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Cover calligraphy  Yan Zhenqing 顔真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover illustration  Portrait of Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 by Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻, *Golden Chamber Monthly* 1.2 (February 1929)
IN SEARCH OF ERLANG

Carmelita (Carma) Hinton

Introduction

Among the gifts received by the Song emperor Taizong 宋太宗 when he ascended the throne in 976 was a painting referred to as a soushan tu 搜山圖 (Picture of a Mountain Search). The emperor was so impressed by it that he promptly appointed the painter Gao Yi 高益 to the position of court painter-in-attendance, daizbao 待诏. This story, which is recorded in Guo Ruoxu’s 郭若虚 Tuhua jianwen zhi 絵畫見文志 (Experiences in Painting) (prefaced in 1070), contains the earliest known literal reference to what has become an enduring theme in Chinese painting. ¹ No longer extant, the picture the Song emperor saw can only be imagined on the basis of much later examples of paintings described as, or bearing the title of, soushan tu. They depict a throng of fierce-looking, demon-like men charging through wooded mountains. Aided by falcons and a hunting hound, they kill or capture a variety of animals, serpents, and birds, as well as creatures that are part human and part beast, some of which appear in the guise of alluring women.

One of the obvious questions arising in the quest for an understanding of soushan tu is the identity of the deity presiding over the mountain search. A survey of the literary sources associated with soushan tu since the eleventh century show that there were a number of deities who were portrayed in this role.² Among them the most frequently mentioned is Erlang, also referred to by the title Qingyuan Zhenjun 清源真君 (The True Master of the Pure Source), and sometimes by the abbreviated form Qingyuan 清源.³ Most of

¹ Guo Ruoxu (fl.1070–75), Tuhua jianwen zhi (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1963).
² These earlier sources make references to soushan tu created by tenth-century artists.
³ The sources identifying Erlang as the commanding figure in soushan tu include: 1. A poem written by Wu Cheng’en 吳承恩 (1500–82), the reputed author of the Xiyou ji 西遊記 [Journey to the West], entitled “Erlang soushan tu ge” 二郎搜山圖歌 [On a painting about Erlang searching the mountains]. It mentions Erlang by his title, Qingyuan. The description of the painting fits in well with extant soushan tu (Wu Cheng’en, Wu Cheng’-en shiwen ji [Collected poems and essays by Wu Cheng’-en], annot. by Liu Xiuye [Shanghai: Gudian Wenxue Chubanshe, pp.16–17]); 2. A colophon written by Ye Sen 杨森 (Southern Song) on a soushan tu by Wang Hui 王輝 (act. 1224–74), recorded in the Qing imperial painting catalogue, in which the protagonist is referred to as Qingyuan Zhenjun. The description also fits in well with extant paintings (Zhang Zhao 張照, Midian zhubin [Palace gems], comp. 1744, facsimile ed. [Taipei: Gugong Bowuyuan, 1971], vol.1, p.191); 3. the title “Guankou soushan tu” inscribed on two paintings, one belonging to Luo Yuanjue 罗 Yuan jue, the other in the Princeton University Art Museum. For more details on these paintings, see Carmelita Hinton, “A mountain of anomic transformations of the soushan tu genre,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000. This title has been translated as “Searching for Demons on Mount Guankou” (Pao-chen Ch’en, “Searching for demons on Mount Kuan-k’ou” [catalogue entry], in Wen C. Fong, Images of the mind [Princeton, NJ: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1984], p.323; Munakata Kiyohiko, Sacred mountains in Chinese art [Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1991], p.106). I would like to...
suggest, however, that since Guankou is the place of origin of the god Erlang, who is also referred to as Guankou Erlang, the “Guankou” in the title refers to the deity rather than to the location of the search. The reason for this can only be clear after a full study of the god Erlang, which is the subject of this paper.

Figure 1
Map of Dujiangyan, the famous flood-control and irrigation project in Guanxian county, Sichuan province (published in Zheng Dishan, comp., Zengxiu Guanxian zhi 灌縣志 (Expanded gazetteer of Guanxian), 1886)

the brief studies of the iconography of sousban tu speculate that the legends of Erlang were the initial inspiration for the creation of paintings called sousban tu. Aside from a number of Erlang stories of dubious date, however, no supporting evidence for this assumption is provided. Furthermore, to fully understand these paintings, it is not enough merely to identify the protagonist and cite fragments from legends. In order to see exactly how Erlang is related to sousban tu, and why this deity was important, a more thorough examination of the evolution of his legends is needed.

This paper traces the origins and history of Erlang. A sizeable body of literature has been devoted to this deity, but only one source briefly mentions sousban tu. Through the pioneering work of Rong Zhaozu in 1929, Huang Zhigang in 1934, and later works by Sang Xiuyun and Wang Qiugui, among others, a large body of primary source material related to the Erlang cycle of legends has been brought to light. It is on the basis of their contributions that my own analysis and speculations are propounded. Nevertheless, I will argue that their use of
sources, both through quotation and interpretation, leaves many questions unanswered. One crucial issue concerns the relationship between Erlang and Li Bing 李冰, a figure recorded in official histories as being the creator of the famous Dujiangyan 都江堰 flood-containment and irrigation project in Sichuan in the third century BC. Despite the different emphases and approaches adopted by these earlier scholars of the Erlang legends, they tend to agree that the Erlang persona was a component element, a variation, or an extension of the cult of the deified Li Bing. But whereas Li Bing consistently enjoyed unchallenged prestige in official histories over time, Erlang, as I hope to demonstrate through my presentation and analysis of previously overlooked textual evidence, was not always regarded favorably by the imperial court and its officials. The link between the two, Li Bing and Erlang, is conditional and highly tenuous. By exploring written records related to Erlang, as well as the literary evidence found in painting catalogues in which his name appears, I believe that we can uncover the process by which his name came to be associated with that of Li Bing. The resulting reversal of Erlang's symbolic stature from demon to demon-queller in the eyes of the Song court, I will argue, affected the evolution of the commanding figure in sousban tu. Our analysis of these issues will, I believe, demonstrate that current assumptions concerning the origins of sousban tu are unsustainable. At the same time I hope to contribute to the creation of a more comprehensive and historically articulate framework for their interpretation.

Origins of Erlang

Erlang has been extensively studied by scholars, though there is very little agreement as to who he was. The many contradictory claims concerning the origin and identity of Erlang found in historical documents and in popular literature are difficult to reconcile. It is, of course, not unusual that legends merge and blend and go through mutations as they are transmitted over time. It is also true, however, that later versions may not necessarily convey the same meanings as did their earlier components. Although modern studies have provided interesting clues to the Erlang mystery, many of them depend on selective data for their interpretation while ignoring contradictory evidence, or indiscriminately cite later sources for conclusions about earlier times.

The term Erlang, as the name of a deity, does not appear in historical documents until the Song dynasty.5 “Erlang Shen” 二郎神 (the God Erlang) as the title of a musical composition appeared in the Tang 唐 poetry throughout the Song, but the content of these poems usually has nothing to do with the god.6 Linguistically, Erlang could be a generic term, meaning “second lad” or “second son,” rather than a proper name with a specific identity. According to the Song writer Zhang Bangji 张邦基 (fl. 1131),

4 Jin Weinuo, “Soushan tu de nei­rong yu yishu biaoxian” [The content and artistic expression of sousban tu], in Gugong Bowuyuan yuankan [Palace Museum journal] (Beijing: Gugong Bowuyuan): 19–21; Pao-chen Ch’en, Searching for demons, p.323; Munakata, Sacred mountains, pp.105–7. Kohara Hironobu 古原宏伸 expressed doubts about some of Jin Weinuo’s conclusions concerning Erlang’s connection to sousban tu, but he believes that sousban tu was based on some kind of popular tale, and that the original, “complete” version of sousban tu, perhaps now lost, was a faithful, scene-by-scene illustration of one particular text, which is yet to be identified. Kohara Hironobu, “Soushan tu” [Picture of a mountain search!], in Guoji Jiaoliu Meishushi Yanjiu hui, ed., Shoubua meishu [Narrative art] (Shenhu Wenzueyu Yishu Shixue Yanjiushi, 1989), pp.110–11.

5 The earliest available record of a deity named Erlang is on a 1020 stele commemorating the building of Houtu 后土 Temple in Wanquan 萬泉 county (in the southern part of present-day Shanxi province). Among the many halls it lists, each dedicated to a different deity, is an Erlang Hall (Ding Mingyi, “Shanxi zhongnanbu de Song Yuan wutai” [Song- and Yuan-dynasty opera stages in central and southern Shanxi], Wenhua [Cultural relics], 1972.4: 48.


7 The only exception found so far is a poem written by Yang Wujiu 杨無咎 (twelfth century), to be further discussed on p.9.
the element “lang” was a common feature in the names of local deities in southern regions. Young and handsome deities were often called “XX lang” (young lad so-and-so), while robust and stern-looking ones “XX Jiangjun” (General so-and-so). Erlang’s name seems to fit this pattern. A homonymous Erlang which is written with the character “er” (児), signifying not “second,” but “son” (so that the combination, Erlang, simply means “young man”), appears in the title of a collection of late Tang and early Five Dynasty songs preserved in Dunhuang called “Erlang wei” (児郎偉), with the wei written either with the character meaning “great” (偉) or that meaning “protector” (衛). The content of these songs is related to the expulsion of demons. The Erlang written in characters which means “second lad” does not appear in these songs, and a direct link cannot be proved.

This study will show that Erlang meant different things at different times to different people. In other words the significance of this god was determined by who identified with him and on what terms. It is not enough, however, simply to acknowledge Erlang’s elusiveness and discuss in isolation the various concepts which have arisen. A close examination of the specific ways in which his identities changed and merged reveals an underlying relationship between the fragments. The evidence suggests connections between the development of the Erlang cult and the consolidation

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**Figure 2**

_Anonymous (bears the forged signature of Su Hanchen 蘇漢臣 (act. 1101–25)), late thirteenth century, color on silk, Palace Museum, Beijing. The earliest extant suoshan tu in the handscroll format, this painting is only a segment of a longer scroll. The missing part, which contains the commander of the mountain-search, most likely served as the model for a much later painting, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston—see Figure 4 (note that this scroll, and that reproduced below as Figure 4, should be ‘read’ from the far end, that is, from right to left, not left to right as it necessarily appears here)."
and maintenance of state power in the Song dynasty. It reveals a theme of contention between the centralized imperial power and the centrifugal forces of local cohesion during the first one hundred years of the Song and, later on, between the Song and outside invaders. These struggles which accompanied the development of the Erlang cult throw an interesting light on the interpretation of soushan tu.

**Erlang’s Multiple Identities**

The accounts of Erlang found in historical and literary sources reveal three main claims regarding his identity.\(^\text{10}\) The later the source, the more entangled the stories become, with different heroes in various stories sharing common deeds or a single hero’s story appearing in multiple versions.

The most popularly known image of Erlang is found in the widely read Ming novel *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West). In this novel the god Erlang is said to be the Jade Emperor’s nephew, to whom people offered incense and oblations at his temple in a place called Guankou in the Shu \蜀 region (modern Sichuan). His mother, the Jade Emperor’s younger sister, had fallen in love with a mortal named Yang 杨 and married him.\(^\text{11}\) This particular

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\(^{10}\) There are actually more than three claims. The other claims, however, appear in very isolated instances, and their sources are quite late. In addition, twentieth-century scholars who studied the subject have come up with interpretations of the identity of Erlang not mentioned in historical sources. Their conclusions will be evaluated in the appropriate places in this paper.

A few sources seem to imply that the name Erlang stood for both Li Bing and his son.
One example is in Zeng Minxing 董敏行 (1118–75), Duxing zazhi [Random notes in
lone sobriety], in Zhibuzuzhai congshu [Collection from the Studio of Incessant

A comprehensive study of ancient Shu is provided by Steven Sage in Ancient Sichuan

Erlang, their offspring, could thus be said to have the family name Yang.

Other stories about Erlang say that he was a Sui 隋-dynasty official named
Zhao Yu 趙昱, who killed evil dragons to prevent flooding in the Jiazhou 嘉州
area in Shu. Eventually a temple was set up for him in Guankou, and he was
popularly known as Guankou Erlang 灌口二郎. The sources in which Zhao Yu's name appears will be discussed later in this section.

The third claim is that Erlang was the second son of Li Bing, who was the
governor of Shu some time during the third century BC and was known for
his role in building the massive water diversion project called Dujiangyan,
located in Guankou near Chengdu 成都. Erlang, it is said, had helped Li Bing
control rivers, and he shared his father's temple in Guankou.12

Despite the discrepancies in accounts of Erlang’s identity in these sources,
one element is common to them all. Erlang, be his family name Zhao, Yang,
or Li, was connected to Guankou of Shu, a region in which a civilization
distinct from that of central China had existed until its annexation and
sinification by the Qin 秦 state during the fourth century BC (a century before
the first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, brought about the unity
of China in 221 BC).13 It does not seem likely that several legends about
controlling rivers in the small region of Guankou would have developed
totally independently. The different versions of Erlang’s identity are possibly
variations of the same theme, or they could have resulted from the convergence of a number of deified heroes who had made a contribution to controlling rivers or who had performed other great deeds. Whichever the case may be, there must have been compelling circumstances in Guankou which enabled the heroic figure to proliferate or to absorb other identities. In order to determine which was the source and which were elements that the Erlang persona later absorbed, the dates of the various stories deserve some discussion.

The Journey to the West, which claims that Erlang was the nephew of the Jade Emperor, has been studied in great detail by Glen Dudbridge. According to his work, the antecedents to the Erlang episode in the sixteenth-century novel could be traced to no earlier than the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368).\(^\text{14}\)

As for accounts depicting Erlang as Zhao Yu, one of the most elaborate is found in the Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan =<sup>A</sup> Survey of the Origin and Development of the Gods of the Three Religions, a 1909 reprint of a Ming text.\(^\text{15}\) According to this source, Zhao Yu, who had been a hermit on Qingcheng mountain 萬成山, was later appointed magistrate of Jiazhou by Emperor Yangdi 炎帝 of the Sui dynasty. Angered by an evil dragon which was causing disasters in two nearby rivers, Yu launched into battle against the dragon and killed it with a sword. Although


\(^\text{15}\) The “reprinting” in this case entailed re-carving printing blocks, using the printed Ming text as the model. It is not known whether the original Ming text is still in existence today. The publisher of the re-carved text, Ye Dehui 叶德輝, said in his preface that he had once seen a Yuan text by the name of Huaxiang Soushen Guangji [Illustrated survey of gods], which he believed to be the book on which the Ming version was based.
Ye Dehui, *Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*, 3:5a; see n.15 above.

17 Liu Zongyuan, *Longcheng lu*, in *Lidai xiaoshi* [Brief histories of the dynasties], comp. Li Zhi 李栻 (Shanghai: Shangwu Hanfenlou Yingyin Ming Keben, 1940), p.11. For details of the discussion of Wang Zhi being the author of the *Longcheng lu*, see Rong Zhaozu, "Erlang shen kao" [On the origins of Erlang shen], *Minsu* 61/62: 70–98, at 79. Following up on the doubts concerning Liu Zongyuan’s authorship of this text expressed by Zhu Xi in the *Zhuzi yuexi* 朱子語類 [The collected sayings of Zhu Xi] (in *Lixue congshu* [Anthology of works in Neo-Confucianism] [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983]) and in another Song text as well as their suggestion that Wang Zhi was the author, Rong adds that the work is indeed not listed in Tang bibliographic catalogues. Rong’s argument is further supported by a source not cited by him, the *Mozhuling manlu* by Zhang Bangji, a contemporary of Wang Zhi. Zhang baldly

Yu disappeared during the chaotic years before the dynasty’s demise, he reappeared in the clouds when the river near Jiuzhou flooded again. The people set up a temple in his honor at the mouth of the Guanjiang 滄江 river (Guanjiang kou 滄江口), and he became popularly known as “Guankou Erlang.” The title “Shenyong Dajiangjun” 神勇大將軍 (Great General of Divine Courage) was bestowed on him by the Taizong 太宗 emperor (r. 627–49) of the Tang dynasty, and this title was later elevated to “Chicheng wang” 赤城王 (King of Chicheng) by the Xuanzong 玄宗 emperor (r. 712–56). When a rebellion arose in Shu during the reign of the Zhenzong 真宗 emperor (r. 998–1021) of the Song, the god came to the aid of Zhang Yong 張詠 (946–1015) who had been sent by the throne to pacify the region. Emerging victorious, Zhang Yong wrote a memorial to the emperor, who in turn, bestowed on the god the title “Qingyuan Miaodao Zhenjun” 清源妙道真君 (True Master of the Marvelous Way of the Pure Source).16

The earliest account of Zhao Yu that I have been able to find appears in the *Longcheng lu* 龍城錄 (Record of the dragon city), said to have been written by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–810) of the Tang, but believed by many to have in fact been written by Wang Zhi 王錫 (active 1131–63) of the Song.17 In this text there is no reference to the name Erlang; recorded only are the name Zhao Yu, the miracles he performed, his temple at Guankou, and his
Tang titles. As to the assertion that Zhao Yu was given the title Qingyuan Miaodao Zhenjun (hereafter referred to as Qingyuan) during the Song, no evidence earlier than the Ming text mentioned above has been found. In the zaju 雜劇 drama “Erlang Shen zuishe suomojing” (Drunken Erlang Shen Shoots the Demon-Restraining Mirror), Erlang introduces himself as Zhao Yu, the magistrate of Jiazhou, who was given the title Qingyuan by the Jade Emperor for killing an evil dragon.18 The date of this drama is uncertain, as are the dates of many of the zaju dramas by anonymous playwrights. Assigning them to the Yuan or Ming period seems somewhat arbitrary,19 but even if the earlier, Yuan, date is accepted, the connection between Zhao Yu and the title Qingyuan would have appeared no earlier than the late thirteenth or the early fourteenth centuries.20 The title Qingyuan did appear during the Song dynasty, but not in any connection with Zhao’s name. A poem by Yang Wujiu 杨無咎 (1097–1171, roughly contemporaneous with Wang Zhi, the supposed author of the Longcheng lu) entitled Erlang shen: Qing yuan shengchen (Erlang Shen: On the Birthday of Qingyuan) eulogizes the god for “capturing an evil dragon at Guankou and calming the waters at Lidui” (a mountain at Guankou).21 So at least as early as Yang Wujiu’s time (first half of the twelfth century) Erlang was known to have the title Qingyuan. But was this Erlang understood

18 Yang Jialuo, Quanyuan zaju sanbian [The complete Yuan zaju drama: part three] (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1963), vol.5, pp.2069–70.
20 In his Yuanju kanyi [Problems concerning Yuan drama] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960), Yan Dunyi argues that all of the extant plays about Erlang are of Ming date (pp.36–48). For a detailed discussion of some of the arguments, see Dudbridge, The Hsi-yu chi, pp.129–34.
22 There is a slightly earlier source mentioning a 午人 (wicked man, or demon) pretending to be Li Bing’s son, without reference to Erlang. This will be discussed later in this paper.


24 The 1074 work, however, is not the earliest source in which the term Erlang is found as the name of a deity. An 1020 stele, cited in n.5 above, mentions a building called “Erlang Hall” in a Houtu temple complex in Henan. The origin and identity of this particular Erlang, presumably housed in the “Erlang Hall,” however, is not known. It appears that he was a member of a pantheon connected to the worship of Houtu, the Earth God. One other example of this particular function of Erlang is in a stele originally carved in the year 1139, which includes an illustration of the Houtu Temple complex of Fenying in Ronghe county, very close to Wanquan county where the Houtu temple mentioned in the 1020 stele was located, identifying one of the buildings in the temple complex as “Erlang Hall” ([Wang Shiren, “Ji Houtuci miaomao bei” [Notes on a commemorative stele in Houtu Templ, Kaogu, 1963,5: 273–7]. Because of the early date (1020) of this appearance of Erlang, he does not seem to fit into the evolution of the Erlang who originated in the Guankou area (discussed in the next section of this paper). It is not possible for me to pursue the Erlang connected to Houtu in this study. He will have to remain a mystery for the time being.

There are scholars who argue for an even earlier date for the appearance of the name Erlang as a deity, but I believe that their interpretation is based on the misreading of a text. Both Li Sichun (jiansheng shilun [Ten essays from a river village] [Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1957], p.66) and Yu Quanyu (“Erlang shen qinlong de shenhua yu Kaiming zao pingkou de shishi” [The legend of Erlang capturing the dragon and Emperor Kaiming’s role in creating the Precious Bottle Opening], Sichuan wenwu [Sichuan cultural relics], 1988,3: 38–44, at 40) cite the title of a stele, “Yuzhi feng Erlang shen bei” (Imperially-made stele enfeoffing Erlang Shen), recorded in the Guanxian Gazetteer (in a section called “Guanzhi zhangu” [Anecdotes of Guanxian], 2:35a, in Luo Junsheng, Guanxian zhi [Guanxian gazetteer] [Rongji Meilili Publishing, 1952]), as early Song (late tenth century) evidence for Erlang. The source, besides being late (1932), is very confusing. The passage in which the stele is mentioned starts out by listing a number of titles given to Li Bing from the Five Dynasties to the early Song. Then, after citing the title given to Li Bing by Song Taizu, it is stated that the stele was made in the early Song probably resulted from its being mentioned right after a list of titles given to Li Bing by Emperor Tai-
Accounts of Li Bing making stone figures appear in several earlier texts, but there is no mention of a son. Not until the mid-eleventh century did statements about Li Bing having a son suddenly proliferate. Since then every mention of Erlang in Song sources, if venturing to explain who he was, always indicates that he was the son of Li Bing.

Some scholars argue that Erlang was developed as an extension of the cult of Li Bing. One problem with this interpretation is that it does not address the issue of the apparent rivalry between Li Bing and Erlang in a number of sources. A good example is a statement by Zhu Xi, the most important figure in Song Neo-Confucianism, which says in effect: The Erlang temple at Guankou of Shu was originally established for Li Bing because of his achievements in building the Lidui. The great many miracles and strange things that have occurred in recent years, however, are due to the sudden appearance of his second son.

Erlang, it seems, had sprung out of nowhere and eclipsed Li Bing, who was, after all, an historical figure, a magistrate appointed by the predecessors to the first emperor of China. The overshadowing of Li Bing by Erlang is also evident in the proliferation of Erlang temples nationwide, while temples dedicated to Li Bing remained much more localized. It can be argued in the

/in search of Erlang

the temple was built and then moved there. In any case there is no evidence to suggest that the stele was made during the early Song, and its location is far away from Li Bing’s temple.

25 Chang Qu 常璩, Huayang guozhi 安阳国志 An account of the country south of Mount Hual (compiled before 355), in Liu Lin, annot., Huayang guozhi jiaozhu 安阳国志校注 [Annotations on An account of the country south of Mount Hual] (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 1984), vol.3, p.202; Li Daoyuan 郭元 (d.527), Shuijing zhu 水經注 [Annotations on the River Classic] (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1955), 13.7a (or p.591). Although there is no archeological evidence for stone figures from Li Bing’s time, a stone figure of Li Bing himself has been found at the bottom of the river at Dujiangyan. The statue is identified as Li Bing and dated to 168 AD by an inscription, which states that stone figures of “three deities” were made. Wang Wencai 王文才, “Donghan Li Bing shixiang yu Dujiangyan shuize” [A stone figure of Li Bing from the Eastern Han dynasty and the water markers of Dujiangyan], Wenwu 1974.7: 29–32.

26 Some scholars propose that the notion of “Li Bing and his son” appeared as early as the sixth century, on the basis of a line quoted in Yudi jisheng 奥地纪胜 [Accounts of famous sites], a 1221 work by Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (of which there are two versions: 1. the Wen-

/xuanlou 文選楼 facsimile of the Song edition; 2. the Yueyatang 禹雅堂 edition of 1885, in Li Zhenhua, Songdai dili shu sizhong [Four works on geography by Song authors] [Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1963], vols 4–5]. The text, however, is problematic. For a detailed discussion of the different versions of the text, see Hinton, “A mountain of anomie,” Appendix 2.


29 There is a more explicit, although later, example of an official reaction to a violation of the correct social hierarchy in the way Erlang was worshipped. A stele seen by Peng Xun 彭海 in 1866 states that during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng 雍正 (r.1723–35) the Magistrate of Sichuan memorialized the court, complaining that Li Bing, the father, was overshadowed by the son, Erlang, in the way the gods were positioned and worshipped in the temple at Dujiang 渠江. If the gods are
abstract that the imaginary deeds of a son, who was not recorded in previous history or legend, could have suddenly become acclaimed as an extension of the cult of the father, eventually even overshadowing the father’s fame. But why would this happen and why at that particular time?

In searching for answers I have found evidence to suggest an entirely different interpretation of the relationship between Li Bing and Erlang: a cult with a strong following in Shu had been distinct from that of Li Bing until the mid-eleventh century, when it was appropriated by the Song court, in the form of what became known as “Erlang, Li Bing’s second son.” Furthermore, roots of this cult may have even predated the cult of Li Bing and had the potential of exerting a stronger hold on the people in Shu. In other words, instead of being Li Bing’s “son,” Erlang may well have been his “ancestor,” or more accurately, a symbol signifying Li Bing’s predecessors in taming the rivers of that region.

Evidence for an Earlier Deity Unrelated to Li Bing

It has been suggested by some scholars that there was once a deity, originally unrelated to Li Bing, who somehow became entangled with him during the Song dynasty. Their arguments, however, amount to little more than speculation based on scanty, and mostly very late, evidence. In this section I will use primarily sources of the Song dynasty and earlier to trace the story of a deity at Guankou whose power derived from controlling rivers but who was unrelated to Li Bing. Furthermore, not only was this deity not sponsored by the state, as was Li Bing, it had been brutally suppressed by the Song court up to the mid-eleventh century.

An entry under the heading Langjun Shen ci 郎君神祠 (Langjun God Shrine) in the Song biyiao 宋會要 (A Compilation of Important Song Documents) records the official “entitling” of a god called Langjun Shen between the years 1063 and 1157.30 Following the heading “Langjun God Shrine” are the words: “the son of Guangyou Yinghui Wang 廣祐英惠王 (King Guangyou Yinghui) of Chongde Temple 崇德廟 in Yongkang prefecture 永康郡.”31 The Song biyiao then records an edict of 1063: “Langjun Shen in Guangji Wang’s 廣濟王 temple in Yongkang prefecture is hereby granted the title Linghui Hou 靈惠侯 (Marquis Linghui) and will receive official sacrifices.”32 It is not clear whether the passage which follows the above is part of the edict or an addendum written by the compiler of the Song biyiao: “The god is the second son of Li Bing. The Shu natives had honored him as Huguo Lingying Wang 護國靈應王 (Miraculous King Protector of the Realm). He was stripped of this title in the year 974. The people then petitioned [the emperor, saying] that the god had helped his father tame the floods, and that was the reason for issuing this edict.”

The year in which Langjun Shen lost his title, 974, is important, for according to WENXIAN TONGKAO 文獻通考 it was in the same year that Li
Bing was given the new title, Guangji Wang, by the imperial court, two years after the court ordered the renovation of his temple. Putting together these two entries from *Song buiyao* and *Wenxian tongkao* we learn that after the renovation of the Chongde Temple, Li Bing was given a new title to replace his old one, Da'an Wang 大安王, given to him during the Latter Shu 后蜀 kingdom, while Langjun Shen was divested of his title. Had it been well established at the time that the two gods were father and son, they would not have received such divergent treatment.

It is clear from the above sources that a god unrelated to Li Bing had existed before the Song. He had a title of his own, which equalled the rank of Li Bing, but was stripped of this title in 974. Some seventy-odd years later, “talk” of his being Li Bing’s son served to “reinstate” him, although only to a lesser rank, through the imperial edict of 1063.

Is this “son of Li Bing,” referred to in the *Song buiyao* as Langjun Shen, the same being as Erlang, the name cited much more frequently for Li Bing’s son? There are at least two Song references which directly link them to each other. Both mention the passage in the *Song buiyao* cited above. One, in Gao Cheng’s 高承 *Shiwu jiuyuan* 事物紀原 (On the Origin of Things and Affairs), notes that a “Guankou Erlang temple” was established in the Song capital during the Yuanfeng 元豐 reign (1078–85). It includes a comment that the god was “whom the *Huiyao* called Li Bing’s second son, Langjun Shen.” The other is in the *Yudi jibeng*, a 1221 work by Wang Xiangzhi. In describing the deity worshipped in the Temple of Pude (Universal Virtue) 普德廟 in Hezhou 合州 (in Shu), Wang says he is one “whom the *Huiyao* called Li Bing’s second son, Langjun’, popularly known as ‘Erlang’.” Another occurrence of the name Langjun is in the title of an anonymous painting “Fulong Langjun tu” 伏龍郎君圖 (Picture of Langjun Capturing the Dragon), listed in the *Song zhongxing guangge chucang tubua ji* 宋中興館閣儲藏圖畫記 (The Song Record of the Painting Collection in the Hall of Revitalization), a catalogue of paintings in the imperial collection compiled in 1199. The subject of the painting, as seen in the title, also fits in well with the legends about Erlang.

The above sources make it reasonably clear that the two names, Erlang and Langjun Shen, referred to the same deity. These sources, however, all date from after the 1063 edict, when kinship between Li Bing and Erlang was assumed by writers who took up the subject, and therefore do not provide any new information regarding Langjun Shen’s (or Erlang’s) relationship to Li Bing prior to 1063. While I have not found any references to the name Langjun Shen in sources before 1063, another name, Guankou Shen, meaning “the god of Guankou,” appears quite frequently. It is noteworthy that the changes in his status parallel those of Langjun Shen during the period between the Shu Kingdoms and the Song.

As mentioned previously, Langjun Shen had possessed an exalted title during the Shu kingdoms, equalling that of Li Bing in rank. Although I have not found any information on the bestowing of titles to Guankou Shen, it is clear that he was important to the Shu rulers from the way he is described...
The postscript (houxu 后序) of Shu taowu 蜀梼杌 written by Lu Zhaojiong 陆昭逈 states that he had a chance to read the book in 1067.

Figure 4
Anonymous (bears forged colophon dated 1325, attributing the painting to Li Tang 李唐 (1050–1130)), seventeenth century, color on silk, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This painting and the Beijing painting (Figure 2) exhibit a stylistic resemblance which suggests that the latter served as its model. They are also the only two examples among extant soushan tu 萧然图 which contain mutually exclusive scenes. When the two are joined together, with the Boston painting on the right and the Beijing painting on the left, each supplies the other with the missing part of a complete scene in the middle.

39 The postscript (houxu 后序) of Shu taowu 蜀梼杌 written by Lu Zhaojiong 陆昭逈 states that he had a chance to read the book in 1067. Although this is a Song work, Zhang explains in his preface that he based his writings on old Shu Kingdom books in the possession of his family. He says that originally he had intended to destroy them, but had felt that it would be a regrettable loss, so he “deleted the tedious parts and made a chronicle of two volumes” as “a warning to unruly rebels.”

The Shu taowu 蜀梼杌, which adopts a tone of condemnation towards the evils of illegitimate local rulers, mentions Guankou Shen in three places. The passage which demonstrates the importance of the god to the Shu rulers says that on the first day of the sixth month in the year 952, the ruler held a banquet during which the court entertainers performed the Guankou Shen formation [dui 队] and feigned a battle between two dragons. After a while dark clouds covered the sky, followed by a tumultuous hailstorm. The next day a report came from Guankou that the Minjiang 江水 river had flooded and the iron pillar to which the dragon was shackled [suo 鎏, literally, locked] had trembled violently.

This is the earliest reference to the idea of securing the dragon to an iron pillar in order to prevent it from doing harm. This idea is different from killing
the dragon, which Li Bing did in all the pre-Song legends associated with him. Securing the dragon is an important characteristic of the Erlang legends found in several later sources. Guankou Shen is here linked to this particular idea, and through it, to Erlang. Another passage in the *Shu taowu* provides a vivid description of Guankou Shen’s appearance, linking him to Wang Yan 王衍, the Shu ruler:

In the Eighth Month of the second year of the Qiande 乾徳 period (920) Wang Yan led his troops on an inspection tour to the north . . . Flags and banners, swords and armor, spread beyond a hundred 里. Yan, dressed in full military regalia, wearing gold armor, satin sleeves, and a jeweled helmet, was holding a bow and arrow. Watching him, people said that he looked like Guankou Shen. 42 That year Wang Yan was nineteen years old. Guankou Shen, whose image Wang Yan evoked in the eyes of the onlookers, in all likelihood was also youthful. This characteristic accords with the term Langjun, which implies youth. The military garb indicates what the sculptured or painted images of Guankou Shen might have looked like, and it also corresponds well with Langjun Shen’s pre-Song title “Miraculous King Protector of the Realm,” which calls to mind a military role.

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40 Zhang Tangying, *Shu taowu*, in Cao Qiuyue, comp., *Xuehai leihan* [A categorized compendium from a sea of learning] (Taipei: Tailian Guofeng Chubanshe), vol. 2, Preface, p. 2a. Zhang’s statement suggests that those old books could indeed have dated back to the Shu Kingdoms, because under the Song they would have been considered “politically unsavory” and the “correct attitude” towards them would have been to express disgust and an eagerness to destroy them.

41 Ibid., 2:9b.

42 Ibid., 1:13a.
Franciscus Verellen has done a detailed study (Verellen, "Liturgy and sovereignty") of the role of Daoist rituals in the foundation of the Shu Kingdom between the years 907 and 925. In this study he discusses how the rising local leadership enfeoffed local gods and made use of Daoist liturgy to extend promises of tutelage and adoption to followers of the region's indigenous cults. These rituals were performed, for the most part, by the former Tang court Daoist, Du Guangting (850–933). Guankou Shen is not among the deities mentioned in this study. Perhaps Du Guangting, who exerted considerable influence at the level of state power, held a certain notion of Daoist orthodoxy which excluded from the legitimizing process local cults that were not already "Daoist." It is also interesting to note here that in his writings which touch on water conservancy, Du mentions Li Bing but not Guankou Shen. In Shu taowu (by Zhang Tangying), on the other hand, Guankou Shen is quite visible, but Li Bing is nowhere to be found. Perhaps

It is clear that, like Langjun Shen, Guankou Shen was an important deity of the Shu Kingdoms. But how did he fare during the first decades of Song rule? Although there is no documentation on the stripping of his titles as there is for Langjun Shen, there is abundant evidence to show that he was detested by officials appointed by the Song court who were serving in Shu. Shi Jie (1005–45), in his account of Liu Sui, who served as panguan (judge) in Yongkang prefecture (where Guankou was located) between the years 1008 and 1016, provides this description:

The Shu natives were born askew to the west and did not receive the correct center qi [life breath] between heaven and earth. Therefore they have all kinds of absurd beliefs in demons and spirits. They have a temple to the god of Guankou at which they worship diligently and sacrifice extravagantly in the spring and autumn.

Guankou Shen, although well known among the people in 920, as shown by the Wang Yan story in Shu taowu, was not considered important by Du Guangting. Other references made to Guankou Shen in Shu taowu occurred after Du's death in 934. Of course there is the possibility that the data recorded in Shu taowu was not from that period but made up at a later date. It is impossible to resolve this problem here. For now, one may reasonably proceed on the assumption that the accounts of Guankou Shen in Shu taowu do reflect the reality of the period it purports to chronicle.
The passage goes on to praise Liu Sui for "putting a stop to yinsi [promiscuous or excessive cults or sacrifices]" by condemning and banning such local practices. The same attitude is demonstrated in Zeng Gong’s biography of Cheng Lin, who was the magistrate of Yizhou between the years 1027 and 1037:

Every year the Shu people gathered to sacrifice to the god of Guankou ... Cheng Lin executed the leaders and exiled hundreds of people. Generally speaking, accusations against these cults involved the use of the term "yinsi." After the year 1063, however, references to Guankou Shen are no longer accompanied by such outright condemnation.

From the parallels cited above, it seems certain that the Langjun Shen who was legitimized by the 1063 edict because he was taken to be Li Bing’s son, was none other than the previously detested Guankou Shen. It does not seem likely that besides Li Bing and Guankou Shen there was yet a third deity involved. A clue to the connection made between the names Guankou Shen, Li Bing’s son, and Erlang some time after the mid-eleventh century is provided by three different accounts concerning Cheng Lin.

As mentioned above, in Zeng Gong’s account the unruly people suppressed by Cheng Lin were paying tribute to Guankou Shen. An epitaph

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44 Shi Jie, Culaishi xiansheng wenji [A collection of essays by Shi Jie], annot. Chen Zhi’e (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984), pp. 105, 108. Zhang Bangji will still note more than a hundred years later, "I am often outraged by the proliferation of licentious temples [yincī 淫祠] in the south. I encounter them wherever I go." (Zhang Bangji, Muozhuang manlu, juan 8, p.8a.)

45 Zeng Gong, Long ping ji [Anthology of prosperity], in Zhao Tiehan, ed., Songshi ziliao cuibian [Collection of source materials on Song history] (Taipei: Wenhui Chubanshe, 1967), vol. 9, 813a. In his preface Zeng Gong states that his book records events between the reign of Taizong and that of Yingzong, which ended in 1067. The book thus must have been written between that time and Zeng’s death in 1083.

46 Some scholars have assumed that Guankou Shen was simply another name for the deified Li Bing (Sang Xiuyun, “Li Bing yu Erlang Shen,” p.666). But given the /OVER
for Cheng Lin written by Ouyang Xiu (d.1072) some time between 1057 and 1072, however, notes that the cause for Cheng Lin’s crackdown was “a wicked man [or demon, yaoren], who declared himself to be Li Bing’s son and gathered some hundred people ...”[47] In these accounts, apparently written about the same event by two different authors, the deities around which the unlawful rallied were Guankou Shen and Li Bing’s son, respectively. It is unclear whether Ouyang Xiu was directly quoting the “wicked man’s” declaration as it was made when Cheng Lin was posted there (between 1027 and 1035), or whether the reference to “Li Bing’s son” was Ouyang Xiu’s later interpretation. In any case, these are the earliest documentation which show a link between Guankou Shen and Li Bing’s son. The date of Ouyang Xiu’s account (some time after 1057, when Cheng Lin died, and before 1072, when Ouyang Xiu died) is very close to 1063, when the Song court legitimized Langjun Shen as Li Bing’s son in response to a petition. The links present in these documents further confirm the possibility that Langjun Shen is simply another name for Guankou Shen.

In the Huangchaoleiyuan (A Categorized Account of Events of the Song Dynasty) compiled during or soon after the Zhenghe period (1111–18), the account of Cheng Lin’s policies says that “an outlaw feigning the likeness of the god Guankou Erlang gathered together some hundred
young rascals who took to making up their own official titles and went about wearing military uniforms ... "48 In this version of the account of Cheng Lin's deeds, Guankou Erlang is the name of the deity around which the unlawful rallied. The linking of Guankou Shen and Erlang into Guankou Erlang also appeared a few decades earlier in the Shiwu jiyuan.49 This linkage was assumed in numerous later accounts during the Song. Clearly, it seems, not until as late as the second half of the eleventh century did a common belief develop among Song officials that Guankou Shen's name was Erlang, and that he was Li Bing's son.50

Erlang and the Consolidation of Song Power

From the above analysis it is clear that in Guankou a deity distinct from Li Bing had once existed. No trace of him has yet been found in Tang sources, but as the Tang empire disintegrated and Shu came under the rule of a succession of independent kingdoms the god apparently loomed large. During the Song dynasty he was at first suppressed by the imperial court, but later reinstated and promoted. He has been recorded variously by the names Guankou Shen, Langjun Shen, Guankou Erlang, or simply Erlang. Of these names, Guankou Shen appears both when the deity was persecuted by the Song court and after he was reinstated; the others were used only during the period in which the deity was esteemed.

The 1063 edict marked a most dramatic turning point in the status of this deity in light of the extent to which his cult had previously been persecuted. This policy of persecution was consistent between 1008 and 1037 or even beyond, as reported by a succession of officials such as Liu Sui who served in Shu from 1008 to 1016, Cheng Lin who served between 1027 and 1037, and apparently even by Zhao Bian who served there during the Qingli period (1041–48). Zhao Bian made the following remarks about his stint as Transportation Director (zhuanyunshi 轉運使) of Chengdu:

Each year there are lazy drifting riffraff who, in the name of worshiping gods and spirits, solicit money and goods. Some two or three hundred people gather in the streets acting out characters bearing titles of ‘generals’, ‘officers’, and ‘soldiers’. Hoisting flags and banners, they parade around brandishing swords and spears. There are women dressed in men’s clothes and men dressed in women’s clothes. The procession is heralded with music and starts out with a variety of acrobatic and other performances.

They carry on like this for three or four nights non-stop. Although official notices have been posted to prohibit such behavior, these practices are nonetheless deep-rooted customs of this far away region and cannot be stopped quickly. I propose that the government establish formal laws, charge those who lead in the violation of the ban as lawbreakers, and send them into exile outside the borders of Chuan [Sichuan]. Prosecutions will be carried out by this office every six months.52

48 Jiang Shaoyu 江少虞, Huangchao leiyuan (pref. 1118), in Songfenshi congkan [Fragrance Recital Studio collection] (Wujin Tongshi Songfenshi, 1916–22), vols 3–14, 23:1b–2a. The meaning of the text here is ambiguous: “zuó Guankou Erlang Shen xiāng” 作灌口二郎神像 could be interpreted as “making a picture of ...” or “feigning the likeness of ...”. This phrase is also used, however, in the description of the court ritual of the Latter Shu Kingdom in the above-mentioned Shu taowu. In a more literal translation, the Shu taowu text says, “Court entertainers zuó 作 [do, or make] Guankou Shen duì [formation, a lining up of characters] two dragons fighting xiāng 象 [likeness, or picture]” (Zhang Tangying, Shu taowu, 29b).
49 Gao Cheng, Shiwu jiyuan, 7:22. For the date of the Shiwu jiyuan see n.36.
50 It is not clear whether, at the time, the local common people also believed that Erlang, or Guankou Shen, was Li Bing's son. How the name Erlang emerged here is still a mystery, though there are several possibilities. One is that Guankou Shen was already nicknamed Erlang by the local people before he was legitimized, but the name did not appear in writing until the god became more widely known. At the same time it is also likely that Guankou Shen itself was already a composite of more than one deity, and that Erlang was one of his manifestations. Another possibility is that Erlang had been a separate being all along, and that he was merged with Guankou Shen only when the deity was incorporated into Li Bing's worship. Still another possibility is that the name Erlang was simply made up when Guankou Shen (called Langjun Shen in the 1063 edict) was proclaimed Li Bing's son, and that its resemblance to any other Erlang that might have existed was pure coincidence.
51 Zhao Bian writes that he had held official posts in Shu four times, beginning during the Qingli period (Zhao Bian, “Chengdu guójùn jīxù” [Preface to a collection of notes about Chengdu from antiquity to the present], in Yang Sheng'ān, Quanshu yuwen zhi, 30:13a–b, at 13a). His first position in Shu was Zhuanyunshi (Chang Bide, Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin [Index to Song biographies] (Taipei: Dingwen Shuju, 1974–76), p.321). Therefore it can be assumed that his description of the situation in Shu quoted here was from that time (1041–48).
Although in this account by Zhao Bian the name of a specific god is not mentioned, the scenes he describes closely approximate other accounts of the rituals connected with the Guankou Shen/Guankou Erlang cult. The biannual prosecution mentioned is also consistent with Shi Jie’s account that the Guankou temple was tended to in the spring and the autumn. Zhao also notes that these cult activities were widespread in a number of districts (zhoubu) under his administration. Although it is possible that Zhao Bian’s proposed measures were aimed at a variety of local cults, the Guankou Shen cult most certainly would have been among those included.53

Official promotion or banning of local deities as a means of political control was not unique to the Song,54 although recent scholarship has shown both a more invasive policy of the Song court with regard to local cults, and a willingness of local officials to negotiate the status of local cults if they seemed powerful and popular enough to warrant such treatment. In Changing Gods in Medieval China, Valery Hansen has argued that the Southern Song 南宋 court and its officials were quite willing to come to an understanding with the supporters of local cults which otherwise ranked low in their estimation.55 This understanding would take the form of a streamlining of the cult, the insertion of the deity into the official pantheon, and the award of an official plaque of recognition that would legitimize the cult. The court’s policy towards the Guankou Shen after 1063 seem to fit this pattern. The policy towards this deity during the early years of the dynasty, however, shows that there was little willingness to legitimize what was seen as a threat to the Song court’s control over the country. In order to better understand the harshness of the court’s initial policy we will have to go back to study the origins of this cult, its particular role in Shu, and its threatening potentialities.

“Shu is famous for being difficult to rule,” observed Zhang Yong in a poem expressing his feelings about being reappointed to Shu by the emperor.56 Song rule in its early decades was challenged by frequent turmoil in Shu. Rebellions on a notable scale occurred in 965, 966, 973, 981, 993, 997, and 999. Many of these uprisings demonstrated a clear drive towards re-establishing Shu independence. In the year 965 Quan Shixiong 全師雄 led a rebellion of over one hundred thousand men and declared himself “Xing Shu Dawang” 興蜀大王, the Great King for the Revival of Shu.57

The largest rebellion in early Song, led by Wang Xiaobo 王小波 and Li Shun 李順, established the Great Shu State after capturing Chengdu in 994. Li Shun declared himself “Da Shu Wang” 大蜀王, King of the Great Shu.58 According to the poet Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210), who wrote more than a hundred years after the rebellion had been crushed, Li Shun was popularly believed to be a prince of the ruling house of the Latter Shu. Still an infant after its fall, he was left to be raised among the common people, who later followed his leadership because of this affinity.59 Li Shun’s rebellion was suppressed after two years, but small pockets of rebels fought on for several more years. Shortly after, in the year 1,000, another insurrection broke out, led by Wang Jun, who again established the state of the Great Shu.60
Li Shun’s rebellion, which had originated near the Guankou area,\(^{61}\) may have had some connection to the Guankou Shen cult. The accounts about Cheng Lin cited above, in quoting his own explanation for the harsh measures he instituted against those celebrating Guankou Shen, state:

“Because in the past Li Shun was not punished, he caused great chaos,”\(^{62}\) and “Li Shun arose from this (Guankou shen) cult. Cutting his roots now will guarantee decades of peace in Shu.”\(^{63}\)

Traces of a Deity Rooted in Early Shu Civilization

What was the origin of this regional cult which had such a hold on the Shu people and which posed such a threat to the central rulers of China? No trace of the existence of Guankou Shen before the Five Dynasties period (907–60) has yet been found. His powers were related to taming floods, but as argued earlier, he was a separate entity from Li Bing, who was by more orthodox accounts the man responsible for the flood control and irrigation project at Guankou, known today as Dujiangyan. Unless evidence of Guankou Shen before the Five Dynasties period is found, we must conclude that either the deity suddenly emerged out of nowhere during the Five Dynasties period, or that the rise of independent Shu states had the effect of reviving some elements of local tradition that had hitherto been dormant. In any case the key to understanding the power of Guankou Shen, or Erlang, may lie in an examination of how the Dujiangyan project at Guankou was built.

Zhang Xunliao’s study of the dates and locations of various parts of this project suggests that the legend of restraining the dragon, a hallmark of Guankou Shen/Erlang, originated in the early tenth century. Zhang argues that one of the key components of the project, the narrow gorge called Baopingkou 寶瓶口 (Precious Bottle Opening), was not opened by Li Bing but was the result of a huge flood in the year 910. This flood was written about by Du Guangting (850–933).\(^{64}\) According to Zhang’s interpretation of Du’s text, the flood completely destroyed the original weir (called Lidui) that Li Bing had built, washing it several thousand feet down river to form a new mound. At the same time the flood cut through a corner of Jianshan 涇山 mountain to form a new channel which, through added human effort, became the basis for the present channel called Precious Bottle Opening, through which one branch (the Neijiang 内江, or Inner River) of the divided Min river flows down to the Chengdu plains. This change provided much better control of the water flow. To support his dating of this major alteration of Li Bing’s original structure, Zhang refers to the account of “the pillar where the dragon is shackled.” As previously mentioned, this reference, which is part of a passage describing the role of Guankou Shen in the Latter Shu court ritual recorded in the Shu taiou, is the earliest known example of the concept of a dragon being fettered to a pillar.\(^{65}\) Zhang sees this as an indication that a new legend originated during this time, reflecting the newly gained control

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\(^{61}\) For a detailed discussion of the place where the rebellion originated, see Wang Xiaoping Li Shun qi yi ziliao baobian [A collection of documents regarding the uprising of Wang Xiaobo and Li Shun] (compiled by the history department of Sichuan University) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1978), pp.113–26.

\(^{62}\) Zeng Gong, Long ping ji, 8:13b.

\(^{63}\) Jiang Shaoyu, Huangchaoleiyuan, 23:2a.

\(^{64}\) In Fu Zhenshang (fl.1607), Shuzao yousheng lu [Elegant prose from Shu] (Chengdu: Bashu Chubanshe, 1985), 1:20a–b.

\(^{65}\) Zhang Tangying, Shu taiou, 2:9b.
over the river.\footnote{Zhang Xunliao, “Li Bing zuo Lidui de weizhi he Baopingkou xingcheng de niandai xintan” [A new probe into the location of Lidui built by Li Bing and the date of the formation of the “Precious Bottle Opening”], Zhongguo lishi yanjiu, 1982.4: 93-6.}

The problem with this conclusion is that Zhang assumes that the “restraining of the dragon” is a new element in the legends about Li Bing. But from the evidence cited earlier in this study, Guankou Shen, to whom “shackling of the dragon” is connected in the Shu taowu, had been a deity unrelated to Li Bing until a century and a half later. Besides, it is questionable whether Guankou Shen could have arisen as a result of the 910 flood (and the presumed “new control”) and gained such popularity so quickly that by 920 the Shu king, Wang Yan, was likened to him.\footnote{Zhang Tangying, Shu taowu, 1:13a.}

To explore the possibility that Guankou Shen had earlier origins, other evidence must be examined. Although there are accounts of local Shu rulers building flood control projects before Qin’s rule, these accounts are generally seen as mere legend. In contrast, Li Bing is regarded as a reliable historical figure around whom legends developed because of his role in Shu hydraulic works.\footnote{Figure 5

Bishamen Tianwang 吠沙門天王 (Vaisravana), anonymous, ninth century, fragment of a painting found on the base of a statue pedestal in Foguangsi 佛光寺 (Temple of Buddha’s Light), Wutaishan 五台山, Shanxi 山西 province. Other painting fragments found on the same surface depict demon-quelling scenes which contain pictorial antecedents to the extant soushan tu paintings. Both pictorial and literary evidence strongly suggests that Bishamen Tianwang was the commanding deity in the earliest known soushan tu paintings.} A few studies, however, suggest that Li Bing might actually have been a later contributor to the Dujiangyan project. If so, Guankou Shen or Guankou Erlang might indeed have represented a tradition that was rooted in the earlier indigenous Shu culture.

Tong Enzheng 童恩正 has cited early accounts of the Shu kings as evidence of pre-Qin local efforts to divert the Min river into the Tuo river 沱江. According to the Shuwang benji 蜀王本記 (Chronicles of the Shu Kings) written by Yang Xiong 杨雄 of the Han 漢 dynasty, the Shu emperor Wangdi 王帝 (named Duyu 杜宇) appointed Bieling 毕棱 as his minister. Plagued by rampant floods which were devastating the countryside, Wangdi
ordered Bieling to cut an opening through Yu Shan 玉山 (Jade Mountain). This the minister succeeded in doing, and he brought security to the people. Later Bieling acceded to the throne of Shu and became known as the Emperor Kaiming開明. This account is also found in the mid-fourth-century Huayang guozhi 華陽國志, which says that Kaiming opened up Yulei Shan 玉樑山 (Jade Fort Mountain) in order to eliminate floods.69 Tong Enzheng argues that this effort laid the foundation for the great Duijiangyan project under Li Bing some three hundred years later.70

Yu Quanyu argues that one of the Duijiangyan project's key components, the so-called Precious Bottle Opening, a narrow slit chiseled through the solid rock of a mountain to channel water from the Min river to the Tuo, was in fact the opening at the Jade Mountain carved out under the auspices of emperors Wang and Kaiming. According to his view, the assumption that this particular part of the project had been built by Li Bing actually originated during the Song Dynasty from a misreading of earlier texts.71 Yu Quanyu's opinion touched off a heated debate on the subject of exactly who did build the project. Although Yu's opinion was reported to have won majority support at a conference in China in 1984, the issue is far from settled.72

Regardless of whether a particular portion of the Duijiangyan water project was built earlier by the local people of Shu or later under Li Bing, studies published in recent years shed light on two important considerations: one, in all probability some form of waterworks were built before Li Bing's time, and secondly, even if Li Bing is credited as "chief engineer" of the Duijiangyan project, many of its outstanding features exhibit prominent characteristics of indigenous Shu culture.73 So far it has not been possible to establish any direct connection between the myths associated with these earlier exploits and the worship of Guankou Shen, or Erlang, but there are a few clues which point to possible links of the deity to aspects of the indigenous Shu culture.

One of Erlang's special features is a vertical third eye in the middle of his forehead. It was seen on the statue of Erlang in the Er Wang Temple in Guankou in the 1940s.74 This image is not limited to Guankou. Local gazetteers of many other areas of Sichuan cite temples called the Chuanzhu 川主 (or Chuanwang 川王) Temple (or Palace), meaning the Temple of the Lord of Shu. Ning Xiang 宁湘, who was in charge of compiling the Qionglai County 邛崃縣 gazetteer in 1922, quotes descriptions of the deity to whom these Lord of Shu temples were dedicated, in which mention is made of a vertical third eye in the middle of the forehead:

He Shaoji 何紹基 wrote a memorial to the court stating that this [feature] should be corrected. But the court concluded that the strange three-eyed statue had been honored for a long time, and it could not be changed. Later, statues were made in the form of a handsome youth, avoiding this strange appearance.75

Ning Xiang also reports that there were many “ancient temples” in Shu housing a god with a blue face and a vertical third eye in the middle of the forehead:

68 There are scholars who believe that even Li Bing could simply have been a legendary figure (Yuan Ke, Gu shenhuaxuanshi [Interpretations of selected ancient mythology] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1982), p.501).
69 Chang Qu, Huayang guozhi, 3:182. For the date of Huayang guozhi see Liu Lin's preface on p.2.
71 Yu Quanyu, “Baopingkou he Tuojiang shi Li Bing yiqian kaizai de” [The Precious Bottle Opening and the Tuo river were created before Li Bing], Libi yanjiu, 4 May 1978.
72 Li Lu, “Duijiangyan chuangjian zhi mi” [The mystery of Duijiangyan's creation], People's Daily (overseas edition), 6 November 1988. Some scholars have argued that the hazy case for a Kaiming antecedent to Li Bing is unsupported archaeologically. See Sage, Ancient Sichuan and the unification of China, p.263, n.93.
74 On my trip to Guanzian in 1983 I visited all the relevant sites. The statue of Erlang seemed rather new, probably rebuilt after the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). In the 1940s Wei Juxian 衛聚賢 visited the Er Wang Temple and reported that the Erlang statue had a vertical third eye (Wei Juxian, “Erlang,” Shouwen yuankan 3.9 [1942]: 129).
75 Ning Xiang, Qionglai xianzhi [Xionglai county gazetteer] (1922), 2: “Jianzhi zhi” [Records on buildings], 16a-b. The page numbers in this book begin from page 1 in each new category.
forehead. As for the function of these Lord of Chuan temples, some of the gazetteers explain that they are temples dedicated to Li Bing and his son, Erlang. Others say that they are simply dedicated to Li Bing’s son Erlang. Ning Xiang cites various claims regarding the Lord of Chuan’s identity as Li Bing or his son, Zhao Yu, the Jade Emperor’s nephew, Zhang Xian 張仙, and Yang Jian 杨戬, but dismisses all of them as unreliable. He argues that no one but Cancong 螭蟄, one of the early Shu Kings could have been the original inspiration for the worship of the Lord of Chuan.

Ning Xiang bases his argument on a passage in the Huayang guozhi, which he quotes very briefly. The whole passage reads as follows:

When the Zhou 周 state lost its mandate to rule, Shu proclaimed its own kingdom. There was a Duke of Shu named Cancong, who was first to be King. His eye (or eyes) is (or are) vertical [qi mu zong 其目縱]. When he died he was encased in a coffin made of stone. His people followed his example. So stone coffins were popularly known as ‘the tombs of the vertical-eyed people’.

It is not clear whether Cancong’s two eyes were so slanted that they looked vertical, or whether he had a third eye that was vertical. It is also not clear whether his people followed him only in burial practice or also in appearance, possibly painting or tattooing a third eye on their foreheads. That stone coffins were popularly known as the “tombs of the vertical-eyed people” indicates that Cancong may not have been the only one who exhibited this anomaly. In any case, the idea of a vertical third eye is one characteristic which may have filtered down through the ages, providing a link between the latter-day Erlang and early Shu civilization.

If the vertical eye seems like a mere coincidence, or at best a very tenuous link, there are other characteristics of Erlang which strengthen the connection. Although the Erlang cast in the role of Li Bing’s son was deified, he does not exhibit any personal traits which depart from the conventional models of meritorious officials worthy of imperial recognition. The Erlang in the Ming novel Journey to the West, however, is very different. His power base is also at Guankou, and many of his characteristics parallel the cultural traits of the indigenous Shu people of ancient times.

In Journey to the West, Erlang’s family name is Yang, not Li. According to the Huayang guozhi, Yang is the most popular clan name in many areas of western Shu. During Qin and Han times (221 BC – AD 220) this region was still largely populated by the indigenous Shu people. According to several studies these people were ethnic Qiang 羌 and Di 氐. That the Yang clans of Shu were in all probability members of these indigenous ethnic groups and not immigrants from central China is suggested by a passage in the late-third-century Bowu zhi (Records of a Wide Range of Things). It tells of a strange creature in Shu Shan 蜀山 (Shu Mountain), ape-like but walking upright, who abducts women and makes them his wives. The children born look exactly like humans and all have the surname Yang. “Therefore today in the western part of Shu there are many whose name is Yang. All are descendants of the ape-like creature.”

Chang Qu, Huayang guozhi, 3:181.

In 1986 a number of large human figures cast in bronze, along with thousands of other artifacts, were unearthed at a site called Sanxingdui in Guanghan county 廣漢縣, Sichuan province. These excavated figures, nearly 4,000 years old, were contemporaneous with the Shang 商 dynasty. While exhibiting an equally high level of development in bronze casting, they nevertheless display characteristics and features of their own, differing from those of the Shang. These finds bear testimony to the existence of a highly advanced Shu culture distinct from that of central China. Some of the figures have protruding eyes, others, a "cloud-shaped" design on their forehead. These anomalies have been interpreted by some scholars as possibly exemplifying the "vertical eye(s)" noted in Huayang guozhi (by Chang Qu). Observations to this effect appear in the works of Fan Xiaoping, "Guanghan Sanxingdui qingtong renxian zai meishushi shang de diweii" [The art historical significance of the bronze human figures at Sanxingdui], Sichuan wenwu, 1988:6: 45–7, at 46, and Fang Zhenning, "Dingshengqi de Changjiang qingtong wenming" [Bronze civilization of the Yangtse valley], Yibshu jia (Taipei), 1988:6: 282–94, at 292, among others. For detailed reports of the excavations see Wenwu, 1987:10: 1–15, and 1989:5: 1–20.

Chang Qu, Huayang guozhi, 3:238, 261, 279, and 282.


Zheng Zhen 81 (1808–64), Zunyi fu zhi [Gazetteer of Zunyi prefecture] (1841), 8:you 夏, 16b. In this book there are two pages numbered 16. The second one is written as “you 16” (again 16).

Zhong Chaoxu 鍾朝旭, Nanxi xianzhi [Nanxi county gazetteer] (1937), 4. Another opinion is that the Lord of Chuan is Zhao Yu, who is one of the three versions of Erlang’s identity discussed on pp.7–10 of this paper (Zheng Zhen, Zunyi fuzhi, 8:19a–b).


It is also possible to translate this line as “He has a vertical eye.”

Chang Qu, Huayang guozhi, 3:181.

In 1986 a number of large human figures cast in bronze, along with thousands of other artifacts, were unearthed at a site called Sanxingdui 三星堆 in Guanghan county 廣漢縣, Sichuan province. These excavated figures, nearly 4,000 years old, were contemporaneous with the Shang 商 dynasty. While exhibiting an equally high level of development in bronze casting, they nevertheless display characteristics and features of their own, differing from those of the Shang. These finds bear testimony to the existence of a highly advanced Shu culture distinct from that of central China. Some of the figures have protruding eyes, others, a “cloud-shaped” design on their forehead. These anomalies have been interpreted by some scholars as possibly exemplifying the “vertical eye(s)” noted in Huayang guozhi (by Chang Qu). Observations to this effect appear in the works of Fan Xiaoping, “Guanghan Sanxingdui qingtong renxian zai meishushi shang de diweii” [The art historical significance of the bronze human figures at Sanxingdui], Sichuan wenwu, 1988:6: 45–7, at 46, and Fang Zhenning, “Dingshengqi de Changjiang qingtong wenming” [Bronze civilization of the Yangtse valley], Yibshu jia (Taipei), 1988:6: 282–94, at 292, among others. For detailed reports of the excavations see Wenwu, 1987:10: 1–15, and 1989:5: 1–20.
works in Shu there is also one person (or deity) named Yang Mo, who “had magic powers and was capable of taming dragons and tigers.” Du Guangting is quoted in *Yudi jisheng* as saying that Yang Mo was responsible for opening the Yangmo (or Yangma) river for irrigation, and that the river was named after him.86

Besides having the family name Yang, the Erlang in *Journey to the West* is the nephew of the Jade Emperor. This relationship also has some parallels in early legends about the origin of the Shu people.87 According to several early accounts of Shu, the Yellow Emperor’s son married a daughter of the Shu Shan (Shu Mountain) clan. She gave birth to the Emperor Zhuanxu, whose descendants (zhishu支庶, meaning not the main lineage, but a side lineage) were enfeoffed in Shu.88 This relationship, perceived from the other side of the marriage, as it were, is reflected in the Qiang people’s creation myth, which says that a daughter of the God of Heaven married the only human on earth and gave birth to a boy and a girl.89 There is no way to know how far back in time this myth, which is recorded in the twentieth century, can be placed. The striking parallels are, nevertheless, worth noting.

The image of Erlang portrayed in *Journey to the West*, with hound in tow, bow and arrows in hand, is that of a hunter. This portrayal matches not only the lifestyle of the indigenous Shu people of ancient times as described in early sources, but that of the Qiang people, who remained a distinctive ethnic group after Shu had become assimilated into the culture of central China. These general associations fit into the overall configurations of Erlang as part of the ancient native Shu tradition. Pictorially, however, the bow, arrows, and hound can be traced through more concrete instances to another source.90

Another hallmark of the Erlang in *Journey to the West* is his weapon, a three-pointed lance with a double blade. In his *History of Chinese Weaponry*, Zhou Wei tells of a lance used by the barbarians in Xikang 西康 (between modern Sichuan and Tibet) which seems to fit the description.91 A three-pointed lance is also mentioned in connection with the deity housed in the Lord of Chuan Temple of Gaoyanshan Mountain, whose descendants passed by the temple on his way to sack Zunyi in 1642, the deity, leveling his three-pointed lance at the rebel, threatened him.92

The lance in this context ties together two different strands of the Erlang legends. It links the Erlang in *Journey to the West* directly with the Lord of Chuan, who has been generally interpreted as part of the Li Bing tradition (i.e., as being connected with Li Bing and/or his son). This connection suggests a reversal of the hypothesis that Erlang derived from, or was another manifestation of, or a “split-off” (fenshen 分身, as Sang Xiuyun 桑秀雲 puts it) of Li Bing. It is altogether possible that after Guankou Erlang was legitimized as Li Bing’s son, his temples were eventually considered by some writers to have been Li Bing’s originally.

An interesting example of this hypothetical reversal of time sequence is that
94 Peng Xun 彭洵, Guanji chugao, 2:21b; also in He Tinglu, Guanzhai xiangtu zhi [Local history of Guanzhai] (1907), 2:17b. Both of these are nineteenth-century sources, but the authors seem to be quoting some other source which is not specified. The Chongde Temple (Chongde miao) was in existence at least as early as Tang times. Shu bei ji (thirteenth century) lists the title of a text, Chongde miao ji [Chongde Temple]. Unfortunately the wording of the essay is not provided. Wang Xiangzi, [Local history of Guanxian] (1907), 2:17b.

The difference between Erlang’s identity in Journey to the West and that found in most Song accounts may be explained in part by the nature of the
texts themselves. Although his image in *Journey to the West* emerged in written form later than the version that Erlang was Li Bing’s son, its origins could have been much earlier. The reason why this earlier oral tradition did not surface in the writings of the Song may have something to do with the special status of Shu in relation to the Song, mentioned earlier. Most of the Song authors were scholar-officials who were interested in orthodox records of history that served the central power of the state. They were perhaps more inclined to focus their attention on Li Bing in relation to the Shu waterworks and to ignore other information as absurd and unorthodox. The authors of the Ming romances, by contrast, garnered much of their inspiration from popular myths and legends.

**The Omnipotent Demon-Queller**

Regardless of what the early origins of Guankou Erlang were, in the Song dynasty the deity underwent a transformation from a dreaded local cult figure into a valorous guardian of the state. The imperial edict of 1063, discussed earlier, signifies a turning point in the official perception of the local deity and a shift in the meanings attributed to him.99 As mentioned before, during the first few decades of the eleventh century, Guankou Shen (not yet called Guankou Erlang) was cited as an example of how the people of Shu believed in *yao* (demons). It should be noted that *yao* is one of the common terms of opprobrium which the Song emperors and officials used in referring to outlaws and rebels.100 Imperial recognition of this local deity, Guankou Shen, came only after the Song court had consolidated its rule over Shu, and thus could be interpreted as a compromise between the “center” and the “periphery.” The act of extending imperial patronage to the local deity enabled

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98 Zhao Daoyi, *Lidai shenxian lidao tongjian* [A comprehensive record of true immortals of all ages], in the *Daozang* (Shanghai: Hanfeiliou facsimile, 1923), vols.139-49, 10:9a. The date of this work is not clear. It could be late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The preface says that the materials included in the book end at the Song.
99 For a detailed discussion of the 1063 edict see the earlier section, “Evidence for an earlier deity unrelated to Li Bing,” pp.12-13.
100 Use of the term *yao* (demons) in connection with events in Shu include the following examples: “Demon Bandits” (*yaozai* 妖贼) as the title of a chapter on rebels (*Zeng Gong, Long ping ji*, 20:10b); “in 973 … demon bandit Li Xian 李仙”
gathered ten thousand men..." (Li Tao, Xu zizhi tongjian changbian, 14:1b); "in 981... demon bandits Wang Xi 王禧 and others..." (Li Tao, ibid., 22.19a); "in 994... the emperor sent an envoy and instructed [Bin斌], 'After all the evil demons have been..." (Li Tao, ibid., 10:4b-5a); and "in 995... the remnant demons (yuyao 餘妖) of Ba 巴 and Shu 王..." (Li Tao, ibid., 36:4b-5a). Another example without a clear location states: "Demon Zhang Long'er 張龍兒 and twenty-four others were executed in 966." In this case Zhang Long'er and several of his accomplices were said to be "Yizu 羿族, a term most often used to refer to the indigenous groups in southwestern Shu (Li Tao, ibid., 7:23b).

101 Xu Song, Song buiyao jigao, p.835 ("Li," 20.141–2).

102 Gao Cheng, Shiwu jiyuan, 7:22. According to the Yi jian zhi 材劍誌, "The record of the listener, Erlang's temple in the capital was built in 1117, when a young child riding on a hunting hound appeared and announced that he was sent by his brother whose temple at Guankou had just burned down and that he wished to have one built in the capital (Hong Mai 虞機, Yi jian zhi Yi 創簡志, 1981, p.439).


104 This refers to the killing of animals in sacrifice to the god.

105 Hong Mai, Yi jian zhi, pp.508–9. Zhu Xi 朱熹 also mentions a similar story in his remarks about Guankou Erlang, the first part of which is quoted earlier in this paper. A colorful nuance in Zhu Xi's account is that the god told Zhang Jun that the vegetarian offering appropriate to his Daoist title had rendered him powerless (Li Jingde, "Zhuzi yulei," 3:53–4).

the central government to generate popular support from the adherents of the cult, and at the same time implied the court's own divine investiture. By co-opting Guankou Erlang into the ranks of orthodoxy the rulers transformed his symbolic meaning from one that signified regional identity and centrifugal dissent to that of a guardian of centralized imperial rule; in other words, Erlang was transformed from demon into demon-queller in the eyes of the Song court.

In the years following the 1063 edict, Guankou Erlang enjoyed continuous promotion. His rank was elevated from "bou (marquis) to gong (duke), and then, in 1103, to wang (king) with four preceding honorific characters, surpassing that of his supposed father, Li Bing, whose Wang title had only two. In the year 1118 the Emperor Huizong 徽宗 bestowed on Erlang the Daoist title Zhaohui Lingxian Zhenren 昭惠靈顯真人. While this title was intended by Emperor Huizong, moved by his well-known infatuation with Daoism, to elevate Erlang, others, as we shall see, felt quite differently about the title.

As his stature rose, Guankou Erlang's influence spread far beyond the borders of Shu. According to the Shiwu jiyuan, a temple dedicated to him was established in the Song capital, Kaifeng 開封, during the Yuanfeng reign. Meng Yuanlao's 孟元老 reminiscences of life in Kaifeng from 1103 to 1127 include an account of how Guankou Erlang's birthday was celebrated "most extravagantly" at his temple, with tens of thousands of offerings, elaborate performances of music, dance, and drama, and breathtaking displays of acrobatics, martial arts and magic.

The foregoing analysis shows how closely the treatment of this god by the Song court was linked to concerns of maintaining power. The sequence of events from the suppression of the Erlang cult to the integration of a modified Erlang into an imperially sanctioned pantheon of gods demonstrated a switch in the perception of the dynasty's security. Later the growing external threat to the dynasty from the North opened a new field in which this god could show his recrafted benign powers.

In the year 1127 the Tartars from the north defeated the Song and took its capital, Kaifeng. The court moved to the south of the Yangtze river and established its new capital at Hangzhou 杭州. The accounts of Guankou Erlang in connection with Song attempts to recover its lost territories may explain, in part, the further empowerment of the god during the Southern Song.

In 1130 the Southern Song suffered military losses in Shaanxi. Zhang Jun 張浚, one of the Song commanders known for his strong views on the need to resist the invaders, moved his troops to Langzhong 朗中 in Shu. After he prayed for help at Erlang's temple there, the god appeared in his dream and said that in the past when he had the title wang and enjoyed "sacrifices in blood" he had been capable of intervening in human affairs; since his title had been changed to (the Daoist) zhenren, however, he had remained aloof from the human world and no longer had the power to help. Zhang Jun then petitioned the court, which issued an order to restore the god's former title of wang.

A less dramatic account of this episode is recorded in the Song buiyao under
the heading, “Langjun Shen’s Shrine,” discussed above. In this version Zhang Jun simply offers the opinion that the title zhenren belonged to the realm of the immortals and was not invested with the connotation of the “miraculous might of the guardian of the realm.” This remark sounds very much like covert criticism of Emperor Huizong, who had been responsible for changing the god’s title to Zhenren, and during whose reign north China fell to the Tartars. According to the Song biyiao, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127-62) later took Zhang Jun’s advice and restored the god’s original title in 1131.107

Five years later, in 1136, two additional characters were affixed to Guankou Erlang’s title. Then, in 1137, he presumably acquired a wife, who was given the title of fiuren, and even two sons, who were both accorded the title of bou (marquis). An accompanying god in his temple named Guo Sheren 郭舍人 also received the title of bou. By the year 1157, Guankou Erlang had accumulated a total of eight characters before his rank of wang, twice as many as those bestowed on Li Bing.108

References to Guankou Erlang in the second half of the twelfth century reveal a god who was offered lavish “sacrifices in blood.” Hong Mai writes, some time between 1195 and 1201:

The Chongde Temple of Yongkang prefecture is the temple of Guankou Shen. He has attained the rank of wang with eight preceding characters …. The Shu people tend to him very diligently. Whether during regular periodic worship or when seeking specific favors, people, regardless of wealth or poverty, kill sheep as offerings. As many as forty thousand sheep are sacrificed yearly. Each sheep is taxed 500 coins, bringing in enormously lucrative revenues for the government.109

Several other Southern Song writers mention the same form and scale of sacrifice, although some assume that the sacrifice was made to Li Bing, or Li Bing and his son, and cite Li Bing’s merits in Shu to explain such extravagant treatment.110 But the practice of making bountiful offerings had clearly been an old ritual associated with Guankou Shen before he was linked to Li Bing (and it may have later included Li Bing after he became, as it were, the “father”). Back in the early eleventh century, when the Guankou Shen cult was condemned and banned as “licentious worship” (yinsi), Shi Jie, who went to Shu in 1038, wrote that the deity was being “tended very diligently by the local people, who made frequent sacrifices to him in the spring and autumn. The profusion of the offerings are calculated in the tens of thousands.”111 Unfortunately this writer does not specify whether it was sheep that were sacrificed. Except for this detail, these two accounts of the local Guankou Shen cult during its persecution by the Song court and after its official promotion are almost identical.

By the time Hong Mai wrote in the last years of the twelfth century, Guankou Erlang's cult had already spread far beyond the borders of Shu. One Song account tells of sheep being sacrificed to Guankou Erlang in the Hangzhou area (called Jixiang 江鄉 in the original text). The writer describes this as following the traditional Shu practice.112
It is also during the twelfth century that the title Qingyuan Zhenjun (True Master of the Pure Source) first appeared. One of the earliest instances of this title occurs in a poem by Yang Wujiu entitled “Erlang Shen: On the Birthday of Qingyuan” (briefly mentioned in the discussion of the legends of Zhao Yu earlier in this paper). The poem clearly indicates that Yang Wujiu understood that this Erlang Shen, whose title was Qingyuan, was connected to Li Bing. The title also occurs in a passage from a now lost portion of the Yijian zhi, quoted in the Yudi jisheng (1221). It says that in the year 1161 the Jin (the Tartar dynasty in the north) ruler Wanyan Liang hung up a writing brush to elicit a prediction regarding his future. The brush wrote a poem spelling out his doom. When asked who presented the poem, the brush answered “Qingyuan Zhenjun, who is the Guankou Shenwang [Divine King of Guankou].”113 This story is quoted in Yudi jisheng under the heading “Guankou Shen of Chongde Temple” in the chapter on Yongkang prefecture. The story reflects Song hatred of its enemy in the north and the popular belief in the protective power possessed by the deity. It also confirms the link between the title Qingyuan Zhenjun and Guankou Shen, whose temple in Shu was the Chongde Temple. This temple has nothing to do with the Zhao Yu legend.

The origin of the title Qingyuan Zhenjun, however, is still not clear. No documentation of a court edict bestowing this title has been found. As mentioned before, in the enfeoffment record of Langjun Shen (Guankou Erlang) of Yongkang prefecture in Song Huiyao, the god’s title was changed by

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113 Wang Xiangzhi, Yudi jisheng, 151:12a.

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Figure 7

Erlang Shen, anonymous, sixteenth/seventeenth century, detail of hand scroll, ink on paper, The Art Museum, Princeton University. In this painting Erlang is dressed in the robe and cap of a civilian official instead of military garb, and he is seated on a huchuang (barbarian bed).
Emperor Huizong from 王 to 神人 (the initial rank in the hierarchy of Daoist immortals) and not 神君 (the higher rank), and soon after the Song capital moved south the title of 王 was restored. Among the above mentioned accounts of Zhang Jun’s military ventures, however, Zhu Xi’s version does mention the title 神君: “Erlang] was originally given the title of 王, then Emperor Huizong, because he was fond of Daoism, called the god some kind of 神君 [emphasis added].” 

A tone of disdain is conveyed by the expression “some kind of 神君.” Unfortunately Zhu Xi did not bother to specify what kind of 神君. It is conceivable that the god housed in a temple dedicated to him at a different location, such as the capital city, Kaifeng, could have acquired a further elevation of title, either officially or unofficially, which would not be included in the records about Yongkang prefecture.

The possibility that Guankou Erlang had indeed come to be known as Qingyuan Zhenjun in his temple at Kaifeng is suggested by a passage in the Xianchun Lin’an zhi (A History of Hangzhou, Compiled in the Xianchun Reign Period [1265–74]), a book about the Southern Song capital, Lin’an. Under the heading “Erlang Temple” in the section about temples in the old capital which were re-established in the new capital, the author writes, “[The temple was] established in the first year of Shaoxing [1131]. According to the old gazetteer the temple existed in the Eastern Capital [Kaifeng]. The god is Qingyuan Zhenjun.”

The same source mentions another temple, Qingyuan Chongyang Guan 清源崇應觀, which was established in 1253 in response to a petition presented by Mu Zicai 牟子才. Qingyuan Zhenjun’s merit presented in the petition was that of constructing waterworks in Shu. His deeds are consistent with those of Guankou Erlang cast in the role of Li Bing’s son and have nothing to do with those of Zhao Yu, who eventually appeared in Ming-dynasty dramas bearing the title of Qingyuan.

After the Mongols defeated the Southern Song and established the Yuan dynasty, Erlang continued to enjoy imperial patronage. According to the Yuan shi, in the year 1330 Li Bing’s title was elevated and designated as Shengde Guangyu Yinghui Wang 聖德廣裕英惠王, and “his son, Erlang Shen” became Yinglie Zhaohui Lingxian Renyou Wang 英烈昭惠靈顯仁祐王. For Li Bing this was indeed a promotion from his prevailing title, which contained only four preceding characters. As for Erlang, however, whose Song title already contained an eight-character prefix, the new title simply replaced the characters “Weiji 威濟 with “Renyou” 仁祐. The “son” still had more prefixes, representing a higher rank, than the “father.” There is no mention of the title Qingyuan in this document, but there is evidence that during the Yuan Dynasty this title continued to be used in reference to “Li Bing’s son.”

A stele dated 1342 commemorating the renovation of a Qingyuan Temple in Jinling 金陵 (modern Nanjing) states that Qingyuan was the most important of three gods of Shu who were included in the government registry of sacrificial rites (sidian), adding:

The god’s name is Li, the son of the Shu magistrate Li Bing. After he died his shrine was first established in Guankou. During the one thousand and five
hundred years from Han through Tang and Song, he was enfeoffed through the ranks, beginning with hou and finally reaching wang. 119

The stele mentions a promotion and a change of title in the Yanyou 延佑 (1314-20) and Tianli 天歷 (1328-30) reigns, but does not specify what they were. It is not clear whether these promotions and changes were within the Daoist or the secular (i.e., Wang, Gong, and Hou) hierarchy, but judging from the name of the temple, Qingyuan Miao 清源廟, the two categories had by now become intermingled. 120 It seems that instead of being a title in a strictly Daoist sense, Qingyuan had become one of the many names by which the god Guankou Erlang was referred to, regardless of his current official title.

Reliably-dated documents from the Song and Yuan establish that “Qingyuan” was understood to be a title of Erlang, who was cast in the role of Li Bing’s son. In the Ming-dynasty Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan, however, Qingyuan is said to be Zhao Yu’s title. 121 So far the only documentation of Zhao Yu’s link to this title likely to be earlier than the book mentioned above is the zaju drama “Erlang Shen zuishe suomojing,” believed by some scholars to be of Yuan date. 122

Exactly when and why the title became associated with Zhao Yu is not clear. From formal considerations of zaju drama, however, Zhao Yu’s “identity” seems more fitting. When a character appears on stage, he gives himself an introduction which needs to be brief, self-contained, and dramatic. Imagine Erlang announcing, “I am Li Bing’s son. I helped my father do this and that ….” For the main character of the play, this announcement would sound rather odd, raising more questions than it clarifies. Zhao Yu’s story is a more suitable dramatic introduction of the god Erlang, whose name and title, Qingyuan, had become well known among the common people by Southern Song times, but whose identity and deeds had most likely become increasingly vague because he had been removed from his place of origin.

Given the history of Guankou Erlang’s relationship with the imperial court outlined in this paper, it appears highly unlikely that Gao Yi’s sousban tu, which so delighted emperor Taizong in 976, could have featured this deity. 123 A further examination of all available literary references as well as pictorial antecedents to sousban tu confirms that the legends of Guankou Erlang were not the initial inspiration for these paintings, but rather a later enrichment of the genre. A comprehensive study of the evolution of sousban tu shows that, over nearly a millennium, the position of commander in the mountain-search was transferred from Bishamen Tianwang (Vaisravana) to a group of deities called Sisheng 四圣, then to Erlang, and finally to Guanyu 關羽, the God of War. Whatever its origin, sousban tu as an idea had quite early detached itself from the confines of legends associated with specific deities. The genre developed into a set of pictorial conventions, the function of which was to display the power of any deity who was elevated to special importance by the imperial court at a particular time and for a particular reason. The gods have come and gone, but the sousban tu remain. 124