warns him of enemies who may attempt to invade his kingdom. One day his only child Britomart, from whom he keeps nothing, looks into this mirror and sees the image of her future husband, whereupon she leaves home dressed in male armor and begins an endless journey in search of this man.

Like the bandit who must disguise himself in order to enter the non-bandit community, the *nǚ chan-shih* must don masculine attire in order to enter the male sphere. Before going off to war, Ch'iu Chu runs to change her clothes:

*Now I've dressed myself in uniform
I wear a cap, a blue suit and a pair of boots.
Do you think I look like a warrior, Mother?*

In a sixteenth century play about Hua Mu-lan, a young woman who went to war as a substitute for her aged father, the heroine is shown putting on her father’s armor before leaving for battle. At the last moment she realizes that her tiny bound feet will never fill her father’s boots. Thus she is portrayed as painfully unwrapping the bindings in order to enlarge her three inch golden lotuses. At the same time the audience is reassured that her family has a magic formula which will return her feet to their small size in order to insure her future marriage.

Hua Mu-lan is an exception among the *nǚ chan-shih* and among the amazon figures in that her masculine attire serves to hide her true sex for twelve years. Unlike the bandit's civilian attire, the martial woman's masculine dress does not always seem to be intended to conceal her sexe
ual identity and often extraordinary beauty. In *Cursing at the City Wall*, a village play recorded in the early twentieth century and based on a T'ang dynasty tale, the warrior Fan Li-hua sights an army advancing on the city. Among the group she recognizes a woman:

In the center there is a female general.
She is very beautiful and awe inspiring.
She wears a seven star helmet and chain armor.
A bronze mirror on her breast is as bright as the full moon.
A precious sword is carried under her arm.
She rides a noble bay horse. 21

In the play *Madame Yang Studies the Stars*, on the first part of her journey Ch'iu Chu is recognized by her brother who remarks that her disguise is not good enough. Thereupon, he cuts off her hair and fills the holes in her pierced ears. However, she is still described as walking like a girl, a reminder that even in masculine dress many of the nü chan-shih such as Shih-san Mei and Purple Silk retain their bound feet.

Similarly, in the Chinese medieval novel *Water Margin*, the warrior Hu San-niang, though dressed in armor, is immediately recognized as a beautiful woman by a member of the opposite camp. This man offers to do battle with her in order to win her for himself. In this part of the story, Hu San-niang is identified as much by her sexual appeal as by her martial skills.

In European tales, the amazon is outfitted in a very traditional manner with "the moonlike shield, the battle axe invented by Penthesilia, the buskins, the robe knotted at the knee leaving one breast exposed" and always a beautiful helmet. 22 One of the most popular scenes in the amazon tales is one in which a male knight knocks the woman's helmet from her head, thus exposing her stunning beauty and revealing her floor-length golden hair. 23
In the stories of the martial women masculine attire is intended to serve more as a symbol than as a disguise, a symbol of the higher status enjoyed by men in the male sphere. In a late ninth century short story the heroine Hung Hsien or Red Thread, claims that she was a male doctor in a past life but that because of a mistake she was responsible for the death of twin fetuses. Consequently, in this life she was "condemned to be a woman. Though my body is thus humiliated my spirit is still full of resource." For the nü chan-shih the masculine attire is a temporary respite from the humiliation of womanhood. That the state of womanhood is thus despised is clearly illustrated in two episodes in which men are forced to dress as women. In the novel A Tale of Compassionate Heroism Shih-san Mei defeats a great bandit chief on behalf of an elderly friend. The bandit is then told that he must dress in women's clothes and parade around a stage. Rather than suffer such humiliation he offers to commit suicide.

In Spenser's Faerie Queene, the great knight Artegall is defeated in battle by the amazon queen Radigund. Because of this defeat and because he rejects her as a lover, Radigund has him dressed in a woman's clothes and set to work at such tasks as spinning and weaving. Of this custom of Radigund, another knight remarks that "I rather chose to die in lives despite/ than to lead that shameful life." For his part Spenser remarks that this was all "A sordid affair for a mind so brave."

I suspect that the masculine attire, while not hiding the woman's sexuality, is nevertheless also meant symbolically to separate her from the sense of pollution associated with menstruation and pregnancy and thus perhaps to prevent the contamination of the male sphere. In this context,
it is interesting to note that in the only story of an active nü chan-shih in which the woman is portrayed as a mother, she kills her child. 27

The power of ritual pollution is one form of the considerable illegitimate and indirect power that women often wield. 28 While the nü chan-shih are separated from this power their masculine dress awards them the right to legitimate authority which is usually the preserve of men. 29 Miss Cloud, from the eighteenth century tale of the same name, for example, on the day of her wedding, puts on her masculine attire and walks into the marriage hall in order to give her dissolute fiance a dressing down. Brandishing her sword in his face she accuses him of cowardice and of failure to show any gratitude either to the state or to herself for the beneficial acts which they have performed on behalf of his family. The character Shih-san Mei, when dressed as a man, usurps the authority of parental figures and arranges a marriage between two young people her own age, even providing them with a dowry. In a parody of these situations, Madame Sung in the early Ch'ing dynasty novel Flower Shadows Behind the Curtain, puts on her military dress and gathers together a female army armed with kitchen knives, cudgels and broom handles and goes to search out and punish her wayward husband.

Amazonian women in European literature are constantly admonishing their male counterparts and usurping their authority. The warrior Britomart, for example, battles with six brothers who are unfairly harassing another knight. Having defeated them, she collects their swords and, standing upon the swords gives the men a lecture on the tenets of chivalry. The young men admit their fault and swear fealty to her. 30 Tasso's Clorinda is also shown reprimanding a group of warriors for failure of duty at which point
"to do her will the men themselves prepare/ in their faint hearts her looks
such terror breed!" 31  

There is also something in the symbolism of the masculine attire which
has its parallel in the Western belief that the amazons severed or seared
one breast in order to become better warriors. The idea is that a woman's
body is not naturally suited to martial pursuits and must somehow be
altered. 32  

Finally, in addition to describing this attire as masculine, the
stories in many cases further emphasize its exotic nature. Thus Shih-san
Mei and Purple Silk dress entirely in red. Hung Hsien dresses in a man's
clothes "with a dragon's head on her chest and the name of the great spirit
Tai-i on her forehead." 33 One reason for this exotic air may be to link
the nü chan-shih with the mysterious countries of women which were believed
to exist on the peripheries of the known world. Likewise, the amazonian
type in European culture was constantly associated with the mythological
amazonian kingdoms. These "inverted commonwealths" 34 are an important
element in the study of the martial woman and will be discussed later in
this paper.  

Along with their masculine attire these women also assume the character
traits, skills and behavior normally assigned to men. All of them are por-
trayed as exceptionally intelligent and skilled in the arts of war and
appear to be superior in these arts in relation to their male peers. 35
Besides the element of authority already mentioned, the nü chan-shih
often conceive of clever strategems which will save their friends and
outwit the foe. Hung Hsien devises a plan which intimidates her patron's
enemy and thus saves his life. Yinniang develops a number of clever devices
which protect her employer from various assassination attempts.

In actual battle the women are also superior. Shih-san Mei defeats ten men singlehandedly. Miss Cloud vanquishes an entire band of robbers alone. An important element of this combat skill is the use of magic. While C. T. Hsia notes that magic was an important feature of most military adventures, it was particularly associated with women warriors and Taoists. Shih-san Mei attempts to dissociate herself from this tradition of magic by claiming that her talents are learned and not the gift of some immortal. However, at this point, she does not mention her magic donkey which is able to fly hundreds of li in an instant, or her ability to leap onto roofs and over walls inspite of her three inch bound feet.

The martial women who are masters of magic and military arts have an interesting ancestress in Chinese mythology. The Dark Girl was believed to have been a teacher of the Yellow Emperor who was himself the mythical teacher of various skills to humankind. The Dark Girl made magic drums for him when he was about to slay a monster and is also believed to have been the author of three books on military strategy. This figure seems to be echoed in the goddess Chiu-t'ien Hsuan Nü who, in the novel Water Margin gave the bandit leader Sung Chiang heavenly books containing military strategy. Later in the novel she gave him advice on how to win an important battle. In a similar vein from the annals of Wu (first century A.D.) comes the story of a mysterious young woman who grew up "in a deep forest, in the wilderness, away from men." This woman is a master of magic and swordsmanship and is invited to instruct the emperor's troops.

Western myth also has its share of warrior sorceresses and goddesses
who, along with fairy god mothers bestow various talents on their charges. In the amazonian tales the gods continually intervene. The goddess Diana uses all of her powers to protect Clorinda. Britomart, on the other hand, is aided by the sorcery of a male, Merlin the magician, the famous teacher of King Arthur. The sorceress Melyssa is an important figure in the life of Bradamante, Ariosto's amazonian heroine.

The aggressive, masculine behavior of these women is not confined to battle, for martial women are often quite forceful and singleminded in their choice and pursuit of husbands and lovers. In the play Cursing at the City Wall, the female warrior Fan Li-hua tells the audience:

Once I married Yang the Slob.
I didn't like that ugly fellow.
One day when we were on the battle field, I killed him with my sword.
Then I fought with the general of the enemy.
He was a brave, handsome young man named Hsueh Ting-shan.
I fell in love with him and later married him. 40

In the early Ch'ing novel Flower Shadows Behind the Curtain, Kin Ping the daughter of a bandit chieftan, chooses a young prisoner for her lover, simply because she finds him sexually attractive. Later, much to her amusement, she also discovers that he is possessed of enormous intelligence. 41

In the story of Yinniang, after returning from her sojourn with the mendicant nun, the young woman chooses an itinerant mirror grinder for her husband, and we are told, her father dared not object. This man is described as having no talents and the couple must be supported by Yinniang's father for a while. The husband has no active role in the story except to follow his wife as she goes to the aid of various generals.
Finally Yinniang decides to retire alone into the mountains and leaves her husband in the care of a patron.

'The woman as wooer' is also an important element in the European tales. Bradamante and Britomart are tireless in their pursuit of their chosen husbands. At one point Bradamante prepares to fight to the death with another woman for the sake of her lover. As mentioned previously, Radigund continued the persecution of Artegall because he rejected her advances.

The final important characteristic of the amazon tale in both the West and the East is that the amazon is not left to wander in her masculine role forever. The only exception to this is when the story or play is clearly an episode from a well known saga, such as that of the Yang family. In the Chinese tales, Miss Cloud and Hung Hsien disappear. Purple Silk and Yinniang go to join the Taoist immortals in the mountains. Shih-san Mei, Hua Mu-lan, Kin Ping and Hu San-niang marry. It is important to note that this conversion from the warrior's life to that of a nei-jen does not require any difficult transition. After twelve years of living like a man Hua Mu-lan simply walks into her old room, puts on her skirt, fashions her hair into an elaborate coiffure and becomes a woman. It would seem that femininity is an innate condition for these women.

In the European tales in somewhat the same manner, Britomart and Bradamante become the founding mothers of great families. Clorinda and Camilla are killed in battle.

As the foregoing discussion indicates, the nü chan-shih are the antithesis of the ideal Confucian woman because they leave the domestic
sphere and adopt the status, behavior and dress of men. However, they also contravene a Western ideal of womanhood and thus are justly labelled by Western scholars as amazons. In the West however, amazon also refers to mythological kingdoms of women where the single martial heroines were found in great numbers. Chinese culture also harboured visions of many countries of women which scholars such as Eberhard have referred to as amazon countries. 42

Along with places such as the kingdoms of giants and pygmies, the lands of the griffins, the two-headed people and the phoenixes, the amazon countries were always described, by both Chinese and Westerners as existing on the bounds of the known world. 43 These Looking Glass kingdoms were forever beyond the horizon, either in a spatial or a temporal sense, and by their barbaric nature they helped to define the boundaries of the civilized world. 44

The fundamental barbaric aspect of both Western and Asian countries of women was that in various ways and in varying degrees, the 'natural' asymmetrical relationship of the sexes was reversed with women occupying the positions of authority. In the extreme these kingdoms were imagined as Adamless Edens where women conceived children by copulating with strangers from neighboring tribes, by walking into magic lakes and rivers or by looking into enchanted wells. Male children were returned to their father's tribe, were murdered, or died naturally at an early age. 45

In other cases these barbarian countries were described as matriarchies in which men were assigned the roles, status and behavior usually belonging to women in the 'civilized' nations. In one version of the Western
amazon myth for example, we read that:

...there was once...on the bounds of the inhabited world, a race which was ruled by women and followed a manner of life unlike that which prevails among us. For it was the custom among them that the women should practise the arts of war and be required to serve in the army...then, when the years of their service in the field had expired, they went into the men for the procreation of children, but they kept in their hand the administration of the magistracies and of the affairs of state. The men, however, like our married women, spent their days about the house, carrying out the orders which were given them by their wives; and they took no part in military campaigns or in the affairs of the community by virtue of which they might become presumptuous and rise up against the women. [!] When the children were born the babies were turned over to the men...46

Likewise in Chinese writings such as the Han dynasty work Classic of the Mountains and the Seas (Shan-hai Ching) which anticipated and perhaps inspired the Country of Women in the novel Flowers in the Mirror, we are told that:

Among the south western barbarians...there is a Kingdom of Women. Its women are fierce and its men respectful. A woman is the ruler of the people and takes a nobleman to husband...Men are appointed as concubines...at most a hundred men, at least a single mate. 47

And in the Kingdom of Women south of the Onion Range, "It is their custom for women to make light of men. Women of the nobility have many male attendants, men cannot have female attendants..."48

For the social historian, the important link between the Kingdoms of Women and the martial heroines is that they all are imaginative portrayals of women who have assumed the roles, status, dress and behavior usually thought of as masculine and male. If literature is functional, if it serves to maintain and stabilize the social order, to justify and sanctify its existence, how can we explain the existence of characters who are the antithesis of the ideal Confucian woman?
In an article entitled "Women on Top," Natalie Zemon Davis discusses various manifestations of the unruly woman in early modern European festival and literature. Among these women out of place, the author includes many amazonian types such as Britomart and Clorinda. In an effort to discover the role of such anti-women in European culture, Ms. Davis reviews the studies of anthropologists such as Victor Turner in which the authors discuss the characteristics and functions of rites of status reversal (symbolic inversion).

Central to Turner's discussion of rites of status reversal and rites of passage is the concept of liminality which the author expands from its use in Van Gennep's work *The Rites of Passage.* In this work Van Gennep defined three phases in transition rites:

The first phase, separation, comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group from either an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an established set of cultural conditions. During the intervening liminal period the state of the ritual subject becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state. In the third phase the passage is consummated and the ritual subject...reenters the social structure, often, but not always at a higher level.

According to Turner the ambiguity of this liminal period is characterised by symbolic representations of death and rebirth, invisibility and anonymity, darkness, bisexuality, propertylessness and the wilderness. While stressing that liminality is a condition found both in passage rites and in rites of status reversal, Turner does point to an important distinction. According to the author:

...one might contrast the liminality of the strong (and getting stronger) with that of the permanently weak. The liminality of those going up usually involves a putting down or a humbling of
the novice as its principal cultural constituent; at the same time, the liminality of the permanently structural inferior contains as its key social element a symbolic or make believe elevation of the ritual subjects to positions of immanent authority. The stronger are made weaker, the weak act as though they were strong...53...[In the latter case the inferiors exercise ritual authority over their superiors affecting] the rank and style of the superiors, sometimes to the extent of arraying themselves in a hierarchy mimicking the secular hierarchy of their so-called betters. 54

On the basis of descriptions such as the above, Natalie Davis concluded that the amazonian type in Western literature and festival was a form of symbolic inversion, an instance of the permanently structural inferiors (women) mimicking the attributes of their superiors (men). Due to the similar asymmetrical relationship of the sexes in China, the nü chan-shih may also be seen as examples of symbolic inversion.

While noting that rites of passage and status reversal share the quality of liminality, Turner also suggested that the first rite is often accompanied by the second. 55 This would seem to be the situation which is portrayed in the novels A Tale of Compassionate Heroism and Flower Shadows Behind the Curtain. 56

In what may be termed the preliminal phase of A Tale of Compassionate Heroism the young hero An Chi is depicted as the equivalent of a nei-jen. He is sheltered from the coarse outside world and is compared more than once by family and friends to a little girl.

Then a series of separations from an ordered family environment and from parental figures mark the liminal phase of the story. An Chi's father, An Hsueh-hai, is appointed to a post in South-east China and he and his wife depart, leaving their son in Peking to study for the examinations. Soon after his arrival, An Hsueh-hai is held responsible for the collapse of a flood dam whereupon he is deprived of his post and ordered
to pay a considerable amount of money in damages.

On hearing this news, An Chi manages to borrow half of the required sum and sets out, accompanied by two trusted servants, on a long and perilous journey to save his father. Throughout this journey the author repeatedly employs images of darkness and death and depicts the extra-domestic environment as a hostile wilderness.

A second separation occurs when the two travelling companions abandon An Chi, one because of his mother's death, the second because of a serious illness. Thereupon, An Chi is entrusted to the care of two sinister donkey drivers. These men leave him alone at an inn, pretending to deliver a letter to An Chi's relatives at a nearby village but in fact they plot to rob and kill the inexperienced young man.

At this point when An Chi is symbolically an orphan, portrayed as a weak and helpless victim, intimidated by the environment and the strangers at the inn, a mysterious young woman his own age rides into the courtyard. Though she too is alone, her demeanour is the opposite of An Chi's. She is in complete command, ordering about the employees of the inn. The young woman sits in the courtyard outside An Chi's room and stares at him. An Chi is both frightened by this boldness and at the same time sexually attracted to a woman for the first time. In an effort to protect himself from this woman, An Chi asks the employees of the inn to place a great stone roller in front of his door. The men are unable to move this stone but the young woman picks it up with one hand and asks An Chi where he would like her to put it.

Anonymity is the keynote as the two young people converse for the
first time. An Chi attempts to conceal his true identity and the young woman refuses to divulge her own name. Eventually An Chi breaks down in tears and tells the woman his name and all of his troubles. She then departs instructing An Chi to wait for her return.

However, the donkey drivers come back to the inn and force An Chi to continue the journey. On the evening of the first day they stop at a monastery where the monks secretly murder the donkey drivers. The abbot attempts to kill An Chi, first by poison and finally by tying him to a post and preparing to cut out his heart and eat it. Just as the monk raises the knife to strike he is killed by a projectile shot from the bow of a figure dressed in red and silhouetted against the full moon. At this moment An Chi faints, taking on the appearance of death.

The figure turns out to be the young woman from the inn; and she unties An Chi and helps him to stand by handing him one end of her crossbow. At this point An Chi proclaims her to be the father and mother of his rebirth.

Putting An Chi in a safe place, the young woman proceeds singlehandedly to kill all of the monks in the monastery.

Following this bloodbath the young woman discovers the three members of the Chang family who had been captured by the monks and whose daughter Golden Phoenix is a mirror image of herself. In order that Golden Phoenix and An Chi may travel together without impropriety, the young woman (who now calls herself Shih-san Mei) arranges their betrothal. She gives An Chi the rest of the funds for his father’s release, and gives Golden Phoenix the money for her dowry.

Shih-san Mei accompanies the Chang family and An Chi part of the way
on their journey but must return to care for her aged mother. Therefore she gives An Chi her crossbow and tells him that at the sight of it any bandit in the region will become submissive. She also promises to return to the monastery and recover an inkstone engraved with the name of An Chi's father.

On the journey the group does meet with bandits and An Chi handles the situation with a new found maturity and authority. Recognizing the crossbow, the bandits offer the travellers an escort for the rest of the passage.

An Chi is subsequently reunited with his parents who are taken aback by his authoritative demeanour. He pays his father's debt and is married to Golden Phoenix. This marks the beginning of the postliminal phase of the novel and it is now necessary to put the world right-side-up by dealing with Shih-san Mei.

By putting various clues together An Hsueh-hai, An Chi's rescued father, discovers the true identity of Shih-san Mei. Apparently her real name is Jade Phoenix and she is the daughter of An Hsueh-hai's late friend General Ho. From this moment An Hsueh-hai takes over the responsibility for Jade Phoenix's life.

Discovering the whereabouts of her mountain dwelling, An Hsueh-hai goes to Jade Phoenix in disguise with her crossbow over his shoulder. (Had she known that he was coming to reward her for saving his son she would have refused to see him.) A few days prior to An Hsueh-hai's arrival Jade Phoenix's mother had died and from this point in the story the author emphasizes the fact that Jade Phoenix is an orphan in need of protection.

An Hsueh-hai tells her of her true identity and details of her child-
hood. He also informs Jade Phoenix that the enemy she has been preparing to kill for so many years is already dead. At this moment Phoenix attempts to commit suicide because, as she says, the main purpose of her life is over. However, she is prevented from doing so because one of the adults has hidden her knife and for the first time her life is literally out of her hands.

An Hsueh-hai reveals his identity and persuades Jade Phoenix to accompany her mother's coffin to a proper burial in Peking. He promises that at the end of the year's mourning he will allow her to become a nun. On the journey back to Peking Jade Phoenix has a dream in which her dead parents do not recognize her but tell her that her destiny lies with the An family. In this dream An Chi appears and angers Jade Phoenix to the point that she raises her hand to strike him. At this moment however, she discovers that she has lost all of her martial powers and she awakes with a start.

By the end of the year of mourning, An Hsueh-hai has already decided that Jade Phoenix will become An Chi's second wife. On the day that she is to assume her religious vocation An Hsueh-hai presents Jade Phoenix with her parents' spirit tablets and lectures her at length on her filial duty to marry and bear children. Using various arguments, including the idea that she has symbolically exchanged engagement gifts with An Chi (the crossbow and the inkstone), An Hsueh-hai convinces Jade Phoenix to marry his son.

After the ceremony Jade Phoenix becomes a conventional nei-jen, immersing herself in domestic affairs and giving birth to a boy. For his part, An Chi takes the examinations and continues his rise in the hierarchy by becoming a respected and renowned official.

It is interesting to note that this same pattern appears in the early
Ch'ing novel *Flower Shadows Behind the Curtain*. In this story the young man Hsiao Ko is also separated from his mother and on a journey in search of her is abandoned by his travelling companion. Like An Chi, he is described by family and friends as girl-like and passive.

Alone, in a desolate forest, Hsiao Ko encounters the daughter of a bandit chief, a strong assertive woman named Kin Ping. Kin Ping prevents her father from killing Hsiao Ko and eating his heart. However, the bandit chief forces the young man to witness a mass execution of prisoners. Following this bloodbath Hsiao Ko is betrothed to Kin Ping.

Leaving Kin Ping behind, Hsiao Ko continues his journey and is eventually reunited with his mother. Like An Chi's parents, she too is astonished at her son's maturity and authoritative air. Finally, after both of Kin Ping's parents have died she is reunited with Hsiao Ko. After a year she gives birth to a boy while Hsiao Ko becomes a wealthy official.

While the *nü chan-shih* and the countries of women may be seen as examples of symbolic inversion, the problem of the function of these characters must still be considered. As Natalie Davis points out, students of this phenomenon generally agree that rites of symbolic inversion are functional:

> They can clarify the structure by the process of reversing it. They can provide an expression of and a safety valve for conflicts within the system...But, so it is agreed, they do not question the basic order of the society itself. They can renew the system, but they cannot change it. 57

The stories of the *nü chan-shih* define and clarify the normal or the civilized by contrasting it to the abnormality of the martial woman and to the barbarism of the countries of women. As Turner notes, "nothing underlines regularity so much as absurdity and paradox." 58 They clearly
offer instruction in the appropriate roles for men and women and definitions of masculine and feminine. But perhaps most importantly they remind women and teach men that masculine attributes are associated with higher status. For as one scholar remarks in connection with the legends of female transvestite saints in medieval Europe:

That a female might desire to be a male...seemed to be a healthy desire, a normal longing not unlike the desire of a peasant to become a noble. This did not mean that either women or peasants were allowed to cross the status lines in any great numbers, but that the desire to do so was accepted as a norm.  

Males on the other hand, lost status if they wore items of female apparel, and the only way that society could justify such a loss was through attaching erotic connotations to such conduct which made it both dangerous and sinful. 

According to this author, the only time that male cross-dressing was tolerated was during festivals when usual standards of behavior were laid aside or among male actors who were already regarded as statusless and outside of the caste system.

As the single martial women were used to clarify the social structure, so too were the tales of past or barbarian matriarchies. Joan Bamberger in an article entitled "The Myth of Matriarchy" describes such legends as examples of 'myth as social charter' for they offer justification "for male dominance through the evocation of a vision of a catastrophic alternative - a society dominated by women." It is interesting to note that Johann Bachofen, who published the earliest and most popular study of matriarchy in 1861, conceived of matriarchy as a liminal period in the evolution of humankind from its chaotic infancy to its patriarchal adulthood.
The tales of the martial women seem to indicate that there is a need to define and reinforce constantly, masculine and feminine roles, behavior and status. As the women train for their martial careers and as the young men travel through their perilous rites of passage, the stories clearly reveal the attitude that masculinity (as opposed to femininity) is an achievement, something which must be learned and earned. Femininity is something so natural that young women easily fall into it and indeed young men must be forced away from it. Older men must avoid femininity at the risk of their lives and self esteem.

That this constant struggle to achieve an ideal and artificial polarization of the sexes is responsible for much anxiety and conflict is evidenced by the almost universal association of symbolic androgyny with utopias. 65 Of androgynous gods and paradises Joseph Campbell writes that, "they conduct the mind beyond objective experience into the symbolic realm where duality is left behind." 66

The male transvestite actors in ludruk drama:

...often accentuate the fact that they combine male and female elements by clearing their throats in a gruff bass, and spectators never tire of discussing the fact that the transvestite singer is really a man, although he looks like a woman. 67

These androgynous figures are in turn associated with the utopian image of Javanese court culture, with the idea of communitas, eroticism without procreation, and the innocence of childhood. Similarly, in the novel Flowers in the Mirror, while the Country of Women is depicted as a place of danger and anxiety, the Country of the Sexless People is depicted as a utopia.

It may well be that in the case of the martial woman, the combination
of masculine dress and behavior with female beauty and sexuality is meant to serve as an androgynous symbol. Surely this androgyny is reaffirmed when in both the West and East, a male actor portrays a woman masquerading as a man. While the characters teach about the polarization of the sexes, at the same time they may be offering a brief respite from this structure.

Finally, I suggest that the stories of the martial women provide release for the conflicts which occur between the legitimate authority of men and the considerable informal power of women, particularly in the domestic sphere. Though this power is acknowledged in the stories it is ultimately destroyed, overcome or pushed away into the boundaries of civilization and perhaps the conscious mind. As Joan Bamberger writes:

Young adolescent males learn as part of the initiation process that men, not women, rule in their society, although this fact may well contradict other expectations prevalent in childhood domestic experience. As the male offspring of female supervised households, young boys need to be reeducated with regard to their future social and political roles...

The myth of the Rule of Women in its many variants may be regarded as a replay of these crucial transitional stages in the life cycle of an individual male. 68

Similarly, the psychologist Philip Slater, writing of the victory of Theseus over the amazons notes that, "it seems likely that the Victory Over the Women, so conspicuous in Athenian lore, primarily describes an event in the emotional life of each male child." 69 Clearly the two male adolescents An Chi and Hsiao Ko, are portrayed as rejecting their feminine elements and in fact it is they who become anti-women. At the same time their maturity is marked by the rule over and subjugation of rather obvious mother figures in the form of Shih-san Mei and Kin Ping. 70
While the fictional accounts of the martial women, like rites of status reversal, may be seen to be functional through instruction and release, Natalie Davis suggests that these unruly women could undermine as well as reinforce the social structure, that they could "widen behavioral options for women..." While this problem must be raised it is clear from Ms. Davis' article that it is difficult if not impossible to document such influence. At present, for example, the consensus would seem to be that the warrior Joan of Arc was influenced not by the amazon myths but by tales of the female transvestite saints. However, there is not much evidence for this assumption.

Similarly, in the case of the revolutionary martyr Ch'iu Chin, it is difficult to separate out the strands of her remarkable development. While she did write of Joan of Arc and of fictional female warriors, she appears to have been equally influenced by the historical warrior Chin Lian-yu and by women such as Sophia Perovskya and Madame Roland. As Mary Wright has shown, in studying Ch'iu Chin's rejection of the typical female role one must take into account not only the myriad influences at work through fiction but as well the influence of an unusually liberal upbringing.

Consequently, while I agree with the suggestion that the problem of 'spillover' must be studied, I suggest that the fictional tales of the martial women and the kingdoms of women were used to reinforce and sanctify the asymmetrical relationship of the sexes in Europe and in China. The rule of women in the public sphere was, and continues to be, the stuff of fantasy.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


2 For example, E. Schafer writes that, "[in place of the universal mother] and in place of the dreaming, haunted shamanesses of antiquity, we get, in the Yellow River Valley at least, the survival of the anti­woman or amazon—warrior viragoes like Hua Mulan, and vigorous politicians like the Empress Wu." E. Schafer, The Vermilion Bird (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) p. 80


4 The characteristics of the nü chan-shih are compiled from the following characters:


Hu San-niang in J. H. Jackson (tr.) Water Margin (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937), vol. 2 p. 665


Kin Ping in Flower Shadows Behind the Curtain (New York: Pantheon, 1959) chapters 31 and 33


Purple Silk in Li Ju-chuen, Flowers in the Mirror Berkeley, 1965

Shih-san Mei in Wen K'ang, A Tale of Compassionate Heroism (Erh-nü Ying-hsiung chuan (Hong Kong: Ta-tung shu-chü, n.d.)

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)

The characteristics of the amazonian type are compiled from the following:

- Bradamante in Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Oxford at the Claredon Press, 1972)
- C. Wright, "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature."


6. The general thesis is discussed in three articles in *Woman, Culture and Society*:
   - M. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview," pp. 17-42
   - N. Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," pp. 43-66
   - S. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" pp. 67-87

On this same topic see also:


8. Ibid., vol. 1 p. 449


   M. Rankin in "The Emergence of Women at the End of the Ch'ing" writes that:
   By the 1890's orthodox views of women had been compromised in many ways. Nonetheless, it was still accepted that women functioned mainly within the household and men without. Education and literary skills which for men were stepping stones to power and prestige, remained largely an adornment even for the most admired and able women. p.44

10. *Li Chi: Book of Rites* vol. 1 p. 479
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)

11 Yinniang, Madame Sung, Hua Mu-lan, the Yang women and Kin Ping are all daughters of military men. Hung Hsien is in lifelong service to a general.

12 her sister, Yang Wan-hua eventually follows her.

13 "Madame Yang Studies the Stars" p. 434

14 Virgil, Aeneid, p. 319

15 Torquato Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered, p. 245

16 E. Spenser, Faerie Queene, p. 366 vol. 1

17 An interesting American legend combines the themes of bandit/citizen and male/female. A popular story told of Belle Starr, Queen of the Bandits, has it that this notorious bandit disguised herself as a man and rode into town. In a crowded inn, she had to share a room and a bed with the county judge. Only as Belle rode off in the morning did she inform the judge of her true identity. B. Rascoe, Belle Starr the Bandit Queen (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 19-21

18 "Madame Yang Studies the Stars" p. 434

19 A scene from the Mu-lan play by Hsu Wei (1521-93) described by F. Ayscough, Chinese Women, Yesterday and Today, pp. 217-219

20 In the version of the tale related by Ysia Tchen, Mu-lan's disguise works so well that she is offered the hand of a general's daughter in marriage. A similar situation is found in the European epic poem Huan de Bordeaux (1220). A young woman named Ide served in male disguise in the Holy Roman Emperor's troops. In recognition of her valor she is given the hand of the emperor's daughter in marriage. When her true sex is discovered she is condemned to death but God answers her prayers and turns her into a man at the last moment. Discussed in J. Foster, Sex Variant Women in Literature (London: F. Muller, 1958), p. 34

21 "Cursing at the City Wall" p. 646
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)

22 C. Wright, "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature" p. 441

23 I suspect that many of the combats between men and women in both Chinese and Western literature are meant as metaphors for sexual intercourse. In his book Sexual Life in Ancient China, R. H. Van Gulik discusses the popular use of military terminology to describe intercourse. p.157 and pp. 278-279


25 Wen K'ang, Erh-nü Ying-hsiung Chuan, p. 119

26 E. Spenser, Faerie Queene, vol. 2 p. 203 and p. 214


29 M. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture and Society," pp. 21-22
P. Slater, The Glory of Hera, pp. 7-9

30 E. Spenser, Faerie Queene, v. 1 p. 351

31 T. Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered, p. 32

32 Diodorus Siculus (Diodorus of Sicily) Translated by C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), vol. 2 p. 249
C. Wright, "The Amazons of Elizabethan Literature," pp. 452-453

33 "Hung Hsien," E. D. Edwards, Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period, p. 125
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)

34 C. Wright, "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature," p. 454

35 Many of these women are also literate, thus trained in two masculine occupations. There are also tales in Chinese culture of women such as Lin Yu-yu who dress as men and enjoy careers as students and degree candidates. These stories would require a separate study.

36 C. T. Hsia includes a quotation from the military romance Feng-shen Yen-yi: In battle you should exercise special caution against three types of opponents: Taoist priests, monks, and women. These three types of warriors, if they do not belong to heretical sects, usually command magic arts. Since they rely on such arts, you will certainly be injured if you are not careful.

37 Wen K'ang, Erh-nü Ying-hsiung chuan, p. 67

38 R.H. Van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China, p. 75. The Dark Girl was also believed to be an instructress in methods of sexual intercourse, another example of the comparison of battle and sex. On the subject of women and magic in China Eberhard writes that, "Wu", the normal Chinese word for shaman, sorcerer and magician, really always designated a female shaman, sorcerer or magician. W. Eberhard, The Local Cultures of South and East China (Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1968) p. 306


40 "Cursing at the City Wall," p. 645

41 There is much about this episode which suggests the treatment of Merchant Lin in the Country of Women in the novel Flowers in the Mirror.


43 Sources on the Western amazonian kingdoms include:
H. Diner, Mothers and Amazons (New York: Julian Press, 1965)
D. Sobol, The Amazons of Greek Mythology (New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1972)
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)


For the amazonian kingdoms in Chinese culture see:

44 For descriptions of the continual movement of the mythological kingdoms to unexplored regions see;

45 For example, see P. Pelliot, Notes on Marco Polo, p. 675

46 Diodorus of Sicily, vol. 2 p. 249

47 P. Pelliot, Notes on Marco Polo, p. 679

48 Ibid., pp. 694-695


52 As described by V. Turner in The Ritual Process, pp. 94-95

53 Ibid., p. 168

54 Ibid., p. 167

55 Ibid., p. 171
56 The similarity in the themes of these two novels has not hitherto been noticed.

57 N. Davis, "Women on Top," p. 130

58 V. Turner, The Ritual Process, p. 176

59 Magical transvestism also helps to reinforce the definitions of masculine and feminine. For a discussion of cross-dressing for superstitious reasons see H. Levy, Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom (New York: Walton Rawls, 1966), pp. 192-196


61 Ibid., p. 1381


63 Ibid., p. 279


Matriarchy is followed by patriarchy and preceded by unregulated hetairism. The Demetrian ordered matriarchy thus assumes a middle position, representing the transition of mankind from the lowest stage of existence to the highest. p. 198


M. Delcourt, Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity (London: Studio Books, 1961)

66 J. Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces, p. 152
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV (Con't)

67 J. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization*, p. 198

68 J. Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy" p. 277

69 P. Slater, *The Glory of Hera*, p. 393

70 The rejection of the feminine aspect and the victory over the women is repeated in Greek myths. Hercules, Theseus and Achilles all spent part of their lives dressed as and behaving as women. Theseus married the amazon Antiope and defeated the amazons at Athens. Hercules married the amazon Deneira and decimated the Asiatic amazons. Achilles killed the last amazon on the battle field of Troy.

71 N. Davis, "Women on Top," p. 131

72 V. Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," pp. 1389-1390


74 M. Rankin, "The Emergence of Women at the End of the Ch'ing: the Case of Ch'iu Chin," pp. 52-53
CONCLUSION

In the preparation of this study I have ranged over a wide field to gather together representative tales from the *yu-hsia* tradition; my method, not entirely conventional for an historian, has been somewhat like that of the messengers of the Han prince who traversed the kingdom in order to collect the songs of the people. The task was undertaken with similar expectations to those of the prince; that an examination of these tales would lead one to an understanding of various aspects of the milieu from which they arose.

In the past, those few scholars who have attended to this rich tradition have approached their material as if it were the equivalent of archival documents. Consequently, what they learned of the historical world from the *yu-hsia* tales was restricted to such social facts as the apparent class origins and common activities of the *hsia*.

However, as this discussion has attempted to demonstrate, what the Han prince learned of the world outside his window while listening to the songs and what the student of the *yu-hsia* tradition will discover while reviewing such tales as *Water Margin*, is precisely that which archival records so often conceal. The *yu-hsia* literature reveals how people in traditional Chinese society understood various aspects of their environment, their beliefs about it, and the ways in which they attempted to control it.

While this literary tradition expresses a variety of attitudes, it primarily reveals the understanding of society as an ordered hierarchy at the apex of which sits the ultimate font of justice, the emperor. According
to the yu-hsia tales, in this system poverty and injustice are aberrations rather than the norm. Thus, in this particularized form these aberrations may be dealt with by the social bandit who acts as the agent of the community. Problems are solved through heroic self-sacrifice and not through mass rebellion against authority.

The frequent bloody battles in these tales between the forces of good and evil are important cathartic elements as justice is seen and felt to be done. In addition however, bloody battles between men and women are an important cathartic element in those tales which deal specifically with female social bandits.

While the nü-hsia tales express similar values in regard to the general structure and functioning of society as do those told of their male counterparts, they particularly stress the idea that a harmonious society should be composed of a hierarchy of the sexes. Nü-hsia tales seem to provide instruction in the definitions of masculine and feminine and in the roles, status and behavior which are appropriate to men and women. However, they also reveal that this artificial polarization is the source of considerable tension and attempt to deal with this through various cathartic devices such as the battles mentioned above.

In the future, studies of the Chinese social bandit might focus on the period 1850-1911 when the yu-hsia tradition seems to have played a complex role in Chinese society. It was during this era that the novel A Tale of Compassionate Heroism enjoyed its greatest success. It was followed, in 1879, by the social bandit novel Three Hsia and Five Altruists (San-hsia Wu-yi) and its many sequels. Eventually these popular tales provided the subjects for the first films made in China in the early twentieth century.
In light of this immense popularity it would be interesting to investigate the use of the *yu-hsia* tradition by various organizations and personalities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Documents, folksongs and folktales relating to secret societies such as the Ko-lao Hui (Elder Brothers Society) and the Hsiao-tao Hui (Small Swords Society) could be examined in an effort to determine exactly how these groups were influenced by the social bandit tales.

In addition, individuals involved in political activities in the late Ch'ing apparently used the *jen-hsia* or social bandit spirit, to enhance their various philosophies. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, the reformer, seems to have identified the *yu-hsia* with radical patriotism and the revolutionary martyr Ch'iu Chin also made use of this tradition to express her ideals.

Finally, while this study has emphasized the similarities between cultural expressions in China and the West, future investigations may discover an equal number of differences. For example, the attitudes toward women expressed in both Western and Chinese amazonian literature appear to be similar. However, the male female hierarchy was much stricter in China and thus symbolic sexual inversion may have been more widespread both in literature and in festival.

In spotlighting the expressive and instrumental elements of the *yu-hsia* literature, the foregoing discussion has attempted to demonstrate that this tradition is a promising and virtually untouched field of study and that particular problems concerning the *yu-hsia* warrant intensive analysis on the part of students of Chinese social history.
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