

ELITES AND THEIR CHILDREN

A STUDY IN THE HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
OF MEDIEVAL CHINA, 500-1000 AD

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In every old person is a young person,
wondering what happened.

T. Pratchett

Cover

Playing children, wall painting, Mogao caves. In: Wang Renbo. *Sui Tang wenhua* 隋唐文化. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1990: 199.

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List of Chinese Dynasties

Xia	夏	21th-16th century B.C.
Shang	商	16th-11th century
Zhou	周	11th century – 256
<i>Western Zhou</i>	西周	11th century - 711
<i>Eastern Zhou</i>	東周	770-256
<i>Spring and Autumn Period</i>	春秋	770-476
<i>Warring States</i>	戰果	475-221
Qin	秦	221-207
Han	漢	206 B.C.-A.D. 220
<i>Western Han</i>	西漢	206 B.C.-A.D. 24
<i>Eastern Han</i>	東漢	25-220
Three Kingdoms	三國	221-280
<i>Wei</i>	魏	220-265
<i>Shu Han</i>	蜀漢	221-265
<i>Wu</i>	吳	220-280
Western Jin	西晉	265-316
Eastern Jin	東晉	317-420
Northern Dynasties	Southern Dynasties	
北朝 386-581	南朝 420-589	
<i>Northern Wei</i> 北魏 386-534	<i>Song</i> 宋 420-479	
<i>Eastern Wei</i> 東魏 534-550	<i>Qi</i> 齊 479-502	
<i>Northern Qi</i> 北齊 550-577	<i>Liang</i> 梁 502-557	
<i>Western Wei</i> 西魏 535-556	<i>Chen</i> 陳 557-589	
<i>Northern Zhou</i> 北周 557-581		
Sui	隋	581-618
Tang	唐	618-907
Five Dynasties	五代	907-960
<i>Later Liang</i>	后梁	907-923
<i>Later Tang</i>	后唐	923-936
<i>Later Jin</i>	后晉	936-946
<i>Later Han</i>	后漢	947-950
<i>Later Zhou</i>	后周	951-960
Song	宋	960-1279
<i>Northern Song</i>	北宋	960-1127
<i>Southern Song</i>	南宋	1127-1279
Liao	遼	916-1125
Jin	金	1115-1234
Yuan	元	1271-1368
Ming	明	1368-1644
Qing	清	1644-1911
Republic of China	中華民國	1912-
People's Republic of China	中華人民共和國	1949-

Note

Age counting of children in medieval Chinese texts started right after conception, which means that a child was one year old at the time of birth. The term for 'age' is *sui* (歲). Thus a seven-*sui*-old child theoretically corresponded to a six-years-old one. However, for very young children this calculation was not used. The age of a child was often specified according to how many months after birth had passed. This was applied up to two years of age in some texts. The fact that ages are often given in a vague way, such as 'six- or seven-*sui*-old', suggests that the Chinese writers of that time were not always certain whether they were including the date of conception or not. I use months and years instead of *sui* for the reader's benefit. If necessary, and if the source was clear about it, I have deducted a year from the *sui*-age.

Prologue

Boasting of My Son

Kunshi, my pride, my son,
Is handsome and bright without match.
In swaddling clothes, less than a year
old,
He already could tell six from seven,
In his fourth year he knew his name,
And never cast his eyes on pears and
chestnuts.
My friends and acquaintances often look
at him
And say, "This child is a young phoenix!
Even in a previous age when looks were
esteemed,
He would have been placed in the first
class!"
Or else, "He has the air of an immortal!"
Or, "He has the bone structure of a
swallow or a crane!"
How could they have said such things?
Just to comfort me in my declining years!
In a beautiful and mild month of spring,
He joins my nephews and nieces at play,
Rushing round the hall and through the
woods,
Bubbling with noise like a golden
cauldron boiling!
When a worthy guest comes to the door,
He will rashly ask to go out first;
When the guest asks what he wants,
He will hedge and not tell the truth.
Then he'll come back to mimic the guest,
Breaking through the door and holding
Father's tablet.
He'll ridicule the guest for being dark
like Zhang Fei,
Or laugh at him for stuttering like Deng
Ai.

One moment he is a heroic eagle with
bristling feathers;
Next moment he is a brave horse in high
spirits.
Having cut a thick bamboo pole,
He rides on it and runs with wild
abandon.
Suddenly he starts to play the stage
bully,
Calling the servant in a measured voice.
Then, at night, by the gaze lantern,
He bows his head and worships the
Buddha's image.
He raises his whip to catch a spider's
web,
Or bends his head to suck the honey
from a flower.
He vies with the butterfly in agility,
And does not yield to the floating
catkins for speed.
Before the steps he meets his elder sister,
And loses heavily in a game of draughts.
So he runs away to play to play with her
dressing case,
And pulls off all its golden knobs!
Held by her, he struggles and stumbles,
But his angry pride cannot be subdued.
He bends down and pulls open the
carved window;
Then spits on the zither to wipe its
lacquered surface!
Sometimes he watches me practicing
calligraphy,
Standing upright, without moving his
knees.
The ancient brocade he wants for a coat;
The jade roller, too, he begs to have.
He asks Father to write on a "spring
banner";

The "spring banner" is suitable for a
spring day.
The slanting banana leaves roll up the
paper;
The magnolia flowers hang lower than
the brush.
My son, your father was formerly fond
of studying;
He worked earnestly and hard at his
writings.
Now, haggard and wan, and nearly
forty,
He has no flesh left and fears fleas and
lice.
My son, don't follow your father's
example
In studying hard and seeking A's and
B's!
Look at Rangju with his Art of War,
Or Zhang Liang with what he learnt
from the Yellow stone;
They became teachers of kings
overnight,
And no longer had to bother about
trifling things!
Moreover, now in the West and in the
North,
The Qiang and Rong tribes rampage
unchecked;
The Court can neither kill nor pardon
them,
But allows them to grow like an
incurable disease.
You, my son, should quickly grow up,
And go to the tiger's den to look for
cubs!
You should become a marquis of ten
thousand households;
Don't stick to a bag of Classical Books!¹

¹ Li Shangyin, transl. by James Liu 1969: 154-6.

Zengzeng's story

In the mid Zhenyuan period (785-805) Liu Ji (柳及) from Henan, the son of a *jinshi*-graduate, married a woman from Huizhang, near a place where he was travelling. They got a son together and called him Zengzeng (甞甞). However, because of poverty, Liu Ji left his wife and child after about a year and went into the far South, where he lived under a different identity. There, in Wuxian, he married again, a woman from the Shen family. He then stayed alone with his new wife and her mother at the place where his was working.

At the time the event takes place, it was autumn, after nightfall when the heaven was clear and the moon bright. Suddenly, Mrs Shen saw a little boy in the window. He pointed at her with his hand and said: "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! I am a nice boy. I will tell you a story and you can listen to it." Mrs Shen told her mother about him. Her mother then asked who he was and where he came from. He answered: "I am Zengzeng. I died last year in the seventh month. Therefore I am coming now to say good-bye. Usually, when someone dies immaturally and has not reached the seventh year yet, he has not committed any crimes during his life time, and he does not receive retribution. Granted that I am not reborn immediately, I am given duties of office, and I bring back and forth documents from and to the palace of the underworld. The lord of the underworld is making notes about the evil and good [deeds] of everybody and every month he is sending them to the palace of the underworld. Between [these errands] I have leisure time and can go wherever I want to."

When Zengzeng's father returned home and his wife told him what happened, he at first did not believe it and thought that his wife and mother in law were victims of an evil ghost. However, Zengzeng showed himself to his father who finally he believed that it was his son indeed.

[Zengzeng's father] then sobbed and cried and asked how it came that he died an early death. [Zengzeng] told him: "Last year, in the middle of the seventh month, I caught dysentery while playing, and neither the doctor nor the pharmacist could help me, and thus [it happened] that I came here. It is fate. Now I receive orders from the underworld and it's not yet my time for incarnation"

Zengzeng, before he enters his new life through rebirth, foretold his father's death and helped his stepmother, whom he had never met when he was alive.²

² *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075-6 (*Qianding lu* by Zhong Lu 9th century). A note says that "Meng Hongwei 孟弘微 from Pingchang 平昌 and Liu Ji knew each other." I have partly translated, partly summarised this narrative, as I have done with many narratives throughout this thesis.

Steaming and Changing

Usually, thirty-two days after being born the child changes. Sixty-four days [after birth] it changes a second time – [it passes through] both [stages], Changing and Steaming. Ninety-six days [later] there is the third Changing, one-hundred and twenty-eight days [later] the fourth Changing – [it passes through] both, Changing and Steaming. One-hundred and sixty days [after birth] there is the fifth Changing, one-hundred and ninety-two days later the sixth Changing – [it passes through] both, Changing and Steaming. Two-hundred and twenty-four days [later] there is the seventh Changing, two-hundred and fifty-six days [later] the eighth Changing – [it passes through] both, Changing and Steaming. Two-hundred and eighty-eight days [after birth] there is the ninth Changing, thirty-two days [after birth] the tenth Changing – [it passes through] both, Changing and Steaming. After accumulating three-hundred and twenty days, sixty-four days [later] there is a big Steaming. After this Steaming, sixty-four days later there is again a big Steaming. After this Steaming, one-hundred and twenty-eight days later there is again a big Steaming. Usually, from birth onwards children have a Changing each thirty-two days. [Together with] each Changing comes a Steaming. Usually there are ten Changings and [among them] five Steamings. Further (thereafter), there are three big Steamings. Altogether it takes five-hundred and seventy-six days. When the big and small Steamings are finished, [the child] becomes a person.³

³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8.2b-3a: 132.

I. Introduction

Scholars have only recently come to recognize that children have their own history and that their history is both global in scope, and a key part of the wider history of social processes and social systems. The raising of children is a major concern for all societies since the reproduction of societal norms and values depends on the way in which children are socialised. The history of children in medieval China, as in other parts of the world and in pre-modern times, stands in marked contrast to the traditional areas of historical inquiry such as the history of the state, the history of the economy or intellectual history. Children generally do not have political power or economic influence; they do not write about their own lives, but instead appear in the writings of adults. Yet, children are a critical part of the social order.

The only information we have about children in medieval China comes from male adults with an elite and literary social background. According to the unwritten rules of composing texts during the medieval era, these men cited from older texts and copied from each other. Concerning children and childhood many images we come across in texts are therefore medieval stereotypes that partly have been transmitted and transformed from earlier imperial times and that partly derived from contemporary medieval gossip and narratives. This limits our knowledge about children to a great degree.

Yet, the images called up by our male authors are not pure fantasy. They are based on ideas about children and childhood to which both authors and audience can relate. Some genres even approach children as children. Moreover, from many sources we understand that authors are well aware of a distinction between child and adult. Authors do not invent children and childhoods, but they form images of them in order to make them fit into their textual worlds for their specific purposes, which are not necessarily centred around children and childhood. Children that we find in our sources for the greatest part are therefore put in there consciously by the elite male authors, and the set of childhood-images these authors use is limited. This means that when investigating the history of childhood in medieval China, we in fact come to learn how the elite perceived themselves through children within that period.

The limitation of the sources, which are almost exclusively creations of elite men, means that we have no information created by children themselves. This thesis thus discusses children while leaving out questions about child agency because an active own will of the child is of no concern to medieval authors. Authors usually focus on the creation of a linear biography of an adult person that includes his or her childhood. That means they apply childhood events retrospectively, so that it fits the rest of the person's lifeline. Additionally, when we read about an action by a child, we do not really know if this action is based on decisions of the child in question.

Nevertheless, in medieval Chinese narratives we also find children who are reported to do as they pleased, against their parent's will. Often this decision-making on behalf of the child can be found in biographies of eminent monks or nuns or of Daoist masters, whose childhoods were considered extraordinary. If the adult in question followed a moral way, he or she was already marvelled at during childhood. If he or she became a monk or a nun, authors often present a very early, even pre-natal, childhood event that points out this fate to become an eminent religious expert. If adults became crooks, their character and nature were pointed out to have been wrong, starting from childhood. This again means that we do not know what the person really did as a child, for these biographies that feature rebellious children, were written about adults whose life was interpreted backwards.⁴

This thesis is a study within the framework of historical anthropology. I will investigate the images that the most powerful group had created about the weakest members of their communities. These images were aimed at

⁴ Writing exercises from Dunhuang and perhaps a few simple drawings of Buddhist images integrated in the writing exercises or on the back of writings are the only traces we might have left from the hands of teenagers, but we cannot be sure about it, see Zürcher 1989.

underpinning the superior moral position that the writing elite reserved for themselves. Childhood images also were at the basis of the legal and administrative classification of childhood, which was used to structure and control the members of medieval Chinese communities. Along these lines, we will uncover the classification and stereotypes of childhood that authors employed to distinguish their own group from others and to distinguish each other among themselves.

Histories of childhood have generally focused on modern European and American contexts. Indeed, some scholars have argued that children, as a distinct social and cultural category, did not exist prior to the modern era. My examination of the history of children in a context which is neither modern nor Euro-American will, I believe, make a contribution not only to the global field of children's history, but to the larger question of how human enculturation practices have varied or stayed the same over the last two millennia. Still, although existing scholarship on the West has been a constant source of inspiration and an important aid in formulating research questions, I will not attempt a systematic comparison between the medieval Chinese case and the medieval or early modern situation in the West.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the various ways in which authors have employed childhood images during a period of great social shifting from a feudal to a bureaucratic system. These social changes became noticeable especially from the later half of the Tang, but they already started earlier and only become manifest during the late tenth century. In order to achieve a satisfactory analysis how childhood was represented in such a significant period of social change, I worked with materials that cover five centuries, dating from about the sixth until the tenth century AD. It would be cumbersome for the reader without a background in Chinese history if I would constantly refer to different designations of periods, such as early medieval China, medieval China, early Tang dynasty, late Tang dynasty and the period of the Five Kingdoms. Therefore, I talk about this period as 'medieval China', although I am aware that this is a debatable term.

1. From early imperial to late imperial children

Works on imperial Chinese children and childhood in Chinese, Japanese and Western languages are still rare.⁵ Three monographs about imperial Chinese

⁵ For a summarized discussion about the major studies that have been written concerning children and childhood in China and the West, see Hsiung Ping-chen 2005 in her introduction. Here I am not discussing other works about childhood in medieval times of other cultures, and

childhood and an increasing number of articles are framing this study on medieval children. These works deal with early imperial China (roughly the third century BC until the third century AD), the Song dynasty (960 – 1268) and late imperial China (seventeenth until the nineteenth century).⁶ The articles and edited volumes include a great variety of topics, but they especially focus on literacy, filial piety, medicine, and art history.⁷ Many articles that handle post-Tang times hark back to medieval Chinese sources, especially from the Tang dynasty. However, until now no attempt has been made to approach the medieval period from a systematic point of view, and combine childhood studies with medieval studies in China. Such a study is necessary because medieval texts about children and images of childhood had a long-lasting impact on views of children in China for many centuries after the medieval era.

Concerning children in early imperial China, Kinney finds that several circumstances motivated interest in children. She points out conditions which gave rise to the concern about the education of children and ideas of the relation between child and cosmic processes. She finds a state of affair that led to the creation of a special curriculum to teach literacy to children and to the establishment of schools for the elite.⁸ Unfortunately, early imperial sources are very limited, and pre-imperial texts are even scarcer, which makes it difficult to speak about a 'new' interest in children, as Kinney claims occurred during the time that is studied by her. Moreover, early imperial sources are to a great degree prescriptive, and we are presented with writings from a very limited range of genres. Nonetheless, these writings are significant because they contain some of the persistent childhood-images that were also used in medieval Chinese texts.

will only briefly mention Shulamith Shahar's analysis of medieval European childhood from 1990. Ever since the indignation about Ariel's neglect of medieval childhood, children in medieval times have a special place in childhood studies. However, concerning questions of children, studies in European medieval times and Chinese medieval times are not overlapping much in time and problems. Most scholars in European history focus on the times from the eleventh centuries onward, which is the period at which my study ends. Furthermore, European sources are very much concerned with Christianity and the questions that this religion imposes on the formation of childhood concepts. This problem is of no concern for medieval China, where we deal with a very different religious culture. Compared with Roman childhood from the third century BC until the third century AD (see Christian Laes 2006), we find much material there about sexual abuse (or usage) of children, which cannot be found at all in Chinese imperial history (with the exception of early marriage of girls, of course).

⁶ See Kinney 2004, Zhou 1996, Hsiung 2005.

⁷ See e.g. Thomas Lee 2000, Lei Qiaoyun 1990 and 1998, the articles in Kinney 1995 (ed.) and in Barrott Wicks (ed.) 2002.

⁸ Kinney 2004: 179.

Our knowledge about the centuries following the fall of the Han is enriched with a greater variety of textual genres, especially with anomaly accounts and more private writings that opposed the official writings. Mather discovers that between the third and fifth century people became more aware of themselves as persons in their own right. He states that “a new stirring of individual freedom with its concomitant relaxation of the classical social and familial relationships afforded some children at least a nearly equal and intimate relation with their elders and greater opportunities to develop as individuals.”⁹ According to Mather the relaxation of relationships replaces the “traditional hierarchic social relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, and so on.”¹⁰

This view about the emphasis of the individual during those times is contested. In her study on filial piety Nylan, for example, does not find ‘individualization’ in the post-Han and Wei-Jin era, and points out many instances of people harking back to Han ideals of filial behaviour. I can add that in medieval biographies although an individual person is considered with name, place of origin and dates, his behaviour is often depicted in the light of the imaginary Han bureaucracy or within medieval stereotypes, and individualization is not greatly perceivable in medieval sources. On the contrary, the traditional hierarchic social relationships seem to be the basis of medieval communities.

The period of the Sui and Tang dynasties is, according to Lee, especially significant because of “a visible decrease in the records of anything pertinent to children.”¹¹ He goes so far as to declare that during the century towards the end of the Tang and until the Song dynasty “the Chinese conception of childhood and concern for children’s education had declined to a low point.”¹² His study puts an emphasis on education, and Lee claims that youth, and not early childhood, was the focus of medieval writers with respect to education. According to him, childhood was gradually seen as distinct from adulthood during the Song dynasty only.¹³

Although more material about children and education of children exists during the Song dynasty, I doubt that the differences between the later half of the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty were large. As the work by Zhou Yuwen about childhood during the Song dynasty shows, the previous centuries were

⁹ Mather 1995: 124, he finds this expressed in the early fifth century collection of narratives, the *Shishuo xinyu*.

¹⁰ *Idem*: 112.

¹¹ Lee 1984: 163.

¹² *Ibid*: 164-5.

¹³ *Ibid*: 165-168.

significant for the development in approaching or depicting children during the Song. Genres in which children were depicted exclusively, and which became apparent during the Song, already existed in a commencing way during the Tang. But much evidence, specifically paintings and medical texts that focus on children, have been lost during the Tang and the Song dynasties or later. That means discussions and depictions which clearly focus on children in the Song are more obscure in earlier times, nonetheless they do exist, and I will analyse them in this dissertation.

In order to amplify her arguments for her work on the history of childhood in late imperial China, Hsiung Ping-chen frequently consults sources from the Tang dynasty. She, for example, points out several subtle as well as big changes that took place between medieval and late imperial China in writings about medical care for children.¹⁴ Her investigation shows interesting similarities in the general ideas concerning the treatment of girls and the attitude towards the death of a child as they are presented in medieval and late imperial material. This gives us an idea about the carefulness with which we have to handle the sources that mention children because those similarities in the representation of children and childhood over a period of several centuries suggest the employment of an unchanging literary motif. This preservation of a certain set of images should not make us believe that with regard to children nothing has changed between the medieval and the late imperial era.

2. Individuals and communities, sources and stereotypes

Writings about children in medieval China present the child as an object of concern for doctors in medical texts, as a member of a larger clan or family system, as an ethical being who must direct filial piety towards his or her parents, and as a member of a household whose labour may be used under certain circumstances. These discourses each construct the child differently. My interest is how one can produce a coherent narrative of children's lives out of such diverse materials, each of which forms a specific section within my thesis. What is more, we have to ask ourselves why elite adult men are interested in children and childhood. In fact, we ought to scrutinize whether the authors actually are

¹⁴ Hsiung, for example, calls attention to the different observations of the seventh century description of a disease related to improper care of the cutting of the umbilical cord, and a twelfth century text that relates this disease to the disease that adults can get when they have an open wound, namely tetanus (Hsiung 2005: 57-8). This twelfth century text, thus, understands the infant's body as comparable to an adult's body, whereas the seventh century text works on the basis of major differences.

interested in children and childhood or whether they use images of children and childhood in order to depict something different, just like in medieval decoration, children are used as symbols in wishes for fertility and longevity.

The social background of the authors explains their choice of topics. Authors for example emphasized and singled out the intelligence of a person during his or her childhood. Therefore the question arises, why was it not enough to only report the deeds a person has done during his lifetime? I will discuss this question in the following chapters. I presume that by focusing on children in the sources we will actually learn more about male elite communities and individual elite men than about children. In fact, we can say that this thesis in large addresses the continuous digestion and re-telling of a limited set of images in texts that the average member of the literati has about conception, childhood and teenage years.

Authors

Those who write about children and childhood during medieval China as I have stated earlier, are exclusively literary male members of elite communities. These men are also members of local communities in which they comprise the elite. Moreover, in many instances these men belong to religious communities with flexible membership. This means we read of men who, simply put, might grow up as Buddhists, turn Daoist and end up as Confucian statesmen. Although they are occasionally switching from one literary religious community to another, such men often belong to the literate elite community that dominates medieval politics. Their wives could come from other local communities but their own male care-givers are probably part of the same literate elite community where they grew up. Additionally, the authors are also members of a class, the aristocratic class or the *shi*, which can be interpreted as aristocracy in the seventh century and as civil bureaucrat in the tenth and eleventh century.¹⁵ This literate elite male community I am concerned with, refers to each other constantly and, if they do not know each other or each other's work, they still have access to the same pool of writings that connects them.

The children whose lives I am analysing are part of the literate community. Although some children's parents are not from the elite class, they came to the attention to the elite authors in some way. Furthermore, although some children are mythical inventions, their images nonetheless belong to the imagery of elite men. By writing about these children the elite male authors reveal their general

¹⁵ For the transition of the meaning of the *shi* and the goal of that class as a community see Bol 1992.

ideas about children, which are limited to their own communities.¹⁶ Although the children often occur as stereotypes they nonetheless derive from the reality of the elite.

Individuals and communities in biographies and narratives

Official biographies and anecdotal narratives do not write about children, but about the childhood of famous or noteworthy people. They point out extraordinary events and abilities that are unlikely to happen to or be possessed by other persons during their childhood. For the greater part the children mentioned are ahead in their intellectual or spiritual development or they are dramatically on the wrong track. The narratives about exceptional people display certain conformity in the usage of childhood images, which allows us to see how medieval elite men constructed their social reality.

Although some children happened to be extraordinary and intelligent, often 'intelligent' and 'filial child' appear to be labels. Concerning filial piety in medieval sources, Keith Knapp presents many examples in which filial acts of historical and fictional people are mentioned in a biographical style, or in which filial acts are made part of a biography of a person, although the person probably did not act according to the described or prescribed way.¹⁷

Ebrey points out that the medieval sources she uses treat prominent men as individuals and not as members of families.¹⁸ That means that in narratives and biographies we find children only in connection with the most necessary adults, the conventionally noteworthy adults or those adults who indeed carried much influence in someone's childhood.

Lastly, Frankel finds that authors "think of personality, career, and the capacity to achieve (in literature or any other field) as more or less fixed from the beginning."¹⁹ This idea of the fixed biographical pattern in which the beginning determines success, failure and the end, in Frankel's eyes, would be a good explanation for how biographers often hark back to childhood and youth. The

¹⁶ The many examples on which the discussions in the following chapters are based are not chronologically structured. However, I assume that the non-chronological usage does not hinder the investigation of the respective topics because the texts derive from one large melting pot of medieval male elite imagery, who often copy from each other, regardless of geographical and temporal differences. Nonetheless, a chronological approach of some of the sources, especially of many narratives, might reveal a subtly ongoing change which might confirm Wicks' proposal of "changing views of childhood that developed in the later Tang and Song periods", (Wicks 2002: 160).

¹⁷ See Knapp 2005.

¹⁸ Ebrey 1978: 2.

¹⁹ Frankel 1962: 80.

fixed pattern contains the idea of childhood not as a stage in the development of a person “but as the period when his personality type first becomes apparent.”²⁰

The genre that contains most information about children and childhood is anecdotal narratives, particularly anomaly accounts and marvelous biographies. Most of these narratives deal with extraordinary events in biographies of people. Some of the persons are also mentioned in official histories, but with the exclusion of bizarre incidents during their lives. Narratives therefore contribute to the official histories and provide a deeper understanding about how an individual coped with illness, death, extraordinary violence or other impactful experiences that are deemed inappropriate in official histories.²¹ My reading of those narratives is partly based on Dudbridge’s division of medieval narratives into ‘outer and inner stories’. The outer story can be said to relate historical givens. “At first sight [the outer story’s] work of observation seems to give us what we ourselves might have seen if we had been there to see it. But of course the detachment is more apparent than real, for those observations are filtered through the minds of informants and shaped by the hand of the compiler [...]. They perceive (as we should perceive) selectively and express their perceptions in forms their culture has laid down for them. The results need interpreting with care.” The inner story “has been enhanced by the author or some intermediate informant to fit standard mythological norms, for those norms both prescribe and reflect the mental imagery of their parent culture. [...] [T]he inner story will interest the historian as mythological property shared between subject, author and society.”²²

Not all narratives can be read this way, because some apparently derive from oral traditions based on mythology and geographical legends rather than on biographies of elite individuals. Concerning narratives about filial piety, for example, Knapp proposes that they “emerged from oral story telling that took place within elite households.”²³ Other narratives might derive from rituals or from powerful enigmatic religious objects that have been translated into narratives. Regarding Buddhist miracle tales, as another example, Teiser writes that “some of these legends offer details on the unseen powers of Buddhist images.”²⁴

One approach concerning the handling of the sources is that I am confronting specialised texts with narratives. I thus use legal and medical

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ See also Kirkland’s insightful article about the *Taiping guangji* and the aim of its compilation in the late tenth century, Kirkland 1993.

²² Dudbridge 1995: 14 and 15.

²³ Knapp 2005: 27.

²⁴ Teiser 1994: 20.

writings – writings that specifically concern children and work with a category ‘child’ – and I am testing their statements with the help of narratives. This means that I mostly understand narratives as windows to medieval practices, under consideration of the limitations of readings I have presented above.

Children as children

The only two genres that treated children as a separate category are medical, legal and administrative texts. Medical texts were compiled by men who came from the same pool of literate elite men as those who compiled works of narratives, biographies, and histories. Medical writings were also compilations of ideas, focused on the body and its developments that had been gathered from numerous different writings and genres, including post-Han and medieval alchemical writings and probably including oral traditions as well. Administrative and legal texts aimed at structuring the social order according to age, sex and social status in order to exercise power over labour and punishment.

Although in poetry children were apparently considered as individuals, we will see that this ostensible individualisation is based on a poetic usage of stereotypes. Tomb inscriptions of children are rare and not available from children below the age of eleven. The information they contain partly talks about the dead teenager, but for the greater part about the grieving parents.

One book that contains much information about how children ought to be raised is Yan Zhitui's *Family Instruction*.²⁵ I often use Yan's opinion and compare it with biographical material and narratives. His work is very important to gain understanding for how stereotypes of children and childhood are used in the sixth century and beyond. Dien argues that "In his *Instructions*, written for his own family, Yan had the education of the younger members of a family in mind with a tradition of learning and official service, belonging to the upper 'gentle' class. To maintain this status he urged education because of the security it offered. For the ideal pattern of behavior he looked at the Confucian canon, but did not see in it the solution to society's ills."²⁶

²⁵ Translated by Teng Ssu-yu 1968. See Teng's foreword for biographical data about Yan Zhitui as well as a discussion on the *Family Instructions*. See also Dien 1962: 43-64, who discusses Yan Zhitui's life in the light of his 'loyalty to Buddhism' (*ibid*: 64) and his duties as an official.

²⁶ *Ibid*: 63.

3. Approach

It is obvious that there cannot be one approach for an investigation on the history of children and childhood in a period that comprises approximately five hundred years. The investigation about the history of childhood from that period in China requires the inclusion of research topics as diverse as medicine, family, and education. What is more, underlying all these topics are questions that are triggered by the contemporary medieval religious practices in particular.

The structure of this thesis more or less follows a chronological order of a person's growing-up process. This means that after introducing general divisions into ages and the creation of a general image of 'the medieval child', I will discuss pre-natal and infant developments, as well as infant care and early childhood diseases. I further focus on the relation of young children with their immediate social environment, and subsequently on the education of older children. I will end this thesis by discussing the deaths of children, which does not necessarily belong to a chronological approach since death can occur at any stage of childhood.

At the same time, one could argue that this growing-up process also reflects a move from the uncivilized body of a child or foetus, to its physical perfection and its integration within a group of already civilized bodies. The dangers the child confronts mostly focus on the body. Accordingly, the centre of attention, with respect to protection, is the body. The enculturation of the body forms a major part of educational efforts. Dying means the dissolution of the body and the integration of the soul into the world of the dead or the world of rebirth, often in the form of a body without substance, within a group of souls that derive from adults and other dead people or even were-animals.²⁷ We thus follow the formation of the child – formation in the sense of taking shape of the body and development of its intellectual and cultural capacities.²⁸

My approach is based on the assumption that the physical growth of the human child always includes the civilization of the body and the enculturation of the child into its human surrounding. After having sketched a general portrait of the medieval child in the next chapter, in chapter III I investigate how the child's body is integrated into its surrounding community. I investigate the theoretical understanding of the literate male medical specialist, and I investigate the practical treatment of the child's body – from the male literati's point of view.

²⁷ In this thesis I will not discuss otherworldly children, and also no images of children that are used as symbols for fertility and immortality or as portents of death. I have analysed this type of child in an article called 'The other child' (Pissin, not yet published).

²⁸ About 'formation' in education, see Zürcher 1989.

The relationships between father, mother and child, the nuclear family, are fundamental in any known community according to medieval Chinese writings. Because this elemental structure was often disturbed by social unrest and death, the extended family was an indispensable source of assistance for the raising of children. In chapter IV, I therefore discuss what the nuclear and the extended family mean with respect to children. I then widen this analysis of social relations by discussing the interaction of children with other children and with their broader social environment. Chapter V then deals with the dangers the afore-mentioned relationships contain, for all helping members of society, especially mothers and her family can also jeopardize the child. Further, I will discuss the physical weakness of the child, the perils it meets outside human territory and the risks wider social unrest bears for the child.

Education, especially the education towards literacy, played a huge role in male elite writing. What appears to be equally important to the mastery of literacy was, in fact, the mastery of the right behaviour. Of further interest in relation to education were instructions in schools, and towards a profession, however scarce the evidence for the last theme is. I will discuss these topics in chapter VI.

Lastly, I discuss matters of death. In death generally everybody stays the same as before: an adult stays an adult and leads an adult after-life, and a child stays a child and leads a child's after-life. A huge problem posed by dead children is that they under no circumstances have produced descendants. Therefore they did not become ancestors themselves and are easier victims of being forgotten and of becoming lost, hungry ghosts. Numerous narratives bear evidence of this dilemma, and I will analyse those in chapter VII.

II. General Definition of Childhood and Children in Medieval China

Between 141 and 144 AD, when Chen Zhongju had not yet commenced his official career, he stayed in a lodge, in which the wife of the host was lying in childbirth.²⁹ The author of the narrative about this incidence in Zhongju's life, Liu Yiqing (劉義慶, 403-444), remarks that Zhongju was not aware of the fact that he slept in a house where a highly pregnant woman resided. Between eleven and one o'clock at night, Zhongju witnessed a conversation between two people, who were invisible to him; one was located on the inside and the other on the outside of the back door:³⁰

The person inside the gates asked: "What sort of child did you see? Which name does it have? How old will it become?" The one who came from somewhere answered: "It is a boy. He is named Anu (阿奴) and he will be fifteen years old." [The person behind the gates] asked further: "How will he find his death later?"

²⁹ Zhongju (仲舉) was the style name of Chen Fan (陳蕃), who was killed in 168 during a battle against a group led by eunuchs. For his biography see *Hou Hanshu* 66 part 56 and de Crespigny 2007: 64-66.

³⁰ The person coming from outside was not permitted to approach the front gates because a venerable guest (i.e. Chen Zhongju) stayed in the lodge.

[The other] answered: "While building the house of somebody he will fall to the ground and die."³¹

This narrative, from a compilation of the fifth century, shows that the main interest in the new-born child was in its gender, its name, its life-span and the way it met with death when older. Although the story took place in the middle of the second century AD its questions were still valid in the following centuries. The four bits of information – gender, name, life-span and death – about a person were crucial in singling the person out from the crowd, and helping to identify him or her. We find this kind of information in nearly all biographical and anecdotal sources in the medieval period and beyond, and it is on the basis of this kind of information that I here will sketch a general idea about children for the medieval period. I will first outline in general terms how gender was approached in medieval China, and in this context I will also discuss the appearance of children. Secondly I examine name giving with its rules and odds. Thirdly I focus on life span. The life span of a person is divided into important events: birth, coming-of-age, marriage, child birth, start of a career, and, of course, death. Life, furthermore, is roughly categorized into childhood, adulthood and old age. Childhood itself is further divided according to important social and physical developments which I will discuss in the last part of this chapter. There I will also provide an overview of the different appellations of children which are connected to social and physical developments. The fourth important piece of information about a person, concerning his or her death, will be discussed in detail in chapter VII.

1. Gender

Most medieval biographies were written by men about men and for a male audience, and to a great extent dealt with boys, if children were mentioned at all. Therefore this thesis for most parts analyses boys' lives. Often I discuss "the child" as a genderless entity because it was not always very clear if my sources

³¹ *Taiping guangji* 137: 984 (*You ming lu* by Liu Yiqing fl. 403-444. Liu Yiqing is also the author of the famous collection of narratives *New Account of Tales of the World*, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語). This narrative is also in *Taiping guangji* 316: 2502. Fifteen years after this incidence Chen became Administrator in Yuzhang. Because he was curious about the fate of the boy, or rather about the truth of what he had overheard he sent a messenger to the lodge to ask after the boy. The messenger was told that the boy was assisting in building a house when he slipped and fell to death.

talked about boys or girls – although I suspect they often rather meant boys than girls.

A little child was often mentioned to be especially loved – regardless of whether it was a boy or a girl. Girls were mentioned to be as much loved or occasionally even more loved than their brothers. According to law, girls and boys ought to be treated equally.³² From the time onward that boys received professional education, girls supposedly received instructions from the older female members of the household. Because this training fell into the female sphere, and because it apparently did not pose such a great importance as childbirth did for our male authors, we do not have much information about it.³³

Compared to adults, information about children in general and about girls in particular is scarce. However, recent research has shown that ample information on women and girls can be retrieved from the male-dominated textual source, although the given information is not as abundant as about boys. Girlhood was mentioned on occasion in biographies of women and in tomb inscriptions composed by men. Girls were also mentioned in narratives concerning the female sphere, and to an even smaller extent in relation to the male sphere. Cases in which girls were mentioned, often stress a special emotional bond between parents and their female offspring. An emotional bond was also stressed in narratives about boys, but boys were mentioned in different contexts.³⁴

Unmarried girls appear to be highly valued within their families and one can consider the idea that they might have lived in “a golden era” between birth and marriage.³⁵ When girls are described they were often depicted as clever, chaste, lovely or beautiful, which were the generally desired character traits for a girl.³⁶

³² Cen Jingwen 2005: 24ff.

³³ The following chapters will be a mixed discussion on boys and girls, with the emphasis on boys because our sources contain more information on them.

³⁴ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 103: 693-4 (*Ming bao ji*), see chapter II (‘Treatment’), I mention it also in chapter V (‘Education at home’); *Taiping guangji* 125: 885-6 (*Yi shi*), mentioned in chapter V (‘Education at home’); *Taiping guangji* 130: 919-20 (*Tong you ji*), see chapter IV (‘Dangerous fathers’); *Taiping guangji* 132: 935 (*Ming bao ji*). See also *Taiping guangji* 76: 478 (*Tan sou*); 84: 542-3 (*Que shi* by Gao, Yanxiu, b. 854); *Taiping guangji* 95: 631-5 (*Ji wen*); *Taiping guangji* 220: 1691-2 (*Youyang zazu*), see chapter II (‘Medical practice’).

³⁵ Cen, Jingwen 2005: 26. See also Hsiung, Ping-chen 2005, who argues this for late imperial China. I believe that it is wise to be careful about a statement saying that life for a girl was easy, but it is easy to gain such an impression from narratives, and I will discuss this point in detail in chapter IV.

³⁶ I will discuss these traits in chapter V (‘Prerequisites for education’).

Medical texts prescribe an equal treatment for boys and girls. Only in two instances girls had to be approached differently: after birth girls ought to be wrapped in their mother's clothes, while boys ought to be dressed in their father's clothes.³⁷ Furthermore, in the case of being inflicted by violent convulsions, a boy should be cauterized on the top of his chest while a girl should be cauterized below her breasts.³⁸

We can neither deduce from this nor from other writings that boys in general received better treatment or a warmer welcome than girls. The difference in clothing after birth did not manifest itself in quality, but only in the symbolic use of materials and colours that stressed the different future expectation for the two genders. It did not imply a preference for one above the other. Differences in medicine only started with the beginning of the reproductive age of girls, from which time onward the body of women and men were treated in separate medical chapters.

2. Appearance

Descriptions of a child's appearance in texts are scarce. In the section above I have shown that medical texts prescribe that boys and girls ought to be wrapped in different clothes right after birth. We cannot deduce from this how these clothes looked like, what kind of clothes girls and boys were wearing after this point in their lives, and if there was a differentiation in their everyday-clothes, colours, hair style and possible jewellery until a certain age. According to some appellations for children that I will discuss below, we can assume that infants might have been swaddled, and that children, when they were about seven years old, wore their hairs in tufts, as it was conventional for servants and other dependants. If a child's appearance was described in texts at all, it was usually portrayed as beautiful or cute.

Illustrations and plastic figures of the medieval era are as scarce as are descriptions in texts. The ones that we have at our disposal are difficult to analyse in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. And although I assume that clothes, embellishments, and body movements of children varied greatly within different communities and geographical areas, we hardly find evidence for this. For example, a famous Tang dynasty painting on silk from Turfan shows a pair of playing children wearing long-legged trousers with colourful vertical stripes, and red shoes. One boy is holding a little dog in his arms, and both children are

³⁷ *Beiji qianjing yaofang* 9: 2a.

³⁸ *Beiji qianjing yaofang* 10: 16a.

depicted rather agitated.³⁹ They might be below the age of seven because they have no tufts yet, or they might come from an ethnic group that did not have the custom in which dependants wore their hair in tufts. In fact, I cannot clearly determine to which ethnic group the children belonged, whether the painting was an ideal of Tang children in general or whether the children depicted came from the Turfan area in particular.

A few other visual pieces of evidence on how children might have looked, are small sculptures from a Tang tomb in Xi'an (Hanlin tomb). A pair of children is depicted naked, one child bathing the other. Another statue depicts a standing bold child, who might wear trousers or is naked wearing rings around is ankles. A fourth child is depicted in swaddling clothes and is wearing a cap.⁴⁰ Again, we cannot say anything about the gender of these sculpture , but can only speculate that they might depict boys, because they resemble those children that are depicted in Song dynasty paintings called "Paintings of Hundred Sons" (百子圖).

Another type of image displaying children in Tang paintings shows chubby, naked boys that remind of the fat naked boys in Christian Roman mosaics, the *putti*. Discussing such images, Wicks and Avril propose that in pre-medieval times, children did not have an individual representation and were instead depicted as small adults. "The model can be traced to Rome, and the spread of the Roman *putti* to Christian, Sassanian, and Central Asian art. By the eighth century, the same cherubic image of boys began to appear outside the religious context in decorative arts made for elite consumption."⁴¹ We cannot tell whether parents actually orientated their taste on these images and applied it to their children.

Children's body movements were rarely considered. In one instance, Yan Zhitui described children in an intimate relationship with their mothers: "in babyhood they are led by their parents' left or right hand and cling to their parents' front or back garments."⁴² Infants were also described as being carried on their mother's arms and older children being carried by their fathers. Still older children were described playing in groups at rivers and streams or tending oxen. As I have just mentioned, in the wall painting and sculptures discussed above we can already detect similarities with the elaborate portraiture of children that were painted in the Song dynasty. Whereas in this later genre called "Paintings of Hundred Sons" we see genderless children playing together with toys that test their motor skills, playing with balls and other toys, teasing each

³⁹ Wang Renbo (ed.) 1990: 199. See also Hayashi 1975: fig. 30, here a little chubby child is depicted on a New Year card with a non-shaven head and pigtailed that is playing with a dog.

⁴⁰ Wang Renbo (ed.) 1990: 118-9.

⁴¹ See Wicks and Avril 2002: 10. See my article 'The other child' (Pissin, not yet published).

⁴² Yan Zhitui III, (Teng, trsl.) 1968: 9.

other, and beleaguering a toy merchant, we do not find many visual evidence of those activities in earlier times.⁴³

3. Names

In his *Family Instructions* (顏氏家訓) from the late sixth century, Yan Zhitui (顏之推. 531-591) compared the giving of names to children during ‘ancient’ times with the child-naming habits among his contemporaries, and he expressed his disgust about the names that parents dared to give their children:

Duke Zhou named his son Bird (Qin 禽), and Confucius named his boy Carp (Li 鯉). When associated only with the persons themselves, these names would not be prohibited. But the Marquis of Wei, The prince of Wei [Han], and the heir apparent of Chu all were named Louse (Jishi 蟻虱); Zhangqing was named Son of a Hound (Quanzi 犬子); Wang Xiu was called Son of a Dog (Gouzi 狗子). In view of the relation to the parents these names are unreasonable. This practice of ancient times is ridiculed today. In the North there were many who actually named their children “Son of a Donkey,” “Colt” or “Pig” (Lüzi, Juzi, Tunzi 驢駒豚子) and allowed them to call themselves by such names and be so called by their brothers. Who would tolerate this?⁴⁴

The classicist Yan Zhitui probably followed the second century *Book of Rites*,⁴⁵ one of the venerated *Classics* on which *ru*-scholars based their moral knowledge, to express this opinion. With respect to name giving, the *Book of Rites* prescribed: “In giving a name to a son, do not use [names of] states, do not use [the names for] sun and moon, nor names of hidden ailments (sexual diseases?), nor of mountains or rivers. Sons and daughters become adults at different ages.”⁴⁶ Names that did not follow this prescription could thus be experienced as

⁴³ See the collections of Song paintings in the exhibition volume from the National Palace Museum, Taipei: *Painting of Children at Play*. We will learn more about trained body movements in chapters IV and VI where I discuss children at play and the education of children, which also included the training of body movements.

⁴⁴ Yan Zhitui VI, (Teng 1968): 25.

⁴⁵ Although he states that the *Liji* is incomplete, and that “in cases that are not mentioned or where affairs of the world have changed, well-learned, superior men have made their own rules which have been followed in practice.” He therefore assumes that customs differ from family to family, Yan Zhitui VI, (Teng 1968): 22.

⁴⁶ *Liji* part I, 1.3.

ridiculous. In fact, the few names we find of children in narratives were hardly ridiculous but expressed positive values.⁴⁷

The ninth century poet Lu Guimeng (陸龜蒙, d. 881) compiled a list of childhood names belonging to people from the Qin of the Northern and Southern dynasties, titled the *Record of Childhood Names* (*Xiao ming lu* 小名錄).⁴⁸ The compilation of the list shows Lu's private interest in childhood names, but it probably also points out a more general interest during medieval times concerning the childhood names of famous people from antiquity. The *Record of Childhood Names* was composed as an anecdotal collection and thus, in an entertaining way, focused on the reason for giving certain names to boys and girls and linking them to their adult name.⁴⁹ Lu's list includes the examples that Yan provided as well, which means that the knowledge, discussions and ridicule of these childhood names of famous people probably were part of the social knowledge and practice of the elite.

When childhood names were mentioned in medieval narratives, they usually pointed out the emotional bond between the parents and that child, or the fine character of the person in question during childhood. For example, we find boys' names such as: Three Brilliances (San Kuang 三旺), Intended Child (Yi Er 意兒),⁵⁰ Ten-thousand child (Wan Er 萬兒),⁵¹ and girls' names such as Defending Manners (Xian Yi 閑儀) and Young Lady Harmony (He Niang 和娘).⁵²

The choice of a childhood name could reveal significant events in the pre-natal history, such as the name of the girl Greatest Compassion (Zui Lian 最憐).⁵³ Greatest Compassion received this name, because she was granted to her parents by the *bodhisattva* Guanyin. Names could also show predictive powers for the child's future, for example Dou Yizhi, who in his later years would work in the

⁴⁷ Still, the custom to confer an unnormal name to one's infants has been carried out persistently throughout the ages, although some members of the elite despise this practice. This could mean that the custom of giving ridiculous names or girl's names to a male infant might be a practice of some ethnic groups, or part of local traditions or that it might be applied by people of lower social ranks than the elite. By the Song dynasty even the author of the *Xin Tangshu*, Ouyang Xiu allows a member of his family to be called by a name that he deems ridiculous (Baker 1979: 28-29).

⁴⁸ He had planned to write about the childhood names of people from the Sui as well, but this chapter does not exist (anymore), see *Xiaoming lu* 1a-2a. For Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 see Nienhauser (Schafer) 1986: 604-6.

⁴⁹ See *Tangdai congshu* 7. See also *Xiaoming lu* in *Siku quanshu* 892: 623-649. Because the names do not differ much from the few examples given here, and because most of them deal with much earlier periods than I focus on, I shall not discuss this source any further here.

⁵⁰ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 192: 1442-3 (*Liu shi er mu ji*).

⁵¹ *Taiping guangji* 286: 2281-2 (*Ling guai ji*), see part 'Neighbours and communities' in chapter III.

⁵² See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 159: 1144-5 (*Xuan guai lu*) and Liu Zongyuan 13: 214.

⁵³ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3094 (*Hui chang jie yi lu*).

imperial library, was called Mi (秘).⁵⁴ Names occasionally were suggested in dreams, like Qingjian (青建), which is the name of a flower.⁵⁵ Sometimes they described ethnic affiliation, like Son of Han (Han Zi 漢子).⁵⁶ There were also names that were given according to sound as well as meaning, such as Little Scholar (Ashi 阿士) for a boy,⁵⁷ and Little Sister (Meimei 妹妹) for a girl.⁵⁸

It was considered remarkable when someone outside of the family or someone new to the family knew the child names of the former youngsters. For example, when the young son of the famous painter, poet and calligrapher Gu Kuang (顧況 c. 725-c. 814) died, the old man was deeply hurt. Duan Chengshi (段成式 d. 863), who preserved this account, wrote that after the death of the son, the child's *hun*- and *shen*-souls were still hanging around in the house. Because the son was moved by his father's ongoing sadness he again became a child of Gu. Once, when he already was seven-years-old and playing with his brothers and sisters, a brother slapped him in play. The boy then said all over the sudden: "I am your older brother! Why are you slapping me?" He next recalled all his brothers' and sisters' childhood-names.⁵⁹ With this remark and his knowledge of his elder siblings' childhood names, the former incarnation within the same family of the later poet Gu Feixiong (顧非熊 fl. 836) was revealed.

A childhood name (*xiao ming* 小名, *xiao zi* 小字 or *you ming* 幼名) was exchanged with a style name once childhood was ritually declared to be over, which was done with the capping ritual for boys or the hair-pin ritual for girls.⁶⁰ According to the above-mentioned *Book of Rites*, "when a son turns twenty he is capped, he receives his adult name. In front of his father, he [should use his] adult name. In front of his lord, he should use his title. When a daughter is promised in marriage she [receives the] hair-pin and her adult-name."⁶¹ That means a boy supposedly got his style name (*zi* 字) at the age of twenty. The age at which a daughter received her style name was not specified because her name-receiving depended on the time she was about to marry.⁶²

⁵⁴ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 223: 1712-3 (*Yin hua lu*).

⁵⁵ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 114: 791-3 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

⁵⁶ *Taiping guangji* 379: 3016-8 (*Guang yi ji*).

⁵⁷ *Taiping guangji* 265: 2070 (*Jia hua lu*).

⁵⁸ *Taiping guangji* 270: 2122 (*Guang de shen yi lu*), see parts 'Female care-givers' in chapter III and 'Migration' in chapter IV.

⁵⁹ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3091 (*You yang za zu*).

⁶⁰ More on these rituals see the part below.

⁶¹ *Liji* part I, 1.3.

⁶² Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* from the twelfth century, however, does not fix the capping age at twenty, but is more flexible and arranges it at any age between fifteen to twenty years of age (Zhu Xi (Ebrey trsl.) 1991: 36). That could also be the case for the sixth to the tenth century, and would adjust to the flexible coming of age ceremony of girls.

The childhood name, we can conclude, was important but rather private, kept within the family and close acquaintances, and it was not mentioned very often in biographies or narratives. Most biographical accounts then were built around the adult name of the person in question. Childhood names did, however, attract curiosity and were part of the intellectual life and interest of the elite, as we can see in the apparently well-known examples that Yan Zhitui and Lu Guimeng quoted.

4. Childhood span: Terminology and age-categories

Children were often defined within the context of family relationships. That means that, not unknown to Western contexts, a thirty-year-old man can still be called ‘a child’ when mentioned in relation to his parents. This on occasion makes it difficult to identify underage children in texts. Often the character 童 (*tong*), which might denote a child but even more so a dependant of any age, causes troubles in identifying underage persons.

Fortunately, medieval authors frequently worked with age marking characters that were used for defining rough age groups, and I will discuss these below.⁶³ The sixteen or twenty-one years between being an unborn child and being officially accepted by the community into adulthood were determined by physical and mental growth and by cultural customs, which were reflected by special appellations.⁶⁴ Some of these terms point at a certain age. Best demarcated are the seventh year and the tenth year of age, and respectively coming-of-age.

Terms

Before birth		
胚	<i>pei</i>	unfinished moulding (first month)
胎	<i>tai</i>	unpolished semi processed moulding (from second until tenth month)
After birth – unspecified		
嬰	<i>ying</i>	infant
黃	<i>huang</i>	infant
兒	<i>er</i>	child

⁶³ These appellations, similar to English ‘child’, are not informative about the exact age of a child, but rather points out the relation of dependency on behalf of the person who is being addressed as ‘child’.

⁶⁴ See also Limin Bai 2005 (a) for a list of terms for childhood with relation to late imperial China (3-4).

小兒	<i>xiaoer</i>	little child
嬰兒	<i>yinger</i>	child that is in infant status
幼兒	<i>youer</i>	child; mostly teenager
兒童	<i>ertong</i>	young lad
兒子	<i>erzi</i>	young boy
孩	<i>hai</i>	child
孩幼	<i>haiyou</i>	
孩童	<i>haitong</i>	
子孩	<i>zihai</i>	
嬰孩	<i>yinghai</i>	
孺	<i>ru</i>	child
小	<i>xiao</i>	little
小兒	<i>xiaoer</i>	little child
小男	<i>xiaonan</i>	boy
小女	<i>xiaonü</i>	girl
幼	<i>you</i>	child in the study-age (about ten years according to the <i>Li ji</i>)
襁褓	<i>qiangbao</i>	[child in the age of being dressed in] swaddling clothes
After birth – specified		
總角	<i>zongjiao</i>	tufts (ca. seven)
丱	<i>guan</i>	tufts (ca. seven)
髻	<i>tiao</i>	tufts (ca. seven)
齏	<i>chen</i>	loosing the milk-teeth (ca. seven)
Death		
夭	<i>yao</i>	Early, premature, death
不育	<i>bu yu</i>	not educated → infanticide
不舉	<i>bu ju</i>	not raised → infanticide
殤	<i>shang</i>	early death, before adulthood
Coming-of-age		
笄禮	<i>ji li</i>	hairpin rite (girls, fifteen)
冠禮	<i>guan li</i>	capping rite (boys, twenty)

‘Child’

The most frequently used character for child in general was (*er* 兒). This character usually had a prefix, such as little (*xiao* 小) or infant (*ying* 嬰), meaning ‘the child that is little’ or ‘the child that is in infant status’, it seldomly came with the prefix for girl (*nü* 女). Another character to refer to a child was *hai* (孩). *Hai* was not as much used as *er* (兒), but likewise was often applied together with other characters to further specify a child.

When mentioning children, authors also used small or little (小) as a prefix to the gender appellation, male (男) or female (女), to refer to a little boy or little

girl. 'Little' was also used individually in juridical and medical terms, and can be translated with 'juvenile'. Often this indicated children below the age of ten, but this was not a general rule. According to the *Tang Code*, for example, 'juvenile' (小) was the category for those children who were younger than fifteen years old.⁶⁵ Furthermore, medical texts agreed on the point that one is called juvenile above the age of six. Yet, authors did not agree on the age marking when one stopped being juvenile and became adolescent (*shao* 少), as we will see in the following discussions.

Classification of children in official documents and reference books

Classification into age groups was an important tool for social control and the execution of power, and texts in different fields each used their own labelling of age. Authorities in such specialised fields such as education and ritual, law, medicine and tax determined certain age-groups in order to correctly categorize elite people and assess their right treatment.

The *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), an early imperial collection of 'how-to-do-rituals',⁶⁶ was used by medieval classicists as the *locus classicus* for living together in family and state and as a guideline in education. This, in medieval times well-used, reference book classified the age of ten as the first recognizable age for children: "When one is ten years old we call him *you* (幼); he goes [out] to school."⁶⁷ This character (*you* 幼), together with *er* (兒), was a frequently used character to denote minors and can best be interpreted as young teenager.⁶⁸ The *Liji* did not classify children below the age of undergoing teaching.

The *Tang Code* classified children according to the age groups seven years and younger, seven until ten and ten until fifteen years. Age fifteen was significant in terms of law because from that age on a person became subjected to full punishment.⁶⁹

Medical classification was different again – it grouped people from six until sixteen and sixteen until thirty. The crucial connection between age and

⁶⁵ Johnson (trsl.) 1979: 169ff (Article 30).

⁶⁶ The *Liji* is a text that grew in early imperial China, and it has not been related to a specific date when it has been first published.

⁶⁷ *Liji* part I, 1.1. Legge (trsl.) 1885: 65.

⁶⁸ Saari notes that towards the end of imperial China, *you* denoted children around six or seven years old, which means children who start to study. I suspect that some medieval texts also use *you* in that way, but not too many yet, Saari 1990: 79.

⁶⁹ Johnson (trsl.) 1979: 169. Not punishing a person younger than fifteen is argued on the same emotional basis (feeling of pity) as the argument against punishing people older than seventy, eighty or ninety.

medical treatment, namely how much medicine to administer to a child at what age, was only applied until ten years of age.⁷⁰

Regarding the distribution of land and taxes adult men received a certain amount of land once they reached adulthood. The administrative organ which organised land distribution therefore had to set up clear rules to determine at what age that should happen.⁷¹ In tax contexts, the crucial factor was a person's physical abilities. We see this, for instance, in the *Ordinances of the Board of Finance* which called "all men and women [...] babies ("yellow", *huang* 黄) until three years of age, juveniles (*xiao* 小) until fifteen years of age, adolescent males ("(boys in mid-age", *zhongnan* 中男) until twenty years of age."⁷² According to the *Ordinances*, people turned adult (*ding* 丁) at the age of twenty-one.⁷³

With respect to household division, people were classified from birth until their third year of age, from three years until sixteen years of age, and from sixteen until twenty-one years of age.⁷⁴ Ikeda On points out that particular attention was paid to young men between fifteen and twenty years old in the annual personal inspections because these ages determined the start of paying taxes, serving corvée and military duties.⁷⁵

The fixing of age groups for the regulation of the tax system, however, differed throughout the Tang, and therefore the age of adulthood varied between twenty-one and twenty-five years old. The age of baby-hood stayed the same, namely between one year old (in this case: birth) and three years old. Boy-hood ended at fifteen or latest at seventeen years of age, and the phase of adolescence varied according to the changes made for adulthood.⁷⁶

Ages

System\ Stage	1	2	3	4
Law	Birth-seven	Seven-ten	Ten-fourteen	
Tax	Birth-three (four)	Four-five- sixteen	Sixteen-twenty- one	Sixteen- twenty-one
Medicine		Six-sixteen		
Education (Book of Rites)	Birth –ten	Ten/eleven- twenty		

⁷⁰ See chapter III, where I discuss medical treatment in detail.

⁷¹ Twitchett 1970: 125.

⁷² Twitchett 1970: 148.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ These age groups differ in the *Xin Tangshu* (1044 AD) and the *Jiu Tangshu* (945 AD). The *Jiu Tangshu* says: age three, fifteen, and twenty in the same chapter. However, the determination of age groups was a matter of discussion throughout the Tang and was never really settled.

⁷⁵ On 1973: 129.

⁷⁶ See the table provided by Suzuki 1935: 1137, for an overview about the determination of age-groups.

Based on juridical, tax, medical and classical classification we can conclude that the ages seven as well as ten were considered important because they were mentioned as age-dividers in most of the social systems. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the age-groups that received the most attention in narratives, were also seven and ten, followed by narratives that mentioned fetuses. Although all other ages appear in narratives as well, these three groups are predominant. Additionally, the ages thirteen, fourteen and fifteen attracted more attention than the ages from one until six, eight, nine, eleven or twelve, which were mentioned far less frequent. The ages from thirteen until fifteen were interesting because they are between childhood and adulthood, and narratives about children in this age group often included events such as finding a husband or a bride.

Age specifications

PRE-NATAL LIFE

In the first month of gestation, the child was called *pei* (胚), which means 'unfinished moulding'. From the second month of gestation onward the embryo was called *tai* (胎) 'unpolished semi-processed moulding'. It was called *tai* until it was born, although it changed rapidly and achieved a human form in the seventh month of pregnancy. The *tai* was influenced by the mother's actions and experiences and should, ideally, have already been educated in this stage of life.⁷⁷

In medieval China, the outer form of a child's body was often thought to be completed in the seventh month in the mother's womb. Nonetheless, the child was thought to be a complete person only one-and-a-half years after birth, when it did not only have the right shape, but also settled organs, and when blood and life-energy (*qi* 氣) were correctly positioned and stable. This final stage of settling, positioning and stabilization of a child's floating substances did not happen in the womb but belonged to a post-natal development process.⁷⁸

Fetuses were believed to already have the ability to interact with people, but the interaction between womb and the outer world usually proceeded only in one direction, namely from mother to fetus. If the fetus conveyed messages and exerted power on its social environment it was interpreted as a bad sign or

⁷⁷ The appellations for the early stages of an embryo vary in different works. '*Tai*' is found to be the general appellation for embryo in most cases.

⁷⁸ See chapter III ('Development').

creepy at the least, while the positive communication from the mother directed to her child in the womb was desirable.⁷⁹

INFANTS

A child had numerous appellations after birth and before turning into an adult. The character that can be translated as infant or baby is *ying* (嬰), but it did not always meant infant or baby, and even a six- or seven-year-old son might have been referred to as *ying*.⁸⁰ The instances in which *ying* was used for non-infants, denoted a slightly older child in absolute dependence of its care-givers. Sun Simiao included *ying* in the title of his chapters about medical treatment of children: 'Treatments for infants, small children and adolescents' (少小嬰孺方). Aside from *ying*, a baby was sometimes called 'pearl' (*zhu* 珠) 'pearl-child' or 'pearl on the palm', expressing the emotional value to its parents. A dead child, accordingly, occasionally was referred to as 'shattered pearl'.⁸¹

Infants were also named according to colours that were related to their perceived body colour: yellow and red. Both colours were also auspicious and precious colours. The expression 'yellow child' was used in tax registers, as we have seen. The expression 'red child' can be found, for example, in an interesting discussion about the relation between the emperor and the aristocracy. In this discussion, the emperor was assigned the role of an educating parent and the aristocracy (百姓) that of 'red children', which meant infants or little children in need of education.⁸²

Another specification, but one that was not used all too frequent during the Tang dynasty, was *zui* (碎), which indicated one-year-old children. We find several entries in the *History of the Tang* using this term.⁸³ One entry, for example, reports that the fifteenth son of emperor Xuan, a son the emperor particularly loved, died when he was not even one year of age (碎).⁸⁴

⁷⁹ For more on the enculturation of foetuses see chapters III ('Abortion') and V ('Embryo education').

⁸⁰ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 467: 3851 (*Yi shi zhi*); *Taiping guangji* 424: 3451 (*Yuan hua ji*); *Taiping guangji* 396: 3165-6 (*Shen yi lu*).

⁸¹ This expression is used in poetry, but can also be observed in prayers found at Dunhuang, see e.g. P2044, see chapter V ('Goals of education') for a translation.

⁸² *Jiu Tangshu* 190: 5071.

⁸³ See *Jiu Tangshu* 59: 2337; *Jiu Tangshu* 107: 3264; *Xin Tangshu* 91: 3794. In two of the three instances the character is used it points out that an infant has died around that age.

⁸⁴ *Jiu Tangshu* 107: 3264.

SEVEN YEARS

The characters 兒 (*er*) and 孩 (*hai*), as well as 小 (*xiao*) and 少 (*shao*) did not precisely reveal the age of the child in question. Therefore, in many cases the age was either specified in numbers or with help of describing attributes belonging to childhood. Thus, 'swaddling clothes' (*qiangbao* 襁褓) referred to infancy, and hairstyle such as 'tufts' (*zongjiao* 總角, *guan* 髻 or *tiao* 髻), roughly denoted an age around seven years, from which children started carrying their hair in tufts. The character *tiao* (髻) for tufts was often combined with the character for 'losing the milk teeth' (*chen* 齣). The age of seven was a most significant age in early childhood, because children were believed to be able to carry self-responsibilities and have a consciousness from that age on; biologically it is the average age at which children actually start losing their milk teeth.

COMING OF AGE

The age at which children became adults varied within the references used, as we have seen above. According to law, children were treated as adults from age fifteen onward. According to the taxation system, roughly twenty-one years of age marked the end of childhood, similar to the idea of the *Book of Rites*. In medicine, sixteen was the age of adulthood. These were the age markers for boys. Girls were considered marriagable from age fourteen onward,⁸⁵ which agrees with the biological development that enables them to bear children. This marked the end of their childhood.

Reaching adulthood was celebrated with a ceremony, at least in the elite context, in which the *Classics* were enhanced. The ceremony for elite male offspring was called 'capping rite' (*guan li* 冠禮). In biographies, this term indicated that somebody was twenty years of age or younger, depending on what age a boy underwent this ceremony. Narratives and biographies correspondingly referred to young men as 'in the age of capping' ([*ruo*] *guan zhi nian* [弱] 冠之年). The age of boys or young men was defined as 'before' or 'after the capping', which means that they were slightly younger or older than twenty years of age.⁸⁶ The coming-of-age rite for girls was called 'hairpin rite' (*ji li* 笄禮) and took place around the age of fourteen or fifteen. The prescriptions of the ceremonies for boys and girls in the *Book of Rites* might have been non-practiced

⁸⁵ Although some also have been married when they were younger than fourteen.

⁸⁶ Yan Zhitui VIII, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 52 says that "with capping the bodies and habits are generally formed."

ideals for most parts of society.⁸⁷ Still, if not as a real ceremony, capping and, less frequently, ‘hairpinning’ was continuously used as an age marker in our sources that were written by elite authors to whom classical rituals still mattered.⁸⁸

DEATH

Finally, death of a child had a different denotation than death of an adult. One word for people dying before they became officially adults was *yao* (夭), ‘do die young’. Another way to express early death was by saying ‘not educated’ (*bu yu* 不育) or ‘not raised’ (*bu ju* 不舉). The latter two expressions, however, also often bears the meaning that a child was abandoned – and consequently left to die.⁸⁹ A less frequently used character was *shang* (殤). It was defined as a character used for “those who died before they reached adulthood. *Xiaoshang* 小殤 [or 下殤] is used for children between eight and eleven years of age; *zhongshan* 中殤 is used for young teenagers between twelve and fifteen years of age and *shangshan* 上殤 is used for older teenagers between sixteen and nineteen years of age.”⁹⁰

AGE AND ABILITY

More or less specific ages are mentioned in roughly half of the narratives that served as my sources. To know the exact age often was important, because at any specific point of its life, a child in narratives displayed a behaviour or took part in an event that was not consonant with general expectation of certain age groups.⁹¹ Thus we observe that events, which happened to seven- or ten-year-old children, demonstrate a certain conformity. Seven-year-old children were

⁸⁷ See Kinney 2004: 15, who believes that parts of those requirements for boys ceased to be asked for in the Han dynasty.

⁸⁸ The terms ‘not yet capped’ in order to denote the age (just) ‘younger than twenty’ are frequently used in medieval narratives. For girls we often find the statement that she has not yet in the age of the hair-pin or not yet married, which means that she was not yet married, usually denoting that she was still a teenager.

⁸⁹ Kinney 2004: 97ff; Liu Jingzhen 1998 who analyses abortion and infanticide during the Song dynasty. In chapter IV I discuss abortion and chapter VI deals entirely with death.

⁹⁰ Liu Zongyuan 1974: 214.

⁹¹ It is not clear in which context the mention of age is required or preferred. I suppose that it is up to the individual author. We see regularly, however, that certain ages are mentioned more often than others, namely seven and ten. These ages are demarcations of the change of the integration into a community.

mentioned in relation to expressions of affection towards them,⁹² in relation to their death,⁹³ or in relation to their protection, for example in case of domestic violence.⁹⁴ On the other hand, when a ten-year-old child was mentioned, it was mostly connected to the beginning of its studies, often of Buddhist texts.⁹⁵ Other events mentioned were the beginning of a career,⁹⁶ or a father who felt compelled to punish his unruly son.⁹⁷

Turning away from anecdotes and towards the official *Histories*, we see that here the focus was different. The great majority of seven-year-old children was presented as literary achievers, who learned one thousand characters each day, were skilled in Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian texts, and composed their own essays or poetry and astonished experienced literary man. Eight-year-old children were less frequently mentioned than seven-year-old ones. However, biographies were still preoccupied with mentioning their literary abilities. The focus on literary achievements became less after that age. When children were nine years old, literary skills were not mentioned in the first place, and one does not find the phrase: 'he was good at composing texts (*wen* 文)' as frequently anymore. Probably, since education was supposed to start around this age, such skills were no longer exceptional. Children who were ten years old usually got more responsibilities, often in relation with the death of either father or mother.⁹⁸

⁹² See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 132: 935 (*Mingbao ji*), see part 'Responsibilities and obligations towards parents' in chapter III; *Taiping guangji* 163: 1181 (*Chao ye qian zai*), see also chapter III 'Neighbours and communities'.

⁹³ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 128: 905-6 (*Ji yi ji*), 149: 1075-6 (*Qianding lu*).

⁹⁴ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 244: 1886-7 (*Chao ye qian zai*); *Taiping guangji* 92: 606-7 (*Tan bin lu*) about mythological protection in relation with dogs.

⁹⁵ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 87: 567-70 (*Gao seng zhuan*); *Taiping guangji* 96: 642 (*Yi shi zhi*), see chapter III 'Play' and chapter V 'Buddhist Education'; *Taiping guangji* 97: 649 (*Yi shi zhi*); *Taiping guangji* 112: 773 (*You ming lu*); *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456-9 (*Zhuan qi*); *Taiping guangji* 207: 1585 (*Tan sou*).

⁹⁶ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 147: 1062 (*Ding ming lu*).

⁹⁷ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 73: 459-460 (*Ji yi ji*).

⁹⁸ *Xin Tangshu* 195: 5579 (Wang Shaoxuan 王少玄).

III. The Child's Body

This chapter discusses an understanding of the child's body in medieval China which was shared at least by men who were engaged in compiling medical works and their readers during the seventh and eighth century A.D.⁹⁹ Adults writing about children were, like most writing individuals at that time, male members of the elite. These men were medical authors or medical theorists and experimentalists, rather than practicing doctors.¹⁰⁰ In their works they presented detailed accounts of the handlings at birth and the crucial first two years of the child, although these handlings were carried out during a period in which men supposedly did not come into the vicinity of children often.¹⁰¹ In addition, medical authors discussed general diseases that were common in children and adults and pointed out differences in the course of a disease and its treatment concerning children. Their major concern was, however, to raise awareness about special childhood diseases and the distinctive physical conditions of a child.

Within their medical treatises authors defined the child as a separate category. In their opinion, the child's body demanded a different approach than the body of an adult. This attitude, to treat children differently than adults and

⁹⁹ Occasionally I will also hark back on a tenth century Japanese work, which belongs to the same tradition of medical literature.

¹⁰⁰ See Wilms 2006: 76, fn 4.

¹⁰¹ About the procedures around childbirth and the role of men during late Imperial China see the dissertation of Margaret Ng 2009, McGill University.

especially to create separate texts about children within a genre to such an extent was exceptional for medieval times. The medical approach to children was further conceptualized only during the Song dynasty, the period in which 'paediatrics' in China came into being, according to most scholars.¹⁰²

The child's body eventually is expected to turn into an adult's body. I will therefore first provide an outline about how the adult body was envisioned in medieval times. Because the rest of this chapter especially rests on one type of source, namely specialized medical texts from the seventh and eighth century, I will reconstruct the written traditions on which these texts are based before I start discussing their content.

Medieval medical authors gathered and edited centuries-old ideas on the processes of physical growth, the development of body movements and perception of children up to two years of age and older. I will discuss these theories and show their alchemic background, which was distinctive for the medieval period, in the second section of this chapter. Knowledge about these theories proves to be important because they were part of the medical discourse for the following approximately ten centuries and perhaps even longer.

Activities around birth, such as caring for the umbilical cord and the belly button, as well as interpreting and, if necessary, evoking the first cry after birth were carried out by women. Medical authors nonetheless provided prescriptions on how to act during birth. I will examine their examples of these birth-handlings, while pointing out that their discussions might not correspond to what women did during child birth.

In the last section of this chapter I will analyse diseases of children and different methods of treatment. While most diseases children could contract were common diseases that also developed in adults, medieval medical specialists also discussed special childhood diseases. General ideas of a child's treatment were in line with treatment of adults. They relied upon using pills, powders, soups, baths and moxibustion and also on magical healing, as I will discuss further below. Some of the diseases and their treatment were also reflected in non-medical texts in which they find numerous expressions, and I will provide examples for them in this last section.

Medieval medical texts about children are not genuinely about medicine, for they also include discussions which could be classified among themes concerning psychology, ritual, embryology, pre-natal care and advice on the magical protection of children. The texts at hand are therefore preoccupied with more than the physical body. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has proposed an

¹⁰² See e.g. Hsiung Ping-chen 1998.

insight to the body as a social and a physical body that is a helpful tool for our understanding of the medieval Chinese presentation of the body that we are dealing with here:

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways. The care that is given to it, in grooming, feeding and therapy, the theories about what it needs in the way of sleep and exercise, about the stages it should go through, the pains it can stand, its span of life, all the cultural categories in which it is perceived must correlate closely with the categories in which society is seen in so far as these also draw upon the same culturally processed idea of the body.¹⁰³

With this analysis of Douglas we can partly explain what we find in medical texts of medieval China. The integration of infants and children into families and communities is an integration of the child's physical body, which is therefore, in conjunction with growth and development, gradually 'socialised'.¹⁰⁴ My approach to the medical texts, as well as an understanding of the child, its body and treatment relies on this definition of the social and the physical body.

1. The body in medieval China and texts about the child's body

Concerning children, medical authors of medieval China were occupied with the question of how the body of a child became the body of an adult. Before analysing the developmental processes of medieval children, we therefore need to understand what the targeted adult body was or into what ideal the growing child's body had to develop in order to become a physically perfect being. This

¹⁰³ Douglas 1970: 65.

¹⁰⁴ Throughout this thesis we will be confronted with ways in which individuals and groups of people, in fact, deal with the bodies of children, and the child's physical integration into its community appears to be very important to its social integration into different communities. See for example Schipper 1993, who approaches the body as it was explained by Daoist groups in particular.

first section's aim thus is to sketch a rough picture of several ideas and theories about the body in medieval China.¹⁰⁵

Medical texts from at least the third century B.C. onward have already defined that children ought to be treated differently than adults, they especially point out that children were supposed to receive fewer medicaments than adults for the same illness. Withal, advice on the child's physical condition at that time is found scattered and often in the close vicinity of discussions on the condition of the female reproductive body. Larger cohesive texts about children address birth and proceedings after birth. However, from the fifth century onward we have lists of texts that deal with children exclusively. Therefore, in the second section I will analyse the historical background of texts and significant passages that were concerned with the child's body because it will benefit our comprehension of the seventh and eighth century medical texts which I will discuss in the following sections.

The medieval body: Cosmos, empire, bureaucracy and agriculture

The basic knowledge about the body that underlies writings and narratives about the body in medieval China, emerged in texts originating from the third century BC parallel with far-reaching developments in the social order. Within this period, around the establishment of the Chinese imperial system, texts concerning the body display an understanding of the body that "was composed mainly of vaguely defined bones and flesh traversed by circulation tracts."¹⁰⁶ The circulation tracts were interpreted and put to use in various ways: as blood vessels, channels, pulse or "topographical routes around the body, divisions of musculature, and the pulse."¹⁰⁷ Sivin remarks that early theorists, whose aim was to point out the correlation between state, cosmos and the human body, concentrated on discussions about the functions of different body parts, and not

¹⁰⁵ A complete and detailed study, comparable to LeGoff's and Truong's work on the medieval body in Europe, combining medical texts, Daoist and Buddhist literature as well as narratives, encyclopaedias and art historical works concerning the medieval Chinese body, has not yet been written.

¹⁰⁶ Sivin 1995: 12.

¹⁰⁷ Lo 1998 (unbound version): 106 ff. Concerning the specification of the circulation of blood and vapour in the body that were related to health, Harper writes that "maintaining health was essentially monitoring the condition of the vessels... The *Maishu* 'Six Constituents' suggests what the new index of illness was: pain," Harper 1998: 82.

so much on their structure.¹⁰⁸ Their point of view is summarized by scholars under the term ‘correlative cosmology’.¹⁰⁹

This early imperial theory about the body permitted not only the creation of interrelations between the cosmos and men, but also between the body’s exterior and the body’s interior. As a consequence, skin, hair, face, and teeth were perceived as markers of the actions that take place inside the body.¹¹⁰ “The face was simultaneously a microcosm of the universe and a place where coloured emanations styled ‘colours of the qi’ (*qise* 氣色) and ‘colours of vessels’ (*maise* 脈色) were an animation of each individual’s inner condition, health, wealth and personal fortune.”¹¹¹ The skin, accordingly, “was not only seen as a barrier and frontier separating interior from exterior, the self from the other, but also as their meeting place.”¹¹² Similarly the hair was “regarded as an indicator of the body’s health and disorder.”¹¹³ After the theories of the correlation of body, state and cosmos had been established for several centuries, understanding of the body reached another level from the second century A.D. onward.

In a seminal article, Anna Seidel has traced back the relationship between the fall of the Han dynasty, imperial treasure objects, and apocrypha with Daoist talismans, charts, registers, writs and tallies which came into use from that time on.¹¹⁴ Daoist sacraments were often used in medical practice by Daoists of any kind. Furthermore, Daoist meditation practices envisioned the inner of the body as an administrated area, based on the ideal of the Han dynasty administrative units. Accordingly, in medical practice, Daoist priests often used talismans, which carried the function of an imperial order from the divine emperor of Heaven. A talisman then was burned and the patient had to drink the ashes. This treatment was supposed to show effect because by drinking the talisman, the correct imperial order would arrive at the place of malfunction, which would then be rectified. After death, a person was imagined to be judged by this

¹⁰⁸ Sivin 1995: 12-3.

¹⁰⁹ Correlative cosmology, the Chinese ‘holistic’ understanding of the body, came into existence simultaneously with the efforts of combining state, cosmology and body shortly before and during the first two Han dynasties.

¹¹⁰ The body could also be attacked by factors from outside the body, usually demons. But demons were despised and only rarely accepted in medical literature that was created by lettered men who were trained in *ru*-writings. These men traditionally did not consider demons and ghosts – although discussions on diseases caused by winds and evil *qi* from the outside are similar to demon attack, yet, their treatment is different. On demonic medicine see e.g. Harper 1998 and Unschuld 1985.

¹¹¹ Despeux 2005: 176.

¹¹² Despeux 2005: 183.

¹¹³ Lin 1999: 365. See also Yates 2000: 5 about a summary of early Chinese body conception.

¹¹⁴ Seidel 1983, see also Harper 1998: 178.

administration and receive punishment within his or her body. The imagining of punishment ordered by an underworld administration was elaborated in the light of Buddhism, which also worked with the idea of an underworld, and started to penetrate Chinese texts from ca. the second century AD onward.

The ways the body was treated by different groups of people, its integration into communities, and also body techniques and expressions, were objects of continuous change especially during the politically chaotic and violent times between the second and sixth century A.D.¹¹⁵ The body's exterior was modified according to changing agreements and rules within different communities. Medieval law and literature but also murals, for example, show that mutilations and tattoos were applied on the bodies of convicts. Additionally, a certain hairstyle displayed the social status and age of a person. We see this, for example, with dependants such as slaves, servants and children, who wore their hair in tufts. Moreover, later, in the eighth century, sculptures of women had voluptuous and corpulent forms instead of the hitherto slim ones. Children were also displayed rather pudgy according to a preferred convention,¹¹⁶ as I have discussed in chapter II.¹¹⁷ We can only speculate whether these forms have actually corresponded with real bodies or whether they were purely ideals.

For those families that were relying on the *Classics*, on which they based the justification of their family rules and strict hierarchical relations, the body was a gift from the parents and not supposed to be damaged.¹¹⁸ The body was

¹¹⁵ Concerning the body in late imperial China, Bray finds this multiplicity expressed in medicine, as well as religion, and magical and cosmological beliefs. The latter group of beliefs, she states "produced variations or alternatives to these images." Bray 1997: 300. She makes us aware that people generally deal with multiple models of the body in any culture and at any time, but that "one will usually predominate at any moment." Bray 1997: 297 note 37. Relying on Douglas, Bray further explains that "the phenomenological body (the physical package of flesh and blood, bones and sinews, vital organs, nerves and senses – perhaps incorporating, perhaps distinct from an immaterial mind, soul or spirit – through which we exist in the world) is differently constituted and organized in different societies, and even within the same society it will be understood and experienced differently by different people," Bray 1997: 297, which is similar to medieval Chinese understanding of the body.

¹¹⁶ That probably has nothing to do with the becoming voluptuous of female sculptures. Female statues gained weight inspired by the well-rounded forms of emperor Xuanzong's famous concubine Yang Guifei (楊貴妃 or Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環, 719-756).

¹¹⁷ Still, we can only speak of the body from the viewpoint of the elite and do not know much about the actual customs around the body from commoners and from non-Han peoples. It would be interesting to investigate the "Human kind" chapters of the *Taiping yulan*, which summarizes numerous quotes from especially apocryphal texts and other material from the Han to the Tang dynasty, and sketches pictures for the ideal hairstyle, as seen from an elite tenth century point of view.

¹¹⁸ See Yang Rubin 1996 on a general overview of ideas connected with the body in a *ru*-ist scope.

subordinated to ritual, and a person had to pay attention to practice correct body movements. Members of those communities also paid special attention to the body's exterior. However, despite the requirement of intactness of the body, during the Tang dynasty, care of the body's wholeness did not have priority, and we find several narratives about descendants to cripple or damage his or her body for the benefit of the parent's body. Sons and daughters in law, usually when they were adults, who were deemed to be filial, were reported to cut into their own flesh in order to prepare an invigorating meal from their body for their parents or they bowed so often in repentance that their forehead bled.¹¹⁹

Certain body-movements, or body-techniques, were advised in order to have an effect on health, life-span, wealth, and fortune. These techniques fell under the thematic group of 'self-cultivation' or 'nurturing life.' 'Nurturing life' became entangled with Daoist longevity practices and with preventive medicine. Health improving practices included not only breathing techniques, and gymnastics, but also eating special food and taking into account the respective season when carrying out activities.

Many body techniques used to prolong life were practiced within the scope of alchemy. Internal and external alchemy worked with certain ideas about the body that were to a great extent related to the ideas about correlative cosmology. This cosmology was in favour of chaos, which was seen as the primitive state of cosmos. Alchemy, furthermore, was based on the knowledge about the nature of transformation. In this context, transformation could be controlled with the knowledge about timing, which means, the knowledge of when which processes were going on within the body.¹²⁰

Unless sudden changes were enforced on the body or otherwise noted as curious or transmitted in paintings and sculptures,¹²¹ we cannot know how people have ameliorated their bodies or marked their bodies in order to make certain statements. Hence, applying alterations to the body's exterior and to body movements were a matter of continuing change that might not have been consciously recognized in most cases by contemporaries, and usually has not been defined in texts or other durable forms of transmission. As the unseen part, the interior of the body, on the other hand, was deliberated about in writings.

The medieval body's interior was not only made up by organs, namely the five *zang* (五臟) and six *fu* (六腑), but also by 'floating' or unfixed substances. The most important unfixed 'ingredients' of a body were the content of the *mai*-

¹¹⁹ See Qiu Zhonglin 1995 about the non-filial behaviour for the sake of filial piety. He traces the roots of damaging one's body for one's parents or in-laws back to the Tang dynasty.

¹²⁰ See article by Ishida 1989, Robinet 1993, Pregadio 2006.

¹²¹ Such as changes in hairstyle or, to mention another well studied feature, the bound feet of women.

vessels (脈), the *shen*-spirits (神), *hun*- and *po*-souls (魂魄), blood (*xue* 血), *jing*-essence (精) *qi*-energy (氣). The souls could flee from the body, and *qi* could easily be disturbed or be stolen via fixed materials such as fingernails or hair. The vessels could be disturbed by for example evil *qi* from the outside, or diseases from the inside. Blockages then had to be opened up again by influencing certain points on the body.¹²²

Interior and exterior of the body cannot be explained individually because they were thoroughly interrelated. “Chinese medical theory was primarily interested in the processes of interaction and transformation that nourished and maintained the healthy body and that also determined the transmission and evolution of disorders. The Chinese organs [...] were functional systems that connected different levels of the same type of physiological activity.”¹²³

Lastly, we need to consider ideas about the body contributed by Chinese interpretations of Buddhist texts. Although, in Buddhist texts we usually do not find a great consideration of the body.¹²⁴ We only find that authors believed that the human male body was the only form that could make it to Buddha-hood and could guarantee freedom from the circle of death and rebirth which one should try to escape.¹²⁵ All other bodies – female body, animal and vegetable forms, as well as supernatural forms were prone to be reborn. The Buddhist image of the body was defined by the knowledge about rebirth. The body was a grotesque product of one's own deeds done during that life or during former lives: now a girl, then a goat. The body of a snake could be immediately connected with the son of a man who boiled this same snake.¹²⁶ Furthermore, together with Buddhism arrived a range of demons that attacked the body at specific times, which have been made fit into the Chinese calendar. For instance, in one text we find that special attention for the child was advised on the second day of the second month of the second year after birth; on the third day of the third month of the third year after birth up to day twelve of month twelve of year twelve after birth.¹²⁷

¹²² These points are not fixed and vary between different teachers and traditions. See e.g. Despeux 2005 and Fan Jiawei 2004.

¹²³ Bray 1997: 302.

¹²⁴ Chinese medicine, however, shows many traces of Indian medicine that entered the Chinese literary scene together with Buddhism.

¹²⁵ With the exception of female emperor Wu Zetian, who claimed to have been a Bodhisattva.

¹²⁶ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 459: 3755 (*Lu yi ji*).

¹²⁷ T1330 救療小兒疾病經. Those days can be collectively regulated, such as the dates mentioned in the sixth century almanac *Jing Chu suishi ji*, or they are observed individually. The individual consideration of dangerous days is especially observed for children, see chapter IV.

Body parts, fluids and supernatural beings on the inside and outside of the body featured abundantly in medieval narrative. However, they were often left unexplained and with numerous variations without consideration of the professional alchemical and medical textual discussions. Although, for example, theories of exact numbers of the *hun*- and *po*-souls existed, in narratives usually only one or an unspecified number of souls came to visit the living and no questions were asked about the remaining souls. The *hun*-soul's shape could be seen exclusively by professional seers or by natural seers such as children and sometimes accidentally by anybody.

Writing about children's developments and disorders until the seventh century A.D.

Numerous texts of various genres from the second century B.C. onward contain written evidence of the conception of the child as a physical entity. Most of the entries that have medical implications concerning children are very brief. Due to this it proves difficult to outline a coherent textual tradition that preceded Sui and Tang medical writings about children and we cannot say to what extent there was an interest in children's health issues.

The first mention of children in a coherent medical text dates back to the Western Han dynasty *Prescriptions for Fifty-two Illnesses* (五十二病方). This medical text, which was excavated from a tomb at Mawangdui (dated 167 B.C.) contains three references to children's diseases, namely infant-cord rigidity, spasms and convulsions.¹²⁸ The entries provide brief information on the symptoms of each ailment and its treatment. According to this text, treatment in the case of cord rigidity prescribed the use of anthill loam and salt which had to be hot-pressed to the affected areas. Treatment against spasms was done with a bath that consisted of water mixed with bamboo-truffle and pig lard.¹²⁹ Treatment for convulsions involved 'vegetation from the upturned-slope of the roof', saliva and an incantation.¹³⁰

The three entries in the *Prescriptions for Fifty-two Illnesses* are interesting because these diseases were also mentioned in medical books from the Jin (265-316) to the Tang.¹³¹ That means that one or more written traditions about childhood diseases might have existed that were transmitted by medical authors throughout several centuries. Moreover, *Prescriptions for Fifty-two Illnesses*

¹²⁸ Harper 1998: 231-234.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*: 232-233.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*: 233-234.

¹³¹ Chen Dali 1987: 47.

distinguishes between adults and children concerning the administered medical dose, a point that was stressed by Tang medical authors as well.

Among the manuscripts from the Mawangdui tombs was also a text entitled *Book of the Generation of the Foetus* (Taichan shu 台產書).¹³² This text explains the child's development in the uterus and handlings regarding the afterbirth. It also, for the greatest part, addresses the exertion of influence on the child's sex and future character and abilities. This practice of influencing the foetus was known as foetus instruction.¹³³

Around the time when the Mawangdui tombs were built, Sima Qian (司馬遷, ca. 145-86) included the biography of the fourth century B.C. practicing doctor called Bian Que (扁鵲 ?407-?310 BC)¹³⁴ in his *Historical Records* (*Shiji* 史記). In this biography he pointed out this doctor's special interest in children.¹³⁵ Bian Que did not transmit writings and was specialized in several more medical fields such as women's health issues. But still, in this early imperial biography, children were mentioned as a special field of interest, apart from adults. We can therefore draw the conclusion that those who transmitted the legends formed around Bian Que, were aware of the fact that children's bodies request different treatment.

In addition to medical texts, non-medical literature contains discussions about the child's body as well. Most of the ideas on children were deliberated in texts concerning politics, cosmology, morality, ritual and history. These entries on children deal with prenatal development and provide brief summaries of the development from birth until old age.¹³⁶ A child after birth was described as being without eyesight, unable to eat, walk, speak or reproduce.¹³⁷ Such discussions imply that the reference and the ultimate goal for childhood was adulthood. Kinney therefore suggests that "early Han Confucian description of a child's intellectual, moral, and biological development are generally based on the notion that a virtuous adult is the culmination, and perhaps, the triumph of a

¹³² For a translation of the Mawangdui *Taichan shu* see Harper 1998: 372-384.

¹³³ I will discuss it in chapter VI.2.

¹³⁴ Sima Qian lived around the time when the Mawangdui tombs were built

¹³⁵ See *Historical Records*, *Shiji* 史記 105: 2794. The *Shiji* was compiled between 104 and 87 BC.

¹³⁶ Kinney finds quotes in the *Shuoyuan* (*Shuoyuan* 說苑 first century B.C., Knechtges in Loewe 1993: 443 ff. Knechtges describes the *Shuoyuan* as "a collection of moral tales and political admonitions," (op.cit. 443)), the *Daode jing* (道德經 3rd century B.C., Boltz in Loewe 1993: 269 ff), the *Guanzi* (管子 5th-1st century B.C., Rickett in Loewe 1993: 244 ff), and the *Huainanzi* (淮南子 Before 139 B.C, LeBlanc in Loewe 1993: 189 ff), which all describe the developments of children's body in monthly and yearly terms, Kinney 2004: 155 ff.

¹³⁷ Kinney 2004: 27-28. The *Shuoyuan*, furthermore, outlines a development of bones related to body movements that we find back in Tang medical works.

long, gradual process that begins at conception”¹³⁸ Apart from these theories linking children’s developments with social, political or philosophical ideas, not much more is known about ideas of the child’s body, observation of its body or its treatment.

Although the venerable *Classics* were held high, the early Tang medical author and alchemist Sun Simiao (孫思邈, ca. 581-682) did not consider all of the classical literature as helpful regarding their actual capacity to help children survive. On the contrary, he critized:

The *Discussion*¹³⁹ says: Concerning the ways of producing people, there is none that does not consist of raising the young to become adult.’ If you do not regard children [as a category apart] they will die early and they will not become adults. Therefore the *Changes* says: ‘Pile up the small in order to grow big.’¹⁴⁰ The *Poetry* has [a sentence]: ‘The first birth of our people [was from Jiang Yuan].’¹⁴¹ The *Commentaries to the Spring and Autumn Annals* says: ‘Shengzi gave birth to Duke Yin.’¹⁴² One of the implications of this, then, is this that from the inconspicuous, [living things] become manifest; from being young, [living things] become mature. With respect to human circumstances, this is commonly seen. To know that, one does not require the *Classics* and *Histories*.¹⁴³

Sun Simiao did not criticize such passages that explained the development of the foetus, which he also used in his texts.¹⁴⁴ But he was not content with the attitude in the *Classics* which took it for granted that things that were small became big as a natural given, which means merely that children became adults. He emphasised there, right in the beginning of the section about children in his treatise, that a special attitude towards children was needed in order to care for their survival until adulthood.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*: 28.

¹³⁹ I could not identify what the *Discussion* is.

¹⁴⁰ In the translation of Wilhelm: *So häuft [der Edle hingebenden Wesens] Kleines, um es zu [Hohem und] Großem zu bringen*. ‘Book of Changes, no. 46 ‘sheng’. “Das Empordringen. Das Bild: Inmitten der Erde wächst das Holz: das Bild des Empordringens. So häuft der Edle hingebenden Wesens Kleines, um es zu Hohem und Großem zu bringen,” Wilhelm 1994 (1973): 173.

¹⁴¹ *Shijing* ‘Daya 大雅’ II, “Sheng min zhi shen”: 1. Translation Legge 1876: 464., vol. IV, pt. II. The text in Legge’s translation proceeds: “How did she give birth to our people? She presented a pure offering and sacrificed, that her childlessness must be taken away.” Her offspring is the mythological hero Hou Ji.

¹⁴² *Chunqiu zuozhuan* 1 ‘Yin Gong 隱公’: 1.

¹⁴³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 1a.

¹⁴⁴ The quotes he is using all derive from those texts that are venerated by the classicists. Therewith he might criticize a big part of his readers, but he strongly wants to make aware that in child care issues it is better to rely on his book than on the usual writings.

We hardly have any information about medical practice concerning children between the second century BC and the sixth century A.D. And no medical books or chapters that dealt exclusively with children is reported from before the *History of the Sui* (*Suishu* 隨書).¹⁴⁵ The biographical chapter in this early Tang work contains three books that show the existence of individual medical treatises concerning children. These were the *Prescriptions for Young Children and Adolescence* (少小方) in one chapter,¹⁴⁶ the *Alchemical Methods for Healing Children* (療小兒丹法) in one chapter,¹⁴⁷ and *Mr Yu's Prescriptions for Healing Children* (俞氏療小兒方) in four chapters.¹⁴⁸ None of these writings is extant now and there is no evidence of later citation.

Still, we can assume that a written tradition concerning the physical treatment of children existed prior to the Sui dynasty, yet not long before it.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Compiled between 629-636 by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-643).

¹⁴⁶ *Suishu* 34: 1045.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 1042. Except for Mr Yu the authors of the texts are not mentioned.

¹⁴⁹ Volkmar, who discusses the 'history of paediatrics' throughout Chinese history, suggests that a serious engagement with paediatrics started in the ca. second and third century A.D. Her strongest argument to support this assumption is that a third century book on pulse diagnostics, the *Maijing* (脈經) deals with pediatrics in a way that one can conclude that there has existed a basic work on paediatrics at that time (Volkmar 1985: 107-8, fn. 62). She assumes that this text might have been the *Fontanelle Classics of Children, Luxinjing* (顱囟經), supposedly written in the Jin dynasty (265-420). The text has been quoted in the late Sui and the early Tang by Chao Yuanfang and Sun Simiao in their chapters on children of the *Aetiology and Symptoms* and the *Prescriptions*, where it is attributed to the shamans of the middle ancient times who were divining long life and early death with its help (*Zhubing yuanhou lun* 45: 1; *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 2a). The *Fontanelle Classic* that we know today has been compiled by an anonymous author during the end of the Tang dynasty and the beginning of the Song dynasty. According to Volkmar, the original character of the early Fontanelle Classic is difficult to track down. Volkmar suggests that the book has a divinatory character and belongs to the demonological medicine (Volkmar 1985: 28). She states that this work elaborates a theory on children's diseases and healing on the basis of a polarity in the child's physiology. She also observes that the understanding of the child takes place between the concepts of the child as weak. The weakness concerns its defence, its need for protection and its not yet stable equilibrium on one the hand, and its abundance or fullness, purity and the *yang* as 'heat' that works in its inside, on the other. These observances, however, derive from the Song dynasty *Luxinjing* of Qian Yi (d. 1113). One book that is often quoted in both Chao Yuanfang's and Sun Simiao's works is the *Lesser Grade Remedies, Xiaopinfang* (小品方), attributed to Chen Yanzhi (陳延之, fifth century). The *Lesser Grade Remedies* was edited between 454 and 473 and it is mentioned for the first time in the *History of the Sui*, but has been lost now.¹⁴⁹ Gao Wenzhu's reconstruction from 1983 shows that the *Lesser Grade Remedies* dealt with numerous other fields like gynaecology, hot and cold diseases and other medical fields dealing with the adult body. Nonetheless, Volkmar suggests that this book was a work on paediatrics only. The *Lesser Grade Remedies* apparently had a similar content to the *Aetiology and Symptoms*.

One piece of evidence for that is the comment in the entry of Mr Yu's *Prescriptions* in the *History of the Sui*, which states that:

in the Liang dynasty (502 A.D. - 557) was a [...] *Miscellaneous Prescriptions of the Hundred Diseases of Young Children and Adolescence* (療少小百病雜方) by Xu Shuxiang (徐叔嚮) in 37 chapters, an [anonymous] *Miscellaneous Prescriptions for Healing Young Children and Adolescence* (療少小雜方) in twenty chapters, an [anonymous] *Miscellaneous Prescriptions for Healing Young Children and Adolescence* (療少小雜方) in 29 chapters, Mr Fan's *Medicaments and Prescriptions for Healing Little Children* (范氏療小兒藥方) in one chapter, and a *Miscellaneous Prescriptions for Healing Little Children* (療小兒雜方) by Wang Mo (王末) in seventeen chapters, all are lost.¹⁵⁰

If the commentator was not mistaken, several medical texts that specialised on children existed during the first half of the sixth century A.D. The mention of those texts is the first trace of a possibly independent textual tradition about children's medical issues.¹⁵¹

The reconstruction of a history of writings about the medical treatment of children prior to the seventh century, as we could see, is based on many assumptions and only a few traces in the form of coherent texts. Sun Simiao considered the history of medical writings about children as sketchy, and scattered across different geographical areas. His aim was to combine all this knowledge into one coherent text, as well as improve it:

In the middle-ancient times there were 'shamans' (巫妨) who established the *Fontanelle Classic for Small Children*¹⁵² in order to foretell early death (夭) and longevity (壽) and to forecast over disease, death and life. It was transmitted and passed on from generation to generation. Only then, for the first time, one had prescriptions for children.¹⁵³ Until the Jin and Song periods [265-479], [the people of] the region to the left of the river Jiang praised the varied knowledge of the Su

¹⁵⁰ *Suishu* 34: 1042, commentary.

¹⁵¹ See also the article by Liu Shukui 1998: 177-180 about the *New Book of Paediatrics* (*Youyou xinshu* 幼幼新書). He provides a list of the books used for the compilation of the *Youyou xinshu* – aside from the usual classics of medicine, most of the sources are from the Tang of the Song, just one is from the Liang dynasty. Unfortunately, to the greatest extent, those sources are not extant anymore. I assume that they have already been lost since shortly after the compilation of the *Youyou xinshu*.

¹⁵² *Xiaer luxinjing*. See Volkmar: 27-29 and her footnotes 63-67. The earliest extant text with that name is edited by Chen Yi in the early Song dynasty, see further below in the main text.

¹⁵³ The *Isshinpo* presents this paragraph as a quote from the *Xiaopinfang*, *Isshinpo* 24.

family,¹⁵⁴ whose transmissions and learnings were based on examinations, and who circulated it amongst the people. During the Qi was Xu Wang,¹⁵⁵ who also [authored] a *Prescription for Children* in three chapters. Therefore, the ones who study [medicine] nowadays have received quite a lot [to study from]. However, Mr Xu's position was very important and distinguished – how could he have found the leisure to put his heart into [medical issues of] children? Now, I compiled broadly from various specialists and from those things which I myself have gone through and used with efficacy in order to make this booklet. If all families will attain this technique of raising children, then there will be no more accidental early deaths.¹⁵⁶

This quote appears in the beginning of Sun's 'Prescriptions for Children' (少小嬰孺方). The description of the available sources before and during his time is relatively detailed, and Sun emphasises that the texts on which he based his knowledge derive from people who have actual experience in medically treating children.¹⁵⁷ Sun's knowledge about the history of texts concerning the medical treatment of children starts with the *Fontanelle Classic* for small children, compiled by shamans, whose content was probably transmitted first orally and later as a written text. He also had access to texts of medical authors, or other literate people, who compiled the oral knowledge of practicing doctors from different areas.

Despite the existence of such medical traditions, Sun emphasized that still many children died young, and he criticized harshly the specialist's way of approaching and treating – or not treating – children. Sun introduced his chapters about children with the remark that his knowledge is based on scattered texts, on the written knowledge of well-known practitioners and on famous but otherwise occupied doctors, who could not engage themselves full-time with the treatment of children. He further added his own thinking and experience to his work, as a great improvement to any other texts on treating children, and definitely as an improvement to the *Classics*.

¹⁵⁴ Sujia (蘇家); I did not find any information about this family. Probably it was a local family in which the practice of medicine was inherited from father to son.

¹⁵⁵ Xu Wang is Xu Zhucan (徐之才, around 550). His biography tells of several events during his childhood that shows his precocity. Thus he could, for example, cite the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*) when he was eight years old and astonish others with his smart behavior before the age of thirteen. He was famed in the Jiangzhou for his medical arts, and was also a doctor to emperor Wucheng (537-569) of the Northern Qi. For his biography see the *History of Qi* (*Qishu*) 33: 444.

¹⁵⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 1b-2a.

¹⁵⁷ Sun might also have drawn on – probably practical – traditions that we have no trace of nowadays.

The shamans Sun mentioned as early healers for children were concerned with foretelling a child's future and foretelling disease, life and death. In fact, in narratives shamans more often featured as successful, or dramatically unsuccessful, healers than doctors did. They stayed an important institution throughout imperial Chinese history and we will discuss them later on in this chapter.

The most complete medical sources of the medieval period that contain substantial discussions on the development and growth of children, are four books compiled by three authors, Chao Yuanfang (巢元方, 550-630), Sun Simiao (孫思邈, 581-682) and Wang Tao (王濤, around 752), in the seventh and eighth century. The world view these texts enhances was limited to a small elite. Yet, in a less specified way, the treatments for children prescribed in these works might also partly have been shared by other elite or non-elite groups. Furthermore, ritual advice and protective means that are included in the medical texts probably derived from the big pool of non-literate people's experience with birth.

All of these major medical works mainly address diseases of men and women in general and health issues of women in their reproductive age in particular. Additionally, the treatises include several chapters that are exclusively concerned with the development and growth of children, as well as the proper handling of infants, special children's diseases and the treatment of diseases of children. Regarding all four works, slightly less than half of the chapters on children deal more or less exclusively with diseases and especially with remedies for treatment. The other half covers the description of ceremonial or ritual proceedings done on specific days after a child's birth or under specific circumstances.¹⁵⁸

The medical texts focus specifically on the new-born child and its physical development in relation to its gradual enculturation. Several additional sources also throw light on various medical issues regarding children. The tenth century Japanese work *Isshinpo* (醫心方, 984), compiled by Tanba Yasuyori (丹波康賴, 912-995) was composed similarly to these Sui and early Tang works and also includes coherent chapters on issues about children. Lastly, several Buddhist and Daoist texts deal with health issues as well as with methods of protection of the child's body.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ All four works and their point of view stay valid reference works until late imperial China. See part below.

¹⁵⁹ I am aware of Bray's warning that "when texts about bodies are what we have to work with, discourses and its political roots will loom larger in shaping our understanding of those bodies than it did in reality, Bray 1997: 301.

Medical texts of the seventh century AD show a textual organization of knowledge about children that is different to medical texts before their time. Much of their content derived from medical and political, as well as ritual texts from pre-imperial, early imperial and early medieval China, as I have shown above. Yet, seventh century medical texts display discussions on children in a coherent form; as separate chapters that specifically deal with children. But I remind that chapters on children's medical treatment did not appear suddenly, and that specialised knowledge about it was available in earlier times already.

In 610, Chao Yuanfang presents his chapters on children (小兒雜病諸) as a novelty, and emphasizes his new perspective on children in his foreword:

All people are [called] 'small' (小) above the age of six, 'young' (少) when they are above the age of sixteen, 'grown-up' (壯) when they are above the age of thirty, 'old' when they are above the age of fifty. Concerning the ones under the age of six, they are not considered in the classical [literature on medicine]. Therefore, when a child that is still be suckled falls ill and it is difficult to heal, all [the doctors] then have nothing to base themselves on.¹⁶⁰

This quotation appears not only in Chao Yuanfang's, but also in Sun Simiao's and Wang Tao's forewords to their prescriptions for children. The first part of this citation originally derives from chapter fifty-nine of the *Numinous Pivot* (*Lingshu* 靈樞) of the *Yellow Thearch's Inner Classic* (*Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經).¹⁶¹ The second part was probably added by Chen Yanzhi (陳延之, around 454-473), the author of the fifth century work *Lesser Grade Remedies* (*Shao Ping Fang* 小品方), whose quote was adopted by the seventh and eighth centuries' medical classics.¹⁶² This statement thus formed the basis of the treatises at hand: children under the age of

¹⁶⁰ Quote from *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 45: 1.

¹⁶¹ *Lingshu* 59, however, starts with the venerated old people and is ending with the young children: "People, when they are fifty years old and older are called 'old' (老); when they are twenty and older they are called grown-up (壯); when they are eighteen and older they are called 'minors' (少) and when they are six and older they are called 'little' (小)." This change in the order implies a change of focus. Development starts from a young age, which ascribes a certain importance to children.

¹⁶² The *Lesser Grade Remedies* only exists in a replenished version, based on especially Chao Yuanfang's, Sun Simiao's, Wang Tao's and Tanba Yasuyori's works. Gao Wenzhu suggests a Buddhist influence behind the medical work. The prescriptions that are described are easy to understand in terms of ingredients and writing style. Prescriptions under each heading are also limited, which provides another help for those who are not doctors or pharmacists, and who might not have a great stock of ingredients, Gao Wenzhu 1983: 185. See the discussion of that work in Yates 2000: 23-24 n. 43.

six became their especially designated target.¹⁶³ The statement serves as an example to point out the nature of the treatises on children, namely that they were a patchwork of different sources. These sources derived from different times and often also belonged to different genres, and they were not necessarily written with a focus on the child's body, the child's health or the child in general. The style of the argument in the new medical chapters on children also shows that their purpose was to promote this kind of treatises. They are presented as authoritative scholarly medical compendium, and therefore as the best source of knowledge for those who had to treat children's diseases. The compilers clearly set themselves apart and at a superior level, compared to other works.¹⁶⁴

This explicit emphasis on children's health issues occurs at the same time as the "gendering of medicine,"¹⁶⁵ when women's health was approached differently than men's. Although the female body has been occasionally discussed in earlier texts, a special focus on women, called *fuke* (婦科), which nearly equates modern gynaecology, emerges in sixth and seventh century texts. Yates suggests that the interest in women has to do with the concern of "a vibrant tradition within the Daoist religious community," between the Han and the Tang dynasties.¹⁶⁶ In fact, it is especially within the scope of Daoist practices and ideas of longevity that a strong interest in children emerged as well, as we will see in more detail below.

Sun Simiao pushed the importance of a focus on children further than Chao Yuanfang. He related a child's importance to that of a woman, and gave both a place as the base of a man's life, for adult men could not exist without either of them:

The fact that this treatise (the *Prescriptions*) [puts] women and children first, and [discusses] men and old people later, is in the meaning of venerating the origin.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Older children are also addressed, but only occasionally, mostly in relation to the amount of a medical dose that has to be administered.

¹⁶⁴ Withal, to claim that one's book is a novelty or to say that it is better than one's predecessor's books, appears to be a convention in medical writing. Harper notes: "Secrecy, disciples, debates over the interpretation of theory, derisive statements about the poor quality of others' books – all have a place in the social history of early Chinese medicine," (Harper 1998: 67). The fact that all three authors quote the same 'novel insight' from the fifth century AD leaves room for the conclusion that this sentence displaying originality and concern might not only have been a standard sentence. It also might have been copied for another purpose than expressing concern about high infant mortality, namely demarcating oneself from other healing professionals.

¹⁶⁵ Yates 2000: 12.

¹⁶⁶ Yates 2000: 30.

¹⁶⁷ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 1b.

Sun thus pointed out that he reversed the usual order of medical discussions, which was adult men, women, and children. Therewith he made clear that for him the origin of men lies in the womb of women, and that men accordingly develop further from foetus, infant, child and adolescent to adulthood. Although the male body was still the ultimate focus for medical understanding, the child's body gained attention that was unheard of, by being discussed separately and before men – at least in Sun Simiao's opinion.¹⁶⁸

2. Developments before birth and during early childhood

Two processes of child growth received attention in texts before medieval times. These are the development of the foetus and the development of motor abilities together with the growth of the infant. Medieval authors have enriched these theories and bridged both development theories with a third one: the theory of Changing and Steaming (*bianzheng* 變蒸). This process explained the completion of the foetal development after birth. Medical authors, whose ideas probably relied on alchemical knowledge, attempted to connect this process with the further growth of the child and its increasing abilities in movement and perception.

In this section I focus on medieval medical theories about the different developmental stages that a child goes through from the moment of its conception until its second year after birth. Before examining these ideas I will discuss the alchemical theory of timing and growth that, as I will argue, underlied these ideas about foetal and infant growth. Awareness of the basic alchemical ideas on timing will help us comprehend how medical theories about children were created and used in medieval China.

The schedule of growth

Alchemists, Daoist adepts whose aim was to attain immortality, have exerted much influence on medieval understanding of a child's early physical development. The reason herefore lies in the special interest of alchemists in chaos and its development into an organised system, which alchemists linked to

¹⁶⁸ This argument shows Sun's Daoist approach to the body. However, children are only discussed this prominently in the *Prescriptions*. Other medical works feature children towards the end. About five hundred years later (before 1150) children are the subject of extensive medical literature – far more extensive than they had been discussed in medicine before. This is often understood as the beginning of Chinese paediatrics, see e.g. Hsiung 2005.

the development of an embryo into an adult. The most important knowledge an alchemist required, was to understand the timing of the cosmic process. As the development of a human being and that of the cosmos was believed to be linked with each other, timing in human development and timing in the development of the cosmos was coherent. That means each stage in the development of the cosmos illuminated or explained the correspondent stage in human development and vice versa.¹⁶⁹

The alchemist adept aspired to attain immortality by reversing this development and going back from organization to chaos. In the combination of Chinese philosophy and medical ideas an embryo is thus put on the same level with the pre-social or pre-civilized chaos because it originates like the cosmos.¹⁷⁰ Through processes in which understanding is based on metaphors of cooking, men and cosmos gradually develop until death.¹⁷¹ In medical texts that deal with the development of children, including the development of the foetus and the early development of the infant, the 'correct' timing of each stage is crucial.¹⁷²

Furthermore, defining the day of birth, knowing if it is an auspicious or inauspicious day, and applying the right ritual actions that were scheduled for each day in the Chinese calendar was thought to be crucial for the future of the child, as well as for the well being of the mother and the whole family.¹⁷³ The *Isshinpo*, quoting the *Chanjing* (產經), provides several lists that define each day of a month. The 'Methods for foretelling the child's fortune with the help of the 'Four Spirits' consists of seventeen entries. For example:

Day one, nine, twenty-nine and seventeen of the first month are the days of the Vermillion Bird. Children born on these days will oppose their parents and will have many diseases. Day two, ten, twenty-eight and eighteen are the days of the

¹⁶⁹ See especially Sivin's research on timing 1968 and *Science and civilization* V.4.

¹⁷⁰ These ideas of course develop in a time when there was much social disorder and the longing to return to the ideal order that was believed to have existed in the Han administration, in fact "chaos is found in greatest abundance wherever order is being sought. It always defeats order, because it is better organized," Pratchett 1994: 5.

¹⁷¹ The concept of 'correlative cosmology' is best described by A.C. Graham 1986; in medical terms by Harper 1998. Another analogy between embryo and chaos-cosmos is made by calling the zygote (*hunyuan* 渾圓): "When male and female have fertile sexual relations, they generate a *Hunyuan* which is perfectly round, and composed of yin and yang elements. The *Hunyuan* corresponds to the fertilized ovum in modern science. It will become, with time, the body of a human being," Bernier (e.a.) 1994: 10. See Girardot 1983 for a book-length analysis of food (soup) and chaos.

¹⁷² What is correct, however, is subject to numerous different opinions.

¹⁷³ The most well-known date is the fifth day of the fifth month. Children born on that day are believed to cause the death of their parents. This is a reason for infanticide on that day even of boys, see chapter IV.

White Tiger's Head. Children born on these days will not be filial. Day three, eleven, twenty-seven and nineteen are the days of the Flanks of the White Tiger. Children born on these days will become good and will reach the official title of Two Thousand Bushels [...].¹⁷⁴

This list goes on and encompasses each day of each month in a year. Tanba Yasuyori provided an additional list called 'The Method of [the Sage] Yu to Foretell a Child's Future [on the Basis of its] Birthday'. Like the above-quote he took this from the *Chanjing*, which claimed that the inventory came into existence when an ostensibly legendary wet nurse was asking Yu which birthdays are auspicious and which are not. According to Yu, "children born on day one, eleven and twenty-one will mostly be boys and they will profit their parents. The same occurs on day two, twelve and twenty-two. Children who are born on days three, thirteen and twenty-three will often be sick."¹⁷⁵

Seeing these two different methods of foretelling a child's future we can act on the assumption that probably more lists were transmitted in literature and especially orally with local variations. That means further that the day of birth was one of the many events around child-birth that predicted the child's future and character, a knowledge which might have influenced the behaviour of the child's care-givers. Interestingly, in biographies and narratives we never learn on what day a person was born, and character and future deeds were associated with other components of the person's life than the birthday. Nevertheless, the birthday most likely was taken serious by the parents.

Development and growth of a child were explained with the help of the calendrical cycle *ganzhi* (干支). This cycle integrates two symbolic systems into a rhythm of sixty days or years, which contains the ten celestial stems (*tiangan* 天干) and the twelve earth branches (*dizhi* 地支). In relation to children, the sixty-day rhythm is drawn upon to explain the development of movements and day-to-day changes of behaviour and growth, whereby the emphasis lied on each thirty days.

Early childhood development was further explained with the cycle of transformations employed by the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經).¹⁷⁶ The *Book of Changes* applies units of three symbols for *yin* (陰) and another units of three for *yang* (陽), of which two pairs of three form a unit of six, with sixty-four possible

¹⁷⁴ *Isshinpo* 24: 541.

¹⁷⁵ *Isshinpo* 24: 541.

¹⁷⁶ The *Book of Changes*, *Yijing*, ca. seventh century BC, is a widely studied text also during medieval and later periods.

combinations. The symbolism and numerology of the *Book of Changes* was important in alchemy, at least from the second century AD onward.¹⁷⁷

Girardot remarks that “it is always a “ritual” issue that is in time: how to eat, how to excrete, or most fundamentally, how to become fully and authentically human in a world that is in process.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, knowing exactly when the child is going through which process was essential. This knowledge about timing included knowing on which day a child’s body temperature is higher than usual due to its developmental processes.

Consideration of timing further included understanding the schedule of demonic beings, which means knowing when which demonic being would attack a child. For example, the demonic bird Catching Auntie (姑獲) was most likely to disturb people’s lives in the seventh and eighth month. Rituals against the demonic bird Demon Wagon (鬼車) were scheduled for the fifth day of the first month.¹⁷⁹ Knowing the demonic schedule, which probably knew local and ethnic variations, was one means of protecting children.

Development¹⁸⁰

Throughout the centuries, from pre-imperial China to medieval times, the events in the womb have triggered numerous explanations. In Chinese counting, a child was born after ten lunar months, which equals circa two hundred and eighty days. Men especially interested in embryological development were alchemists, medical specialists, and perhaps parents. The interest of alchemists rested in the understanding of the different stages of an foetus in order to learn how to prolong life. Medical specialists wanted to make this knowledge available to parents, who were urged to act properly according to the respective month of

¹⁷⁷ Towards the end of the second century AD a book called the *Unit of the Three in One*, *Cantongqi* 參同期, was published supposedly by Wei Boyang (but his authorship is questioned). It is based on the cycle of the *Book of Changes*. The *Cantongqi* belonged to the basic literature for medieval alchemists, and hence for doctors as well (see Ge Guolong 2004: 135-141). Its theories heavily influenced alchemical and medical writings and theory.

¹⁷⁸ Girardot 1983: 39.

¹⁷⁹ See chapter IV ‘Supernatural and natural dangers’.

¹⁸⁰ Although here I am talking about the development of foetuses, it is not adequate to use the denomination ‘embryology’. “In China, there has been no embryology in the strict meaning of the word, but instead there was a vitalogy concerned with the living being from its formation to its death. ... As a matter of fact, embryology presupposes that the anatomical and physiological sciences are advanced enough to permit some understanding of developmental biology”, Bernier e.a. 1994: 3.

gestation. Knowledge about the proper timing, once again, was the most important aspect.

The *Book of the Generation of the Foetus* that has been found among the manuscripts in the Mawangdui tombs, dating from 168 B.C., contains a description of pre-natal development that shows “extensive text parallels” in Chao Yuanfang’s *Treatise on the Aetiology and Symptoms of Disease* (*Zhubing yunhou lun* 諸病源候論) and Sun Simiao’s *Revised Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Cash* (*Qianjin yifang* 千金翼方), dating nearly eight hundred years later.¹⁸¹

Another work that mentions embryological development of the kind that can be found in medieval treatises, is the *Huainanzi* (淮南子), which tells about embryological development inside the womb in ten steps.¹⁸² The *Huainanzi*, like the *Book of the Generation of the Foetus* also derives from the second century B.C. It uses a quote from the pre-imperial *Daodejing* (道德經) which precedes the description of the development in the womb. This famous quote from chapter forty-two of the *Daodejing* talks about the transformation starting from one to ten thousand things and thus links the development of an individual human being to the very first transformative act of being.

Concerning the embryo of the first two months of formation the *Huainanzi* uses characters that have the connotation of the cooking or moulding of substances. The denotation for the embryo in the first month is *gao* (膏), which can mean ‘fertile’ as well as ‘food and fruit cooked to a very thick or pasty form’. The second month’s embryo is called *pei* (胚), which among other also bears the meaning ‘unfinished moulding’. From the third month onward the embryo or foetus is called *tai* (胎), which means ‘an unpolished semi-processed moulding of something.’ From the fourth to the sixth month skin/flesh, muscles and bones are developing. The *Huananzi* states that in month seven the child is complete, and from this moment its development is described in movements: it moves in month eight and is restless in month nine. In the tenth month the child is born.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Harper 1998: 27 and 378-381.

¹⁸² *Huainanzi* 7: 212.

¹⁸³ Comparing the two ways of foetal development provided by the *Huainanzi* and the *Revised Prescription*, we find that the embryonic development stages in the *Revised Prescription* of the first two months are also identified as *pei* (unfinished mouldings) and *tai* (unpolished semi-processed moulding of something), which are the names for the second and third month embryo in the *Huainanzi*. In modern (western medical) comprehension of the foetal development, in the very early stage the human is a clump of cells, a fertilized ovum. From the third month until birth the systems of *Huainanzi* and *Revised Prescriptions* only agree on the point that the bones are developed in the sixth month. According to modern medicine, at this stage the foetus can open and close its eyes. Bone cells begin their development in month two, which is a sign for the completion of the physical development. The *Revised Prescription* observes this completion of the form of the body in month four. Both Chinese texts further observe the movement of the child –

Sun Simiao starts his section on ‘Miscellaneous [Prescriptions for] the Healing of Little Children’ (小兒雜治) in the *Revised Prescriptions* with a description of the genesis of the foetus:

In the first month the foetus is called *pei*.¹⁸⁴ In the second month it is a *tai*.¹⁸⁵ In the third month it has blood and vessels. In the fourth month a form of the body starts to develop. In the fifth month it starts to move. In the sixth month all the bones are complete. In the seventh month hair starts to grow. In the eighth month the organs are complete. In the ninth month grain enters the stomach. In the tenth month the hundred spirits are completed. Then the child will be born.¹⁸⁶

Concerning the differences in the theory of development employed by both texts, we find that the *Huainanzi* focuses on the development of flesh, skin and muscles, whereas the *Revised Prescription* focuses on the completion of blood and vessels, hair and organs.¹⁸⁷ The *Revised Prescription* mentions then the entering of grain in month nine,¹⁸⁸ and the completion of the one hundred spirits in month ten.¹⁸⁹ Adjusting the child to other nutrition than the mother’s already starts in the placenta and will be continued by the nurturers very soon after birth.

The *Huainanzi* integrates the child into the development of all beings by having it relive a process very similar to the development from primordial chaos to a hierarchical, systemized world. Sun Simiao’s ideas on foetal development appear to be heavily influenced by ideas about which physical features were

which is thought to occur in month eight in the *Huainanzi* and in month five in the *Revised Prescription*. Modern medicine observes vivid movements in month three. However, during the fifth month, vigorous movements of the child are felt by the mother. The differences can be explained because *Huainanzi* and *Qianjin yifang* belong to different traditions of dissemination about gestation, see Li Qin-pu 2006b: 752-764. He provides information about the spread of sixteen versions of ideas about gestation. Accordingly, the widest spread version is the explanations of the Mawangdui silk manuscripts, which has influenced parts of the *Beiji qianjin yaofang* and the *Zhubing yuanhou lun*. See also Li Qin-pu 2006a. He provides an extensive table in which he compares thirteen Buddhist and Daoist texts that explain the events during the up to forty-three times seven days in which the child develops in the mother’s womb.

¹⁸⁴ *Pei*: also means ‘unfinished mouldings.’

¹⁸⁵ *Tai*: also means ‘an unpolished semi-processed moulding of something.’

¹⁸⁶ *Qianjin yifang* 11: 311.

¹⁸⁷ The latter are also very important in Daoist practices and are used in witchcraft, see for example ter Haar 2006.

¹⁸⁸ Dependency of grain is associated with common people – transcendent people are able to live from pneuma instead of grain. To rid oneself of the habit to eat grain and substitute it with food for immortals (pneuma) is one step of Daoist adepts of immortality to reach their goal.

“Vegetable sustenance, such as pine nuts and calamus, was proposed to replace grains, which were associated with decay and death,” Bokenkamp 1997: 70 n.39.

¹⁸⁹ See Robinet 1993: 100-103 for the process of deities populating the body.

regarded as essential within alchemy. He particularly mentions the growth of the organs, hair, blood and vessels, although their development cannot be observed on the outside of a woman's womb. Sun mentions these developments much later than they actually occur according to modern research, which suggests that he did not observe dead fetuses at these stages.

Medieval Chinese medical authors acknowledges that the outer form of the child was completed at birth. However, the child was still not considered a full person. It would become ready just after the following five hundred and seventy-six days – after it had gone through another process to be formed into completion. The end product of this process was the 'complete human being' (*chengren* 成人).

Changing and Steaming

The process that finalises the foetal development was called Changing and Steaming (*bianzheng* 變蒸).¹⁹⁰ It describes an internal development that can only be recognized by change in the body-temperature and a higher psychological sensibility of the child. These changes occur in a more or less regular sequence once a month and last a couple of days. The whole process takes place between approximately the thirty-second day and the five hundred and seventy-sixth day after birth.¹⁹¹ Changing and Steaming was held responsible for the 'flourishing' of the vessels and the altering of the five internal organs heart, stomach, liver, kidneys and lungs.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ See the preface of this thesis for a translation of Sun Simiao's description of the process.

¹⁹¹ In the scope of Daoist techniques, "the word *bian* has assumed a generic sense that includes many types of powers, such as the gift of ubiquity, the faculties of rendering oneself invisible, passing through walls, traversing great distances very rapidly, invulnerability, entering a fire and not being burned, walking on water and not drowning, knowing the future, etc," (Robinet 1979: 37). Robinet actually discusses *bianhua* 變化. *Hua*, on the other hand, appears to be closer to the meaning of coming into existence (*ibid*: 38). Therefore I assume that it has nothing to do with the already born infant, which is already beyond the stage of coming into existence. Although the interpretations of *hua* and *bian* are very close to each other, these powers "can be obtained either through magical practices (...) or through meditation exercises." (*ibid*: 37). *Bian* is "describing thereby the great cosmic movements of separation and reunion of Heaven and Earth," (*ibid*: 38), which means that "all things coming to their limit of their course reverse into their opposite or change form." (*ibid*: 38), which is close to what happens during the process of Changing and Steaming.

¹⁹² The theoretical foundation of the process probably relies on a framework of early medieval alchemical theory. The timing of the process – roughly every sixty-four days the process enters a new stage – is most probably based on the numerology of second century alchemical work *Token for the Agreement of the Three According to the Book of Changes*, *Zhouyi Cantongqi* (周易參同契). The

Changing and Steaming appears to be an invention of the third century.¹⁹³ In his *Aetiology and Symptoms* Chao Yuanfang merely noted down the schedule of when a process of Changing and when a process of Steaming takes place. Forty years later, however, Sun Simiao elaborated on the theory and filled it in with his alchemical knowledge.¹⁹⁴

According to the medical authors, ten Changings and five Steamings plus three big Steamings in the course of five hundred and seventy-six days make the new-born into a 'completed' person (*chengren* 成人). None of the Tang medical texts that I have consulted gives an entirely satisfying explanation for this concept of growth. Sun Simiao in the *Prescriptions* is the only one who explains, very briefly, why Changing and Steaming occurs: "[The reason why] the child changes and steams, is to let the blood and vessels flourish and to transform its viscera [which are heart, liver, lungs, stomach, and kidneys]. Therefore, after a Changing has been finalized, its perceptions, feelings and attitudes are different."¹⁹⁵ The process thus can be understood as a partly physical and partly neurological or psychological development. According to the theory, the child is gradually able to perceive more of its environment. With this process the child's viscera is enriched and steamed into its correct functioning, and only after the process is finished, are we dealing with a completed person, equipped with the intestines in the right place, executing the right functions, and with the basic conditions to perceive: "When the big and small Steamings are finished, [the child] becomes a person."¹⁹⁶

Charlotte Furth, who discusses the same theory for this infant development in a Qing text, explains that "this curious term (changing and steaming) draws on the medical concept of 'steaming' as a kind of feverishness in the marrow, and also on a metaphor of cooking, the qualitative transformation of

Zhouyi Cantongqi belongs to a text corpus that "explain the alchemical process by borrowing the language and emblems from the *Book of Changes*, *Yijing* (易經) and from the system of correlative cosmology, and describe the compounding of an elixir made of lead and mercury, which ingredients replace the much larger variety of ingredients typical from the earlier methods," (Pregadio 2006: 214). It is believed to have been composed in the second century A.D. by Wei Boyang and "the received text of the *Token* is the result of the encounter of that original text with the alchemical traditions of Jiangnan," (*Ibid*: 215).

¹⁹³ It is, even so, not only an invention of doctors, but based on actual observance of children. As Hsiung points out, especially two features of children below the age of two years are noteworthy, namely the fast psychological and physical development and change and the frequent indisposition of the infant's body, for example that its body temperature rises easily (Hsiung 1993: 253).

¹⁹⁴ See preface of this thesis for a translation of the process.

¹⁹⁵ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 3a.

¹⁹⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 3b.

food by heat. Linked to *zheng* (Steaming) was *bian* (Changing) which means a cycle of change, also seen as involving qualitative transitions from one cosmic pole to another, as *yin* to *yang*.¹⁹⁷ Furth here points out the intricate connection to cooking. Similarly, in a comparative approach, Bernier e.a. show that in occidental as well as Chinese ideas on embryonic development “the same importance [is] attributed to the burning or cooking of food by the organism. This burning allows the organism to feed itself and to carry out its specific activities.”¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the words used show the linkage between early childhood development theories and alchemical theories and practices, because ‘steaming’ is a crucial element in alchemical processes. *Zheng* literally means ‘steaming,’ which, in terms of alchemical operation, is distillation.¹⁹⁹

Sun insists on a proper handling of the system and emphasizes: “I am afraid that nobody will understand this, therefore I stress it.”²⁰⁰ He thus describes exactly how care-givers could discern a light and a heavy variation of Changing and Steaming. A light process could be detected by cold ears, a cold spine, and slight sweating. Those symptoms fall together with the expected rising of temperature and the child being prone to fright. A heavy process, on the other hand, manifested itself by a very hot body and a chaotic pulse; the child sweats irregularly and displays eating disorders.²⁰¹ The alchemist and medical specialist Sun Simiao also indicates on which days after birth care-givers had to take into consideration the process of Changing and Steaming, and points out that the timing is quite flexible.

The reason why care-givers had to understand this process and ought to be aware of the special days of Changing and Steaming, is because they had to

¹⁹⁷ Furth 1987: 25, see also Furth 1995: 173-4. See especially Hsuing Ping-chen’s 1993 article on that process from medieval times until its disappearance in the sixteenth, seventeenth century. See also Volkmar 1985: 26, who dates the appearance of the process to the second or third century AD. Hsiung 1993 assumes the seventh and eighth century as the important time for the development of the process. Volkmar points out the alchemic influence on the idea of Changing and Steaming. She speculates that the reasoning behind this theory was the assumption that an inner fire, (corresponding to the pure *yang*) caused a state of hotness and changes within the organism in a certain rhythm (Volkmar 1985: 26 ff). She traces the first mentioning of this theory back to Wang Shuhe’s *Maijing*, in a discussion on pulse changes in children (Volkmar 1985: 31). Throughout her dissertation Volkmar observes the changes in the theory from the third century until its disappearance (42-3 Song; 68-72 Ming until Qing).

¹⁹⁸ Bernier (e.a.) 1994: 34.

¹⁹⁹ *Science and Civilization* V.4: 4.

²⁰⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 3b.

²⁰¹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 3a-b. Heaviness or lightness of the process can also be detected by the colour of the eyes.

change their handling of the child during those days and particularly protect it from being disturbed. Sun strongly advises approaching the child very calmly during such a stage. The care-giver should avoid suddenly moving the child, like picking it up abruptly, as well as exposing it to too many people. Again, Sun points out the relative flexibility of the process “there are many children that are early or late [in the process of] Changing and Steaming, and do not [act according to] the rules.”²⁰² This means that a clear understanding of the process’ symptoms was crucial.

One good reason for trying not to lose count of the days is the possibility that Steaming and Changing could fall together with disease. Care-givers were warned not to confuse disease and process, and to be alert about how to treat the child:

When children are [in the process of] Changing and Steaming and additionally get a cold-disease, then cold and hot are fighting each other. Stomach and kidneys will be in chaos and it will cry without stopping. When you appease it, then it will heal. Steaming looks similar to [the ailments] hotbed and coldness. If [the child] is not [in the process of] Changing and Steaming, and his body, ears and spine are also hot, this will be caused by other diseases, and you can use certain remedies [...]. When you have established that it is Changing and Steaming, you cannot use any of [certain medicaments].²⁰³

Determination of Changing and Steaming, therefore, required close observation of the child, its body temperature and behaviour. Knowledge about the process was necessary to ensure the ‘correct’ treatment and medicating of the child. The doctor’s concern suggests that parents were prone to administer drugs easily, which in many cases might have led to complications and even to death. Once again, knowledge of the correct timing was essential to take proper care of the child. This sensibility to timing of a process, again, probably derived from alchemic practices, in which the timing of a heating-process had to be observed especially meticulous.

When heating the furnace in which a distillation took place in the case of an alchemical experiment, timing was crucial. Alchemists were very attentive to the ‘fire-times’; an attention that they also carried over to the body and to physical techniques.²⁰⁴ Observation of fire times was “a complex system that

²⁰² *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 3b. See section below and chapter IV ‘Physical weakness’.

²⁰³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 4a.

²⁰⁴ “Daoists were paying great attention to carrying out their physiological exercises at different specific hours of the day and night. This constant vigilance calls to mind the complicated cycles of heating (the ‘fire-times’) which were so prominent in wai dan [outer alchemy] laboratory

regulates the intensity of fire according to the cycles of cosmic time. This system is based on several sets of cosmological emblems..."²⁰⁵ Although in the case of Changing and Steaming it was not an alchemist who heated the child in order to evoke steaming and changing, and even though the process came through the child itself, the terminology was that of a laboratory.²⁰⁶

By including the theory of Changing and Steaming in his chapters about children, Chao Yuanfang shows that he considered it an important piece of knowledge about children. Interestingly, Sun merely quotes another work and fills this theory with his own experience or observations or broader knowledge of alchemical theories and texts. Additionally, although incorporating much of his Daoist interpretation of the body as well,²⁰⁷ Sun Simiao appears to focus more on the actual process and thus on the child itself, compared to earlier authors. The child in Sun's writings appears to have a status of its own and not that of a metaphor for moral ideas. Sun thus holds true to what he states in the beginning of the chapters on children, namely that adults first have been children, and because of that the medical problems of children have to be considered before adults' diseases.²⁰⁸

alchemy," *Science and Civilization V.5*: 45-6. "Let the 'chemical furnace' (the body) be watched with much care, and the 'fire-times' (periods of circulation of the *qi*) strictly kept..." (*Science and Civilization V.5*: 92).

²⁰⁵ Pregadio 2006: 105.

²⁰⁶ Considering modern insights into early child development we know that during this time brain, nerves and organs rule over its behaviour and reactions and that it is subject of many fast changes in that regions. Steaming and Changing can be compared with the western concept of 'growth-spurts.' Growth-spurts imply the observation that an infant goes through eight major steps in its mental development. These steps take place from week four or five after birth onward and return every four to five weeks, until week fifty five, when the mental development – linked to the development of the brain – is finished. During this time, the child will be especially afraid of foreign influences and will tend to be focused entirely on its mother. It will wail a lot and might even have a warmer body-temperature. These developmental steps can roughly be compared with Piaget's ideas on early child development. The physical expression of increasing body temperature corresponds to synaptogenesis.

²⁰⁷ See Schipper 1993 on general Daoist ideas about the body.

²⁰⁸ Children below the age of three or four, and definitely below the age of two, do not receive much attention in narratives and biographies, except as dead figures, see chapter VII. Aside from instances about talking foetuses and lost *hun* souls that sometimes enter, or sometimes are hindered to enter the womb of a pregnant woman, narratives are quiet about pre-natal developments.

Development of motor abilities and the growth of the infant

Together with the discussions about foetal development, and Changing and Steaming, Sun Simiao and the other medical authors contemplate a third kind of development which explains the growing motor abilities of the child.²⁰⁹ This development takes place in a rhythm of sixty days:

Usually, sixty days after being born, the pupils are developed, and [the child] can laugh, smile and react to people. After a hundred days (some say: a hundred and fifty days), the *mai* vessels are developed, and [the child] can turn over and turn back again by itself. After one-hundred and eighty days the bone at the end of the spine has developed, and [the child] can sit by itself. After two-hundred and ten days the bones of the palms are developed, and [the child] can crawl. After three-hundred days the bone of the knee-cap is developed and the child can stand by itself. After three-hundred and sixty days the bone of the knee is developed and [the child] can walk. That is the fixed pattern [for the child's corporeal development]. If there are those that do not stick to this timing then there must be something that is not under control.²¹⁰

The sixty day cycle is based on the combination of the systems of the heavenly stems and the earthly branches. The sixty-four day cycle, which comes from the *Book of Changes* was textually elaborated in pre-imperial and early imperial ritual works. However, both cycles lead an easy coexistence in various contexts. They are furthermore connected with the rhythm of the five changes (*wu xing* 五行). Sun Simiao then combines the two processes – the thirty-two/ sixty-four day cycle Changing and Steaming and the thirty/ sixty day development of the motor abilities.²¹¹

Usually thirty-two days after being born the child changes for the first time. When it changes the body is hot. At day sixty-four it changes a second time. It does both, changing and steaming, and its body, when lying, straightens up. [...]. At day one-hundred and twenty-eight it changes for the fourth [time]. It does both, changing and steaming, which enables [the child] to laugh and smile. At day one-hundred and sixty-five it changes for the fifth [time] and [the child] develops motive powers. At day one-hundred and ninety-two the sixth changing occurs, [the child] changes and steams, and the knee-cap is formed. At day two-

²⁰⁹ This quote is also used in the *Huangdi neijing*. More importantly, it seems to belong to a common knowledge, and is also used by Yan Zhitui.

²¹⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 2b. For a comparison, see the quote of the *Shuoyuan* (Liu Xiang, B.C. first century), discussed by Kinney 2004: 27.

²¹¹ I could not find an earlier evidence of such a combination regarding early childhood development.

hundred and twenty-four is the seventh changing, which enables [the child] to crawl. At day two-hundred and fifty-six the eighth changing occurs, [the child] changes and steams. One will [then] know if the child can learn to speak. At day two-hundred and eighty-eight the ninth steaming occurs, and the child can nearly stand up. Usually, two-hundred and eighty-eight days after a child is born, there the ninth changing and fourth steaming will happen. [In case of a disease] at the day of a changing one really cannot treat it, [otherwise] that would worsen the disease.²¹²

In connection with the theory on Changing and Steaming process, Sun explains that the first major distinctive action of an infant is lying straight. Thereafter, the infant smiles, which is followed by the development of motive powers. The fourth salient physical development, according to the theory, is the development of the knee-cap, which allows crawling thirty-two days later. Around that time, roughly eight months after birth, doctors say that one is able to know whether the child will be able to talk or not. The last development described is the attempt of the infant to stand up.

The first thing the sixty-day process of the motor development describes is smiling and reacting to people that occurs sixty-eight days earlier than in the process of Changing and Steaming. This is followed by moving backwards and forwards, sitting, crawling, standing and finally walking. In the process of Changing and Steaming, the last two features are not mentioned. Table 2 below provides easier comparison:

Months	Changing and Steaming (day)	Motoric development (day)
1	Process starts (32)	
2	Body is straight while lying (64)	Pupils develop, child can smile and reacts to people (60)
3		
4	Child smiles (128)	
5	Motoric powers developped (160)	Vessels develop, child moves back and forth by itself (100 or 150)
6	Knee-cap develops (192)	Knee-bone develops, child can sit by itself (180)
7	Child crawls (224)	Bones of the hand palm develop, child crawls (210)
8	One is able to know whether the child will be able to talk or not (256)	
9	Child tries to stand up (288)	

²¹² *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 4b-5a.

10		Knee-cap develops, child stands up (300)
11		
12		Child can walk (360)

During the ten months of gestation, the foetus is attributed with more and more human features which were deemed essential and regarded as the basic necessities for a complete human life. Authors belonging to different traditions highlighted the occurrence of certain developmental features for different times. This means that the Chinese construction of the foetus' evolution was primarily inspired by theoretical considerations and to a lesser degree by empirical observations.

The development from foetus to a being with the basic ingredients of a human being and the development from chaos to order, show parallels. The theory of the process derived from philosophical and political ideas, as well as perhaps insights gained from the examination of foetuses, which were put together in writings before and during the Han dynasty.

The infant's motor development was first mentioned in a crude form within the *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shuoyuan* 說苑), a first century B.C. dictionary.²¹³ Both developments, foetal and the motor, belong to the theoretical complex that integrated cosmos, state and body that I have explained above. The development described in Changing and Steaming was a late addition, which for a large part relied on the alchemical and numerological use of the *Book of Changes*, through the mediation of the second century AD *Cantongqi* (參同契).²¹⁴ While foetal and motor development occurred in early texts of the second century B.C. within a cosmological and a moral discourse, the idea about Steaming and Changing arised from, and within the context of alchemical theory and practice. To sum up, the perception of foetal and early infant development was heavily influenced by alchemist ideas. Much attention was drawn to the development of the foetus in particular, because different theorists used the foetus, which was invisible to them, for explaining their ideas about cosmos and being.

3. Activities around birth

Motor development and Changing and Steaming are discussed at the beginning of medieval medical treatises about children because they explain the basic physical condition of the child during the following two years. It should be

²¹³ *Shuoyuan* 18.12.

²¹⁴ See notes 177 and 192 about the *Cantongqi*.

stressed that these development theories rely on texts that were studied by literate men. Activities around birth, however, actually belonged into the sphere of women and male engagement in it was rare.²¹⁵ Interestingly, medical texts include brief advice on such activities nonetheless.

Before discussing Changing and Steaming, Wang Tao, for example, describes the first urgent handlings after a child has been born. They include cleaning the mouth of the child and, in cases of infants who did not do so by themselves, how to make them cry. He further describes how to deal with the umbilical cord, and what to do about bathing and clothing. All these were activities that ought to be done right after giving birth. Other activities of significance during one of the first few days consisted of introducing honey and wheat to the child, ritual washing, burying the placenta, cutting hair, and choosing a wet-nurse.²¹⁶

The execution of those activities mostly relied on the experience of the women who attended the birth process. These women might not have been specialists, but probably were experienced at assisting during birth giving. Jen-der Lee suggests that “while most of those who performed midwifery did not necessarily make their living from their skill, there were women since early times in China who worked as birth attendants for a living. Birth assistants might have helped out in other women’s births because of their poverty and need for an income, or they might have been women with a lot of personal experience.”²¹⁷ These women would also perform the cleaning of the mouth and inducing the first cry, washing the child and cutting the umbilical cord.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ See for example Jen-der Li 2006, where she analyses birth in Han China. She states that birth assistants are female. The first activities right after birth most probably were done by women as well. Activities around the social body such as burying the placenta, bathing and cutting the hair, however, were done by, or in the presence of men. Treatment of the infant after birth has drawn the attention of several scholars. See e.g. Furth 1995; Hsiung, Ping-chen 2005; Yates 2006; Lee, Jen-der 1996 and 2006. Therefore I will sum up the information that for the greater part rely on these scholars’ works, and I discuss those postnatal activities that were specifically addressed in the context of Tang dynasty children.

²¹⁶ Excretion is discussed throughout the treatises about children by mentioning diarrhoea, congestion or other indigestion. It does not receive special ritual attention during the first month after birth.

²¹⁷ Jen-der Lee 2006: 166.

²¹⁸ For the Song dynasty Ebrey suggests that “childbirth was not necessarily viewed as a narrow medical matter. Religious experts could also be called into help in cases of difficult births,” Ebrey 1993: 174. That was most probably true for the previous centuries as well.

Caring for the physical body

Mouth and the first cry

Medieval medical authors advise that right after birth the inside of the mouth had to be cleaned off blood, which was considered polluted and dangerous (惡血).²¹⁹ Doctors warn that this blood would otherwise enter the stomach and cause diseases.²²⁰ This was done with a finger wrapped in silk by one of the birth assistants, who then cleaned the inside of the mouth and the top of the tongue.²²¹

It was a matter of concern if the first cry did not occur right after the cleaning of the mouth. In that alarming case, several methods are described to make the child cry, including pouring warm water into the child's mouth or softly whipping the child with the heart of an onion.²²² When the child was not crying after birth, and the reason could be found in relation to a lack of *qi* resulting from a difficult birth, one had to "take the umbilical cord, face the body [of the child], step away from the ridge pole of the house and let *qi* enter the stomach, then spit on it up to a hundred times."²²³

Food

Medical authors advised administering solid food to infants. However, unlike their successors of later ages they did not suggest at what age solid food should be fed. Neither did they give advice on how to prepare it.²²⁴ Hsiung remarks that in determining when to give the first solid food, which consisted of little wheat balls and honey, the correct timing was essential.²²⁵

Sun Simiao warns care-givers not to feed the child with too much honey in order to prevent diarrhoea. This warning suggests that it was common to feed sweets to young infants. The first introduction of other food than breast milk

²¹⁹ See Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 51 ff. She focuses on the care of newborns during late imperial China and compares it to medieval Chinese practices.

²²⁰ See also Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 61 ff.

²²¹ See *Waitai miyao* 35: 974b.

²²² *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 1b.

²²³ *Waitai miyao* 35: 974.

²²⁴ Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 87-88, *Waitaimiyao* 35: 974.

²²⁵ "Sui-Tang medical texts, discussing the methods of infant-feeding, focus primarily on the right time to begin solid foods and the correct types. Wang Tao's *Waitai miyao* for instance, gave the auspicious dates, respectively, for initiating either a boy or a girl on solid food. It also cautioned "not to feed them salty things." The contexts suggests that Wang had in mind the question of beginning infants on food other than milk, not simply using them as substitutes or supplements," Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 88.

took place at the very beginning of an infant's life. Sweet things apparently played a big role:

When the child is bathed, the cutting of the umbilical cord is finished, when the clothing and nursing and the dressing in swaddling clothes are done, one cannot yet [feed the child] with honey, [but] one should [feed it] with sweet grass soup.²²⁶

Food other than milk was of rice, which was administered for the first time as a drug during the ritually important third day after birth: "One should open the abdomen and assist the *Gu*- (grain, 穀) Spirit. Pound rice to make a thick drink – as thick as curd and as big as a bean and give it to the child to swallow. [Let it] swallow three 'beans' and then you must stop."²²⁷ The rice-dosage was increased during the following one hundred days. An overdose of rice, however, could cause disease in the form of ulcers. When ulcers came and went alternately, it was an indication that the child would be weak and difficult to raise, in other words that it might die young. Administering too little rice or when the child spit it out again, on the other hand, was interpreted as a cause for ailments as well. The child would suffer from phlegm, indigestion and morbid appetite. In that case, Sun Simiao advises to use force in making the child swallow the rice curd.²²⁸

Umbilical cord

Dealing with the umbilical cord, its cutting and subsequent care of the belly button was of utmost importance because mistakes in its treatment were understood to be lethal. Therefore the description of the cutting of the umbilical cord is very accurate:

When the baby is already born then let it be lifted up. When you delay lifting it up, then you cause cold to enter and thunder will sound in the belly. Then wash it for the first time and cut off the umbilical cord afterwards. In order to not hurt it with the knife, you must order a person to separate the afterbirth in uneven numbers by biting it off. Together with the warm *qi* exhale seven times. Then bind up the rest of the umbilical cord and let it [hang down] to above the feet. If it is shorter cold will enter [the child], which causes disharmony in the belly. If it is too long, the child will suffer from diarrhoea.

²²⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 3a.

²²⁷ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 4a. Grain already enters the stomach as one of the last steps of prenatal development during the ninth month according to Sun Simiao's theory of foetal development.

²²⁸ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 4b.

If you first cut the umbilical cord, and then wash [the child], water will enter the belly button. When water enters the belly button, this will lead to stomach ache. When this cutting off from the belly button is finished one has to get rid off it immediately, including the worms in the umbilical cord. If one does not do so, [the worms] will enter the belly of the child and cause diseases.

The person that cuts off the umbilical cord at the belly button, should leave it 6 *cun* long. If it is longer, it will hurt the flesh. Is it shorter, then it will hurt the intestines. If [the umbilical cord] is not cut on time, and if the *nuo*-juice is not enough, this will cause the warm *qi* to gradually weaken. It will become cold by itself and cause wind to enter the belly.²²⁹

The belly button had to be bandaged in new silk and then the child's reaction had to be observed carefully. The bandages were loosened after twenty days, and external medicaments can be applied in case of inflammation. Nothing else was put on the stump²³⁰ The umbilical cord should not be cut if the placenta did not come out for a long time because of the connection between placenta and umbilical cord. The mother then had to be treated with drugs to make the placenta come out. In this situation haste was required because the correct timing of the actions was essential.²³¹ Furthermore, the umbilical cord, as we can see in the quote above, was afflicted with the three worms. The three worms belong to all human bodies, thus also to the mother's and the child's bodies.²³² They form one of the forces of death that reside within any person's body, whose nourishment relied mainly on grain. They "want to free themselves by either accelerating the death of the body through diseases or by shortening the life span by reporting a person's faults to heaven."²³³ The three worms were believed to frequent the placenta which would make the umbilical cord into a connecting passage.

²²⁹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 2a.

²³⁰ Sakade 1991: 108.

²³¹ Yates 2000: 40-41, relying on Chao Yuanfang.

²³² We will learn more about the three worms in the next paragraph.

²³³ Robinet 1993: 139. Only Chao Yuanfang discusses the problems of three worms in children, see *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 50: 1.

Caring for the social body

Placenta

In the prenatal life of the child, the placenta is the organ that keeps the child alive. In medieval texts it is called 'the cloth' (*yi* 衣).²³⁴ Although after birth the child is fed and kept alive by its mother, wet-nurse and other people, the placenta did not lose its importance for the health of the child. After birth, the placenta had to be washed with clean water and alcohol and a coin had to be inserted. The whole placenta, then, had to be bottled in a new bottle, which was wrapped in white silk. After three days it ought to be buried at an auspicious place, where the sun is very hot at noon. When the placenta bottle had been buried at a certain depth, it was supposed to lead to a long life of the child. If the placenta was not treated in the right way, Wang Tao points out several negative scenarios for the child's future. For example, the child would become mad if the placenta was eaten by pigs, and it would grow ulcers if the placenta was eaten by insects. If the placenta was devoured by dogs, the child would die in the army. If the placenta was buried next to the temple of the earth-god, the child would see ghosts. If it was buried next to a well, it would be mute and deaf, and so on. In order to find out the right day to bury the placenta, Wang Tao also provides a list of the auspicious days of each month.²³⁵

The placenta was the meeting point of the three worms of respectively the child and the mother. The special interest in the placenta in medieval China suggests that this organ was not only recognized as important but that it was also perceived as a nearly individual being that was intrinsically linked to the child's fate.²³⁶

Clothing

The next step in caring for the child, after making it cry and caring for the belly button and umbilical cord, was providing it with the correct clothing.²³⁷ Clothing

²³⁴ It is also called *taibao* (胎包), a foetus cover.

²³⁵ *Waitai miyao* 35: 978b. See Wilms 1992 (MA thesis) on choosing the auspicious day for burying the placenta.

²³⁶ I will discuss the placenta in connection with death of children who pass away up to two years of age in chapter VII.

²³⁷ In fact, clothes or attributes of clothes, such as belts, are not just to keep a child warm but also have a function in healing as part of drugs that often are burned and then administered orally or as crèmes. Clothes, can also cause disease because they carry bad *qi* from the outside to the child or their colours have a frightening effect on children, e.g. the combination of bright white clothes and a blue belt can cause frights.

is discussed right at the beginning in the *Aetiology and Symptoms* and takes up a big part of the introduction. The importance of clothes for medieval communities cannot be underestimated and Bray has shown that “textiles were fundamental to the functioning of the Chinese state.”²³⁸ Producing clothes was women’s work, and it “tied the family into the community” by giving gifts of cloth, paying with cloth and using cloth as betrothal.²³⁹ The medical classics often instruct on when to use coarse material and when to use plain silk for wearing or for using as bandages.²⁴⁰ Sun Simiao extensively treats clothes in two chapters, where he basically points out that it is necessary to dress children in the proper way in order to prevent them from sweating and thus catching a cold or a fit.²⁴¹

Right after birth, a boy should be dressed in his father’s clothes and a girl in her mother’s clothes. No reason for this advice is given. Probably it was done to integrate the child into its respective gender position. Chao Yuanfang and Sun Simiao warn insistently to not put the child in too many clothes (especially silk clothes), because “that will cause harm to the skin of the child and hurt the vessels and give rise to ulcers and jaundice. If the clothes of the child are made of silk, one especially has to avoid thickness and heat.”²⁴² Therefore, doctors advise to use cotton clothes instead. Tanba Yasuyori also gives advice the colour of the clothes children have to wear, with respect to their birthday – these are black, blue-green, green, yellow or white.²⁴³

Bathing

Bathing was the next important handling after birth. Usually on day three after birth, the child was expected to be given a ritual bath. The occasion of ritual bathing was also used to introduce the child to its father. The future emperor Daizong (r. 762-779) for example, was brought out to be seen by his father, Suzong (r. 756-762), on the third day, when he was also given a bath in a golden basin.²⁴⁴ Sun Simiao writes that when bathing the child in peach-root water on the third day, “it will turn out good and the non-auspicious will be removed.

²³⁸ Bray 1997: 187, although she argues especially for late imperial China, I believe her statement counts for the medieval period as well.

²³⁹ *Ibid*: 189.

²⁴⁰ Concerning the clothes that women wore when giving birth, Yates concludes that “in the case of the old cloth for terminating pregnancy, the woman is taking an object of her own labour that symbolized all her productive and reproductive capacity and her moral virtues to subvert and terminate that very productivity and reproductivity,” Yates 2000: 27.

²⁴¹ Especially *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9 and 10.

²⁴² *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9.2a: 135.

²⁴³ *Ishinpo* 25: 555.

²⁴⁴ *Taiping guangji* 136: 975-6 (*Liu shi shi*).

That will ensure that the finished body does not grow ulcers".²⁴⁵ Baths were also often recommended as a healing method. Advice in that respect was rather generous: one should not bathe the child too long, otherwise it would catch a cold-disease in winter and a hot-disease in summer. Not bathing the child on the other hand would cause loss of hair. Moreover, children bathing children apparently is an auspicious symbol. Some Tang burial objects are models of children bathing children, perhaps as symbols for peaceful co-existence.²⁴⁶

Hair

The washing and cutting of the hair was another important ritual. Hair is a very important part of the body, and it was believed to carry all the information of the person, "essentially the hair was conceived of as a condensed symbol of the self."²⁴⁷ For medical purposes, "hair was regarded as an indicator of the body's health or disorder."²⁴⁸ Like clothes, hair was regarded as the carrier of disease, but also as a remedy against diseases. Understandably, cutting the child's hair is therefore also a dangerous activity which can only be done on an auspicious day.²⁴⁹

Although I had divided the preceding discussions into separate emphases on the physical and the social body, both the body and its treatment, in fact, cannot be rigorously separated. Most post-natal handlings with respect to the child can be understood on the basis of biological survival strategies; however, these handlings were also rationalized through cultural practices. They were regarded as serving the child's future protection and were part of the process of the child's integration into its community. With such ritualized activities, adults provided the child's physical body with the necessary care such as food and warmth. At the same time they provided even more care for the child's social body: introducing honey and wheat very soon after birth, burying the placenta and cutting the hair are clear signs for the 'socialization' of the child's body and its

²⁴⁵ *Beji qianjin yaofang* 9: 5b.

²⁴⁶ About the connection between newly born infants, and newly dead people and bathing see chapter VI. Bathing children becomes an auspicious symbol and is often used as decoration, as Bartholomew shows: "The imperial jackets [of the Xiaojing Empress, d. 1612] show boys in groups telling stories and giving each other baths. As shown in court paintings from the Song period, bathing infant sons was an important task of imperial mothers. In this playful version of the theme, one boy sits in a wooden tub, showered by a friend holding a long glass bottle, while two others try to upset the tub with a pole," Tse Bartholomew 2002: 65.

²⁴⁷ Yates 2000: 20.

²⁴⁸ Lin Fu-shih 1999: 366.

²⁴⁹ *Waitai miyao* 35: 980.

integration into the world of human communities. Moreover, the way a child was washed, the reason why it should happen at day three after birth and the given reason for cleaning its mouth, infer that the social body weighs at least as much as the physical one.

The information on post-natal treatment we get from the treatises is thin. It is limited to advice on observing the child and determining the right time for the actions. Determining how and when to react to a disordered birth was of greatest concern to the medical authors. The advises are rather general and suggests that they only reveal fragments of the actions that might have happened at birth. Some of the actions involved men, like burying the placenta or selecting the wet nurse and the third-day rituals during which the child is formally introduced to its father. This probably is the reason why we have a fair amount of detailed information about those handlings.

4. Diseases

Children contract the same diseases as adults. Yet, they also contract special childhood diseases. In this section I will first discuss the structure of Sun Simiao's treatise on children in order to provide an understanding of the order in which diseases are presented.²⁵⁰ I will then analyse diseases that are common in both groups, adults and children.

In the second part of this section I will focus on special childhood diseases. They are called frights (*jing* 驚), convulsions (*xian* 癇) and foreign *qi* attack (*kewu* 客忤). These diseases, especially frights, were also well-integrated motifs in narratives that feature children as I will show. Related to diseases are their methods of treatment. Children's diseases for example required certain special drugs that were different from adults' drugs. We also find several methods of healing that belong to a practice that can best be called 'magical healing', which is also part of numerous narratives. I will therefore discuss cases of narratives

²⁵⁰ Scholars acknowledge Sun Simiao in general as the greatest authority concerning medical care of children in medieval times. I therefore chose to focus on his text here. The originality of the *Beiji qianjin yaofang* and the *Qianjin yifang* that are available today, however, appears to be problematic because both texts have been officially modified by the Northern Song scholar Lin Yi (林億) and associates for the Academy of Medicine. Sivin writes about Lin Yi's revision of medical works: "it is generally agreed that their [Lin Yi's and his companions] lack of respect for textual integrity greatly simplified the task of producing textbook versions." Yet, Sivin concludes that "these modifications [...] chiefly effects details of medical and pharmaceutical practice," (Sivin 1968 138-140).

that show a clear connection between child, disease and the process of finding and applying a successful treatment.

In many narratives that deal with the curing of children not the child but the treatment is central and many methods could be applied to adults as well. Nevertheless, the narratives that I provide as examples for medical practice are extremely interesting and are supplementary to the image that the medical texts create.

General principles

The medical authors of the medieval period in China wrote about development and proper care, because a thorough understanding of it, so they claim, prevents wrong treatment and therewith disease and premature death. As I will argue below, one further reason for their writings probably was the distrust of men in female care and the male observer's suspicion that this care causes many unexplainable deaths of infants.

As a consequence of the development and changings of little children, the course of a disease is more complicated than in adults. The chapters on children for the greater part deal with diseases that would also afflict adults, but have to be treated differently in children due to the latter's transformative condition. According to Sun Simiao,

children's diseases are not different from [diseases] of adults. Only the quantity of the drugs varies. Eight or nine sections on frights, fits, foreign *qi* attack, open skull, and not [being able to] walk, together form this chapter. The remaining prescriptions for diarrhoea [and other disease] are spread over all chapters.²⁵¹

Consequently, Sun structured the first four chapters about children according to those diseases which are much more dangerous for children than for adults and therefore need more attention.²⁵² All other diseases are discussed by Sun in

²⁵¹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 1b.

²⁵² Many of the symptoms of children's diseases that are examined by physicians or people in charge of health issues are called *bing* (病). *Bing* has been translated as 'ailment' by Donald Harper, who defines it as "a morbid condition which can be given a name," (Harper 1998: 72-3). Charlotte Furth, on the other hand, preferred to refer to *bing* as 'disorder' and explains that "'disorder' results from excess or deficiency – categorized as 'heat' or 'cold' (*re* 熱/*han* 寒), 'repletion' or 'depletion' (*shi/xu* 虛), and 'inner' (weakness) or 'outer' (invasion) (*li/biao*)," (Furth 1987: 13). Also Sivin interpretes *bing* as '(medical) disorder', which "includes the modern categories of traumas as well as diseases. It often refers to symptoms, syndromes, and groups of related syndromes or diseases as well," (Sivin 1967: 106 and footnote 18).

chapter five to nine. These common diseases are based upon the ideas of influences by hot and cold, wind and by *qi* that occurs out of season. Diseases described in chapter two, three and four on the other hand, are based on the special situation of the child being weak, easy to frighten, and on its way to completion. Those diseases were, in fact, believed to be difficult to avoid because they belong to childhood for they often are side-effects of the growth process, or they occur because of the child's incompleteness.

Sun Simiao's chapters on children cover the same diseases that Chao Yuanfang addressed earlier. Even so Sun's entries to the individual chapters are much more elaborate and each entry starts with a general comment on the group of diseases he discusses specifically. He often urges adults to take care of children and to not take symptoms of diseases lightly. His style of writing, interestingly, is rather colloquial. Summarized, the nine paediatric chapters of the Prescriptions contain the following:

1. Preface (序例)
2. The new-born (出生初腹)
3. Frights and convulsions (驚癇)
4. Foreign Qi Assault (客忤)
5. Diseases due to cold factors (傷寒)
6. Coughing (咳嗽)
7. Indigestion (癖結脹滿)
8. Carbuncles (癰疽) and (瘰癧) scrofulous swellings
9. Miscellaneous diseases of little children (小兒雜病)

Each chapter, in general, starts with a quotation from the *Discussions* (論). In chapter one he introduces the background of his ideas and his incentive to compose these chapters, as well as the history of medical treatment of children. There he further presents the developmental theories on infants. Chapter two deals with the first handlings that have to be carried out when the child is born. After these points are dealt with, Sun continues with general advice on clothing, bathing, feeding and ends the chapter with methods of foretelling the child's life expectancy and explanations on how to foretell a child's character. We have discussed these two chapters above.

Chapter three, then, discusses convulsions, frights and feeding problems. While Chao Yuanfang's discussions on fright were rather short and not numerous, Sun explains the different kinds of fright in detail and gives several prescriptions for treating them. He ends those discussions by providing a list of methods to diagnose convulsions. Chapter four deals entirely with the disease

‘foreign qi attack’ and the possible healing methods, most of which are magical and make use of hair, saliva, items of the mother, and spells.

Chapters five to nine mostly contain information about which medicaments can be given and how to prepare them, in case the child suffers from cold, coughing, dropsy, carbuncles, scrofulous swellings, ulcers, the three worms, urine-problems and spitting blood.

A child’s disease is a delicate and intricate factor, as Mayo points out in a discussion about a sick child in Tang Dunhuang. “The child, or the descendant, is a specially vulnerable point in the structure, a point at which malevolent influences may enter and disrupt the family, forcing fathers to take action to protect the system as a whole from the interventions of the punishing forces of the celestial political order. The boy child – vehicle for the reproduction of the family as a corporate structure [...] – is a source of danger and instability for the overall structure.”²⁵³ Successful and correct identification of the disease and its cause and subsequent successful treatment of the afflicted child was therefore of the greatest importance.²⁵⁴

At the time of the Tang dynasty, two systems that explained how a person falls ill were prevalent: one was the system of the balance of the substances within the body that can be brought into disorder by winds and hot and cold diseases. The other system was based on ‘foreign’ and demonic attacks from outside that would break into the body, and eventually cause imbalance and internal disorder.²⁵⁵ Understanding which disease has afflicted a person is crucial for applying the appropriate treatment.

Medieval narratives often tell of sick children, who one way or another were treated successfully or whose reason for death was related to an ancestral fault. However, we also get some detailed descriptions of pathologies that nobody was able to understand. In a famous ninth century case, the boy Huangfu Ji (皇甫及), for example, was born just like other children and very much loved by his father, the vice governor of Taiyuan. In 872, when Ji was fourteen years old he suddenly contracted a very strange disease.

²⁵³ Mayo 2005: 55. See also chapter VII about the impact of dead children on a community.

²⁵⁴ ‘Correct’ within medieval Chinese context, obviously. The medical writings that we have at hand here provide a rather coherent view about analysis of disease and its treatment. Medical practices as they are described in narratives show a greater variety of non-official treatment methods. Still, taking pills and other medicine orally appears to be very important.

²⁵⁵ Demons are imagined vividly, also those that have been imported from India via story-telling and sutras. But also Chinese demons found their way into medical treatises and can be found in medical practice and exorcist rituals (Bodde 1975, ter Haar 2006). Furthermore, for medieval China, distinctions have been found between Northern and Southern medical theories and practices (Fan Jiawei 2004). For a general discussion on these two systems, see Unschuld 1985.

He not only suffered from extreme cold but he suddenly grew taller and within a short time his body was taller than seven *chi* (about 2.10 metres) and his waist was several *wei* big. He ate three times more than he used to. In the following year in autumn he passed away without being sick.²⁵⁶

Huangfu Ji's disease remained obscure and eventually even led to his death. In the historical records his case is noted as one of many inauspicious events that happened towards the end of the Tang dynasty.²⁵⁷ The young boy's disease therefore can not be found in the medical treatises that discuss childhood diseases and general diseases.²⁵⁸

General diseases in Sun's *Prescriptions* are discussed under the headings cold damage diseases, febrile diseases, fevers, possession-diseases (*zhu*),²⁵⁹ cholera, diarrhoea, skin-diseases (mainly ulcers), diseases caused by the three worms, and others in chapters five throughout nine. Most of the five chapters that deal with general diseases in children follow the same pattern: the course of a disease is described briefly as a title, for example: "Prescription for healing a swollen stomach of children."²⁶⁰ This is then followed by brief descriptions of therapy. In the case of a swollen stomach: "Burn the fingernails of father and mother to ashes, smear it on the nipples and let [the child] drink it. Another prescription: fry radish juice together with pig-fat and administer it carefully."²⁶¹ Often, the name of the medicaments is stated, followed by its ingredients and composition.

Symptoms of general disorders did not differ much from the symptoms of the specific disorders of children. The physician urges that care-givers should know if a child has been afflicted by a general disease or if it suffers from a specific childhood disorder. It is clearly important to know how to distinguish a

²⁵⁶ *Taiping guangji* 220: 1691 (*Sanshui xiaodu*).

²⁵⁷ *Xin Tangshu*: 856; his case is mentioned alongside other weird diseases and disabilities that were talked about during these times a few decades before the end of the Tang dynasty, e.g. a man suddenly grew horns, a baby was born with two heads, a strange neck, four arms and legs that were connected with each other.

²⁵⁸ According to Chen Yanzhi, whose *Lesser Grade Remedies* was well-used by Sun Simiao and the other medical authors, diseases in general were caused by "wind, extreme cold, heat, dampness, fatigue, external wounds, drunkenness, excesses in diet, fear, discomfort, fright, anxiety, anger, childbirth, lactation, miscarriage, sprains, vomiting, diarrhoea, blood-letting, mineral drugs, and drugs for longevity," (Chen Yanzhi, *Xiaopinfang* (article 2), the translation of Mayanagi 1987(web-article). Mayanagi remarks that "such an ordered list of pathogenic factors is unusual in early Chinese medical texts," (ibidem)).

²⁵⁹ For the *zhu*-disease, see Sivin 1967: 102-106.

²⁶⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang*: 12: 13b.

²⁶¹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang*: 12: 13b-14a.

general disorder from a specific childhood disease, and then to administer the right amount of the same medicine that is prescribed to adults.

Sun Simiao often starts a new section by providing a general reason why children could be afflicted with the disease in question. In the case of cold diseases,²⁶² which comprises one of the larger sections in the category of common diseases, he notes the following:

The *Discussions* says: As long as children cannot yet run out into frost and snow, they will not catch a cold disease. When adults let them go free for long,²⁶³ and they get damaged by coldness and chilliness, then there is nothing to discuss. When there is inappropriate *qi* during the season, [the child] will also be afflicted with it. In a year when it is the season for epidemic disease and a child gets out, the stomach will then suffer from different [diseases]. In order to heal those seasonal diseases, apply the same methods as for adults. But use a slightly smaller amount of medicine. The medicine should also be slightly cool.²⁶⁴

The above-mentioned reasons for being afflicted with a disease, such as influences of hot and cold, wind and *qi* that is not in its place, as well as the weakness of the child and attacks from the outside, can also be found in narratives. Unfortunately most narratives end tragically with respect to healing. Liu Ji, Zengzeng's father for example, left his wife and infant son for good sometime between 785 and 805, and assumed a new identity in the South. He later learned that his son died when he was not even seven years old, because he had caught a disease while playing, and the medicine did not help him.²⁶⁵

In another case, in the year 833, a man called Zuowen (佐文) was forced to find shelter against heavy rain and was invited by an older man to stay with him. This older man shared his abode with an eight- or nine-year old girl. These two figures actually were ghosts, who died suddenly because one contracted a disease several days after the other.²⁶⁶ These are examples about diseases that befell adults and children alike. In the following section, on the other hand, I will discuss diseases, which were recognized as special childhood diseases.

²⁶² On the cold disease see Sivin 1967: 84 and notes.

²⁶³ Which means, when they play outside for a long time.

²⁶⁴ *Beiji qianjin yaofang*: 11: 9b.

²⁶⁵ *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075-6 (*Qianding lu*), for the full translation of this narrative see the Preface of the thesis.

²⁶⁶ *Taiping guangji* 347: 2751-2 (*Ji yi ji*), for a translation and further discussion see chapter VI 'Afterlife'.

Special diseases: Frights, Convulsions and Foreign Qi Assault

The three disorders frights, convulsions and foreign *qi* attack were closely linked with each other. The discussion of these subjects was merged, because a fright could develop into a convulsion. Foreign *qi* attack was related to both diseases as well, because when a child was struck by foreign *qi* attack it was easily frightened and more severe cases could then have developed into convulsions.

Frights

The most salient cause of a fright was that the heart of a young child was not stable, and therefore “when rearing children one has to be cautious with frights. Do not let [the child] hear loud noises, when holding them, be peaceful and don't let them be frightened. Further, when there is thunder, close the ears of the child.”²⁶⁷ Not only sudden and loud noises, but also sudden movements, many people, and moreover, contact or near contact with impurity, especially death and objects that had been in the vicinities of dead bodies, could cause frights in children.

Frights could be suppressed with a drug called ‘purple pill’ (*ziwan* 紫丸) or, supposedly most effective, with moxibustion (*jiu* 灸).²⁶⁸ Sun sums up nineteen spots on the child's body, which the healer could cauterize in the case of eighteen different kinds of Fright. In order to ward off frights, more advice existed, most of which fell under the category ‘magical medicine’.²⁶⁹

A fright disorder did not need to be the result of being frightened, it could also occur at the beginning of a general disease:

Usually, when children have the beginning of a disease in their belly the body will be cold and hot. When [the body] is cold and hot, the blood and vessels are moving. When [blood and vessels are moving], the heart is not settled. When the heart is not settled, [the child] will be easily frightened.²⁷⁰

An unsettled heart, thus, is the direct reason for getting a fright. The unsettled heart can arise through disturbing, sudden, loud noises or through alternating cold and hot temperature which lets blood and vessels move.

Frightening a child is not difficult, and fright was a disorder parents were very much concerned about. When in 742, during the reign of emperor

²⁶⁷ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 3b.

²⁶⁸ About the Purple Pill and moxibustion, see the part on healing methods of this chapter.

²⁶⁹ See section below on healing.

²⁷⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 5a.

Xuanzong (r. 712-756), the little girl Xianyi (閑儀) was playing in the garden, a person unknown to her called her and foretold her future. She became very frightened, fell to the ground and was unconscious. Only because her family tended to her well, she did not get any disease during the following ten days.²⁷¹ Another motif is the collision of ghosts and young children that we can observe in the narrative of *jinshi*-scholar Zheng Zong's (鄭總) wife who, ten months after she had passed away, returned to have a cup of tea with her husband, but refused to see her children in order to not cause for them to catch a fright disease.²⁷²

Convulsions

Even more alarming than frights, in the opinion of medical authors, were convulsions. A convulsion could occasionally be caused by a fright. Therefore a child had to be healed immediately of frights.²⁷³ Furthermore, even though the symptoms were the same, the disease convulsion got a different name in the case of children older than ten. According to Chao “above the age of ten ‘convulsions’ (癇) are called ‘epilepsy’ (癲) Mouth and eyes are sunken, the eyeballs are rolling. Arms, hands and feet make fists or the back is rigidly straight or the neck is bent.”²⁷⁴

Frights and convulsions thus were closely related. Sun notes that according to the post-Han dynasty pharmaceutical work *Shennong bencao jing* (神農本草經)²⁷⁵ one hundred and twenty different sorts of fright convulsions existed. The reason for young infants being afflicted with convulsions often occurred due to *qi* that was not regularly distributed in the viscera. This could happen frequently, because the *qi* was supposed to be still unsettled and therefore easily disturbed in young children caused by the incompleteness of their internal physical status.²⁷⁶ Sun emphasises that special caution had to be taken during a Steaming and Changing because convulsions in such a period were extremely severe.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ *Taiping guangji* 159: 1144-5 (*Xuan guai lu*).

²⁷² *Taiping guangji* 352: 3786, for a translation see chapter V ‘The child’s physical weakness’.

²⁷³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 5a.

²⁷⁴ *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 6.

²⁷⁵ In fact, the *Shennong bencao jing* is rather difficult to date. See Unschuld 1985.

²⁷⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 1a and 2b.

²⁷⁷ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 2a.

Convulsions were divided into three categories. Depending on the causes that were responsible for their emergence, they are called: wind-convulsions, fright-convulsions and food-convulsions:

Wind- and fright-convulsions happen most frequently. Out of ten children about one or two children get a wind- or fright-convulsion. Usually, those that first get cold and then hot are the ones with food-convulsion. Treat fright-convulsions by cauterizing according to the diagrams.²⁷⁸ Treat wind-convulsion by feeding [the child] pig-heart soup. Food-convulsion is treated by swallowing [the drug] Purple Pill.

Usually, children get a wind-convulsion because their clothes are too warm, [the child accordingly] sweats, and therefore wind enters. The symptoms for those [children] who have a wind-convulsion are cranking their fingers several times. Then they have a fit – that is wind-convulsion.

The ones that get a fright-convulsion first cry loudly because they are frightened, then they develop a fit – that is fright-convulsion. Regarding the ones who have only a slight fright-convulsion, take them in your arms immediately. They should not again be exposed to a further fright. Some stop [crying] themselves. Regarding the ones that first have not been fed with milk, [but] spit, turn warm and later develop a convulsion, that is the food-convulsion. When you suppress it early, it will heal.²⁷⁹

Most symptoms of convulsions were generally visible on the head. Thus, dry or blue nose and mouth, hair that falls out, a dark face or closed eyes that turn blue, pointed at convulsions. Sometimes the whole body was hot, which, in combination with a sweating head, vomiting, panting or difficulties in urinating was another sign of convulsions. Convulsions could furthermore be defined by black, red or blue vessels or white hands. Moreover, whenever the eyes were directed upwards, the pupils were black and big, the eyes were not refined or they were hazy, or the child played with the tongue and shook its head, these could also be regarded as symptoms of convulsions. Sleeping disorders, like restlessness, or light sleep or laughing while dreaming bore the sign of convulsions as well.

The symptoms of a convulsion could be easily recognized. Parents or other care-givers were therefore urged by Sun Simiao to examine the child regularly with respect to those signs, so that the disease could be treated as soon as possible, because “convulsion is the worst disease of a child. Some [families] do not consult a doctor and therefore meet with disaster. When hot *qi* develops

²⁷⁸ I assume that Sun Simiao works with cauterization and moxibustion charts similar to those found in Dunhuang, see for example Lo 2005: 211-222.

²⁷⁹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 2a-b.

inside [the child] there must be a diagnosis from the very beginning. You should repeatedly examine its essence and spirits (精神) and select [the appropriate] diagnosis [according to the list that I provide below].”²⁸⁰ After this warning, Sun lists twenty-one signs that point to the beginning of a convulsion.

Foreign Qi Assault

Like frights, foreign *qi* assault (*kewu* 客忤) was also related to the child’s weak physical state of being.²⁸¹ In the case of foreign *qi* assault, the cause was the instability of the *qi*-channels in children as we can read again and again in medical treatises. This means that attack from strong and impure *qi* coming from the outside of the child’s body was a very urgent danger, because they disturbed the fragile system of the floating substances in a child.

While convulsions were related to irregular and instable *qi* (and blood) within a child, foreign *qi* assault was a disease that was caused by any kind of *qi* that was brought to the child from the outside.²⁸² Carriers of this ‘external or heteropathic *qi*’ – thus, of the disease – could have been anyone, including close relatives, and even mothers, fathers and wet nurses.²⁸³ Foreign *qi* assault was also related to the feeble and weak spirit and *qi* of the child, but it only occurred if it was touched or seen by people or things that it did not know or that appear suddenly, for example:

Infants and young children get foreign *qi* assault, because *qi* and breath of people that come from the outside pollute it. One name is ‘being struck by a person’

²⁸⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 5b.

²⁸¹ The term ‘*kewu*’ 客忤 itself does not contain the character *qi*. But when examining the diseases grouped under foreign *qi* assault, we can see that usually *qi* is involved. However, *kewu*-diseases are related to any attack from external entities and some diseases show a clear relation to demonic attack, which proves the connection between *qi* and demons in medical theory and practice (see footnote below). Additionally, also adults can get a *kewu*-disease when their *hun*- and *po*-souls are in a weak state, see *Waitai miyao* 28: 755-757 on foreign *qi* assault in adults. See especially Cullen 2000, who discusses *kewu* (which he leaves untranslated) in the context of contagion; he talks about the role of *qi* as an ‘encroaching *qi*’.

²⁸² The symptoms of foreign *qi* assault are similar to the ones of the *xian*-convulsion. They involve vomiting, stomach ache, thin appearance, and changing of the face colour (*Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 2a-b).

²⁸³ See for example Yates’ explanation about the relation of external *qi* (attacks) and disease: “Blockages in the movement of internal *qi* as well as the attack and entry of external heteropathic *qi* were thought to bring on disease. This was true for both men and women. This medicine of systematic correspondence gradually superseded, especially among the male intellectual elite, an earlier medicine based on the more religious notion that disease was caused by ghosts and supra-human spirits (demonic medicine),” Yates 2000: 6.

(*zhongren* 中人) – that is what I call foreign *qi* assault (*kewu* 客忤). It does not matter whether they are family-members or people from other families, whether they are a wet nurse or parents: [persons], who come from the outside, [and who therefore carry] rough, evil and violent demonic *qi* in [all] their clothes down to the shoes, as well as the *qi* of cattle and horses, [those persons] are all polluting.²⁸⁴

Continuing his discussion of the disorder, Sun focuses on the *qi* in the clothes of people coming from the outside, elaborating the dangers of the *qi* from cattle or horses. If people would approach the child after horse-riding, without changing their clothes or washing themselves, the horse's sweat, *qi* and breath that still clings onto those people, subsequently would afflict the child. Thus, if “the child suddenly sees a horse coming and hears a horse neigh in alarm, furthermore, all the things on the horse, [the tack and saddle], causes the child to be attacked by horse-foreign-*qi*-assault. One really has to protect them, especially the one-year-old [children]!”²⁸⁵

There were several other varieties of foreign *qi* assault. Noteworthy, the explanation of the disease did not necessarily have to involve *qi*. Concerning the disease called *ba*-[demon] (魃), for example, the attacking entity was clearly a demon, an ‘evil spirit’ that entered the pregnant woman's womb via the stomach and caused the child to become sick as a foetus. The result iwa jaundice, hairloss, and hot temperature in the infant after birth. Sun emphasizes that it was not the mother's fault when this happened, because “everybody has it from time to time.” Another variation of this can occur when the mother fell pregnant again, while still suckling an infant.²⁸⁶

Foreign *qi* assault seemed to be caused in the first place by pollution.²⁸⁷ Fearing foreign *qi* assault might therefore cause protective behaviour and made care-givers regulate the number of people approaching the child and control the manner in which they approach it. As a result, children were prevented from being in the vicinity of too many people, and people were asked to be clean, calm

²⁸⁴ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 1a.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 1b.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 6b-7a.

²⁸⁷ This pollution is based on the idea that anything that comes from the outside – outside of one's body, one's family, one's village or the Tang realm, is dangerous. Therefore, the *qi* of an animal that dwells in polluted areas (around the toilet for example) or that passes through areas that are not cultivated (horses that run through ‘wilderness’) and that is brought to the child via a person, is utterly dangerous. To be hygienic in medieval times consequently meant taking precautions to ward of influences that come from the outside. The outside is defined according to the respective target and can be another person as host of outside *qi*, an animal that lives outside of the house, a wild animal (including supernatural beings) that lives outside the cultivated area etc. Cullen understands this disease as a kind of demonic possession (Cullen 2000: 49), to which I agree.

and careful. Even certain colours – white clothes and a blue belt or blue clothes and a white belt – pose a danger.²⁸⁸ The fear of foreign *qi* assault might also be one of the reasons for women to not become pregnant again very soon after giving birth.

Since foreign *qi* assault was transmitted by outside *qi* and the cause did not come from within the child, its prevention was both an urgent task and a very difficult one. The disease was mostly treated with the help of magical medicine, by using hair of the mother, saliva, spells and the like.²⁸⁹ The best way to protect the child from foreign *qi* assault however, was to keep it in seclusion. If it was not possible to keep away the influence of outside *qi*, Sun advises to at least sterilize the entrance of the place where the child is located:

Usually, many people and all the things that come from the outside frighten the children and cause disease. A method for protecting them is to let the child avoid everybody and everything that comes from the outside and enters the house, and not to let it be seen. If you could not avoid [the outside influences], burn cow-bezoar and often order some smoke to be placed in front of the door. Then it will be alright.²⁹⁰

Treatment

Concerning the treatment of diseases in general, Chen Yanzhi, author of the much-quoted fifth century work *Lesser Grade Remedies*, proposed an approach that was different from previous ones, which spread out to the Tang and post-Tang medical works. In the translation of Mayanagi “the most important thing in treatment is to effect quick relief, and those who practice medicine should be thoroughly acquainted with acute diseases. When learning medicine, the emphasis should first lie on the understanding of the essentials regarding life-saving measures, then on mastering the ways of relieving symptoms, and finally on becoming versed in methods of hygiene.”²⁹¹ Chen Yanzhi further distinguished three types of drugs: harmonizing drugs, tonifying drugs, and purgative drugs. He additionally suggested not using purgatives with infants. This was because “Yanzhi considered young children with a weak constitution to be prone to adverse effects of purgatives even after their condition was improved with harmonizing drugs.”²⁹²

²⁸⁸ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 1b.

²⁸⁹ Cullen translates a whole range of the remedies used against *kewu*, Cullen 2000: 46.

²⁹⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 1b-2a.

²⁹¹ Mayanagi 1987, web-article.

²⁹² *Ibidem*.

Chao Yuanfang, Sun Simiao and Wang Tao were only three medical experts among an uncountable number of experts during the Tang dynasty. What is more, probably with the exception of Sun Simiao, they might not even have had a great practical knowledge of medicine.²⁹³ The texts of these three literate men were nonetheless chosen to be transmitted to later generations, and they have strongly affected the history of treatment. Although these medical authors also mentioned magical recipes, they mostly based their treatment on pills, powders and decoctions, that consist of plants, animal and minerals parts. Among them, three prescriptions occur most often: Purple Pill (紫丸), Black Powder (黑散) and Dragon Gall Soup (龍膽湯).²⁹⁴ But also moxibustion and charms were possibilities for treatment. Giving a bath with special substances was likewise suggested several times as a form of treatment. Furthermore, during the first two years, the development processes, particularly Changing and Steaming, had to be taken into account when treating a child.

Certain types of diseases, such as frights and convulsions, foreign *qi* assault, cold and skin diseases, required a certain type of healing. Moxibustion was mainly prescribed in cases of frights and convulsions. Foreign *qi* assault was preferably treated with magical medicine. Pills, baths, extracts and soups were primarily prescribed in cases of ulcers, cold diseases, fevers and other general diseases.

Many methods for healing children's diseases were of a preventive nature, and much of the preventive care was carried out shortly after birth. One example is the bathing in the peach root decoction, which was advised to be done on the third day after birth. The extract was supposed to ward off the inauspicious: "that will lead to not growing ulcers once the body of the child is completed."²⁹⁵ Other preventive care was conducted when certain symptoms, like ulcers, occurred which were interpreted as the harbinger of other, worse, diseases. For example:

Method for healing Sudden Death [after] a child has been born: When, at the time of the symptoms, you observe that in the mouth of the child an ulcer has evolved in front of the roof of the mouth, then pluck away the head [of the ulcer] with your finger. When it bursts open let the blood disperse. Do not let the blood enter the throat. If it enters the throat, that will kill the child. Be very careful!"²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Medical authors of medieval China were more interested in the literary copying and transmission than in the actual examination of bodies and diseases.

²⁹⁴ Dragon Gall is identified by Cullen as *Gentiana scabra* (Cullen 2000: 45).

²⁹⁵ *Beiji qianjin yaofang*: 9: 5b.

²⁹⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang*: 9: 7a.

This example shows that several pathologies just asked for the right reaction to be executed by the care-giver, and not necessarily or immediately for a pill, a powder or other medicaments.

Because other practitioners did not leave writings, we have to rely on narratives for a broader understanding about treatment. Yet, narratives are usually not extremely specific on the subject of how healing was practised.²⁹⁷ I assume that people who could not afford a doctor, and needed one very urgently, or who thought that they did not need one, had to be creative and attempt to help themselves. Alternatively they needed a set of preventive instruments and medicine. Around 661, the little nephew of nun Xiuxing (修行) for instance, paid in hell for killing a crab to make his own medicine during childhood. The nun reported this after she has had insights into some underworld legal cases

‘When your son was young he once killed a crab, took the fluid [from within the crab] and smeared it on an ulcer. It healed. But now he has entered the Forrest of Knives in the underworld. I saw that he has seven knives in his flesh...’²⁹⁸

According to medical literature, the three medicaments Purple Pill, Black Powder and Dragon Gall Soup, were most important for children's diseases. Purple Pill and Black Powder were especially mentioned in connection with Steaming and Changing. Moreover, Purple Pill and Black Powder were the main drugs when dealing with diseases related to heat, cold, indigestion, and food-convulsion. The entries concerning the drugs are all composed in similar manners: first, a list of diseases is mentioned that can be treated with the help of these remedies. This list is followed by the ingredients, their precise amount and the preparation. The entry ends by noting the quantity of drugs to give to a child, the amount often depending on the severity of the disease and the age of the child.²⁹⁹

Dragon Gall Soup was more often used for diseases that were not just connected to Changing and Steaming. Sun Simiao was very explicit about its importance: “Children that are younger than ten years all are treated with it. For children, Dragon Gall 'soup' is number one!”³⁰⁰ This soup was used against coldness, heat, warmth, cramps, frights, vomiting, indigestion, foreign *qi* assault from people, demons and [evil] *qi*, and it could be used during Steaming and

²⁹⁷ For the greatest part it cannot be done, or can only be done with help of reconstruction on the basis of material from later dynasties.

²⁹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 103: 693-4 (*Ming bao ji*).

²⁹⁹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 5a-b (Purple Pill), 6a (Black Powder).

³⁰⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 8a.

Changing and against fright convulsion. That means that care-givers would do well to be sufficiently supplied with a stock of these two drugs at home.³⁰¹

The dosage of administered pills often depended on the age of the child.³⁰² The entry on the Dragon Gall Soup for example, is very explicit about the difference in age and the administering of the soup:

With respect to the ones that are [only a few] days and months old, rely on this sequence and make it standard. [...] For children that are a hundred days old, increase to three *zhu*. For two hundred-days-old children increase [the amount of Dragon Gall Soup] to six *zhu*. For one-year-old children increase it with approximately half a *liang*. Surplus medicine should all be prepared.³⁰³

Nun Xiuxing's nephew who helped himself by preparing his own drug might have tried to prepare a remedy that had been taught to him by one of his care-givers. I assume that medical specialists probably were knowledgeable about different local remedies, and relied on family tradition as well. This is suggested in the narrative of Xu Sibō (徐嗣伯), a famous local healer from the sixth century. When the boy Zhangying (張景) was fifteen he suffered from indigestion and a yellow face. A whole crowd of doctors that preceeded Xu could not help Zhangying. Xu ordered the family to administer him a 'pillow of a dead person' (死人枕), which had to be cooked. Zhangying's family did so and the boy was cured. Healing with 'a pillow of a dead person', for which Xu is reported to have entered graves in order to cut out what he needed, was the healing method for which he became famous.³⁰⁴ In the case of healing Zhangying, Xu obviously did not fear causing frights in the boy, even though frights in children could be caused by having objects of dead people coming close to children. In this case, Zhangying was not considered to be a child in danger of such a disease anymore.

Chapter Three of Sun Simiao's *Prescriptions*, which deals with convulsions, ends with a lengthy explanation on methods of moxibustion. Moxibustion for little children has probably been practiced since at least the second century B.C.³⁰⁵ Sun Simiao in his *Prescriptions* relied on the information provided in the *Discussions*, which might be from as recent times as the fifth or sixth century A.D.:

³⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰² *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 2a.

³⁰³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 8a.

³⁰⁴ *Taiping guangji* 218: 1667 (*Nan shi*). The cause of the disease was an intestinal worm. About this anecdote and more about Sibō see *Nanshi* 32: 839-840.

³⁰⁵ Volkmar 1985: 16.

The *Discussions* says: ‘When children are newly born and have a disease, be aware that you cannot cauterize them with regular needles. If you cauterize them with regular needles, terrible pain will stir the five vessels and therefore easily develop into convulsion. ..’³⁰⁶

Moxibustion was almost exclusively applied in cases of convulsion – especially when the diagnosis was fright-convulsion. In chapter twenty-six, part three of the *Revised Prescription*, Sun Simiao has a special entry on twenty-one methods for healing children’s fright-convulsions.³⁰⁷ This entry lists twenty-six acu-points and their relations to specific frights. In each entry, first the point or points in question are mentioned and then linked to a symptom and a possible cause of the Fright. Moxibustion could be applied up to one hundred days in a row, as Sun mentions. However, there were also a few cases in which moxibustion was used with diseases that were not related to frights or convulsions.³⁰⁸

Magical medicine

Nearly all medical specialists who were active in the medieval period sunk into oblivion after their death, and with them their methods they had applied in the treatment of diseases. Nevertheless, during this period two general trends for explaining disease existed, respectively based on the demonic and harmonic causes of disease. We can therefore assume that healing and treatment would follow similar directions. Medical practice aimed at exorcising demonic influence,³⁰⁹ and restoring to harmony what had been rendered chaotic or disturbed.³¹⁰

In order to exorcise, one needed to be able to detect foreign, demonic influences. One specialization among Daoist (*daoshi*, *fangshi* 道士, 方士) practitioners, for example, was the detecting of demons in a patient. After the successful recognition of the demon’s identity, and how the demonic influence manifested, it was usually easily exorcised. Exorcism was done by writing down charms that often had to be burned and taken orally.

³⁰⁶ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 10: 13b.

³⁰⁷ *Qianjin yifang* 26: 749.

³⁰⁸ *Waitai miyao* 35: 995a.

³⁰⁹ For a very good definition about exorcism (in the context of a ritual held in Dunhuang, related to disease) see Mayo, who says that “the elimination of disease by ritual expulsion and the assertion of local political power through a coup d’état against an usurper, along with a proclamation of affiliations with the authority of the vastly weakened Tang imperial centre, are here constructed as linked projects.” Mayo 2005: 56.

³¹⁰ See Unschuld 1985.

Charm writing was a profession as such at the time, and usually locally known professionals would be asked to exorcise.³¹¹ Making charms or incantations and using them was part of the profession of an exorcist, known as an expert of spells (*zhousheng* 咒生).³¹² These experts of spells were low- or non-ranked officials, and they formed part of the officially acknowledged community of healing specialists.³¹³ Among Dunhuang medical documents are also a few prescriptions that made use of words in healing.³¹⁴

- a. When a child that is breastfed cries because it is frightened, write beneath the navel and make the precious character 'great fortune'.³¹⁵
- b. In order to heal night-cries of the child, take grass from beside the well and put it on the back of the mother, then, during sleep, it will not cry.³¹⁶

Charm-remedies are found rather seldom in medical documents. Buddhist medical texts, on the other hand, form a rich source for charms against sick, mostly frightened, children, which I will discuss later.³¹⁷ Moreover, practitioners were often renowned for their knowledge regarding drugs. The immortal Zheng Siyuan (鄭思遠), who is said to ride on a dragon, was, for example, also versed in tiger-drugs. One remedy made from the body of a tiger that was attributed to him goes as follows: when a hunter shot a tiger, he should bury the tiger's light-giving eye in the earth,³¹⁸ this would change into a white stone, which was able to heal children's frights.³¹⁹

³¹¹ See chapter V 'Professional education' for a few possibilities about how one becomes a medical practitioner.

³¹² "The purpose of the incantations is to deliver a particular kind of message, and most of them state their information in straightforward fashion," Harper 1998: 161. See Wang Zhen'guo 2006 for the education of medical specialists during the Tang, especially pages 160 ff. Of the (ideally) forty students that are enrolled at the medical school, three are supposed to specialize on children. Specialisation takes five years (*ibid*: 165).

³¹³ Apparently they existed only during the Tang and possibly during the Sui dynasty. Hucker lists a Spell Chanter 咒禁工, unranked; an Erudite for Exorcism 咒禁博士, who was "authorized to have ten youths as Exorcism Students", rank 9b2; and a Master of Exorcism 咒禁師, Hucker: 178 (no. 1337-9); also in *Jiu Tangshu* 44: 1864 and 1876; Des Rotours: 280.

³¹⁴ Which is similar to using charms.

³¹⁵ Cong Chunyu 1994: 579 (P 2635).

³¹⁶ Cong Chunyu 1994: 580 (P 2635); the comment of the modern edition quotes from the *Zhenghe bencao*, which says: "grass from the side of the well presides over the night-cries of children; put it under the sleeping pillow of the mother, without letting the mother know."

³¹⁷ I will discuss Buddhist healing methods in chapter IV because they often deal with demons.

³¹⁸ Medieval magical biology stated that in tigers one eye gives light, the other sees.

³¹⁹ *Taiping guangji* 430: 3496 (*Youyang zazhu*), see also chapter IV for more about tigers.

Paul Unschuld distinguishes between two kinds of magical healing: contact magic and homeopathic magic.³²⁰ One speaks of contact magic, when a healer or any other person uses any physical substance of an individual – usually hair or fingernails – in order to manipulate that person. Homeopathic magic is when a healer uses objects that look similar to a person, such as a clay figure, or a brain, such as a walnut, or whatever one wants to manipulate, and inflicts damage to that object; this action will then show some effect on the person one wants to influence.

Both types of magical healing are also present in medieval treatises on children's diseases, including medical documents found in Dunhuang. Medicaments, including ashes of burned charms, hair and saliva of another person, clothes and animal hair were administered with the hope and belief that they show effect. Many cases of foreign *qi* assault and frights were targeted with such prescriptions, for example:

1. Take ten silver fishes from the clothes, make them to powder and disperse it over the nipples of the wet-nurse. Let the child drink it, when it inhales it will heal immediately. [...]
2. [...] Burn three cun of the mother's belt and loosen your hair, mix it with milk and administer it. [...] ³²¹

Saliva was regarded as a very powerful magical healing ingredient.³²² In another prescription against foreign *qi* assault it was used together with a charm:

Those children that are struck by foreign *qi* assault from horse [*qi*] and who spit without stopping, cauterize them [...]. You can also use a powdered pill [...]. And [you can also] use saliva. For the method of spitting and reciting the incantation, see below: 'The incantation reads [accordingly]: Father of the family so and so, mother of the family so and so, the child of the family so and so is troubled by foreign *qi* assault. Even though [the prescriptions of the famous,

³²⁰ Unschuld 1985: 52.

³²¹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 3b.

³²² "The prominence of spitting and spouting when chanting incantations in the magical recipes suggests southern breath magic called 'recipes of Yue' (越方) in Han sources." Harper 1998: 159; see 163ff, more on breath magic, see Helm 2000: 244, in an article about healing narratives in early Christian miracle stories, writes about saliva: "Jesus and the Apostles are said to heal by driving out evil spirits, by word, or by touch. No remedies, either herbs or minerals are mentioned. The only material means used by Jesus was spittle, which was and is found in the folk medicine of almost all cultures, but which can also be regarded as an important agent against demons."

legendary doctor from pre-imperial China] Bian Que [who specialized in treating children] are good, he no equal to saliva.'³²³

One protagonist in 'therapeutic rituals', as Davis calls it, was the spirit medium. Although Daoists, Buddhists and literate physicians used much effort to get rid off these established mediums, they already had an important function in therapeutic rituals before the arrival of Buddhist and Daoist healing methods and they kept their crucial position in disease-combat.³²⁴ At some point during the Northern and Southern dynasties the young daughter of a very rude member of the ruling class, who dismissed the existence of spirits and gods, fell ill as a result of her father being ill-behaved in a temple of the Divine Goddess (聖女神). A spirit medium (*wu* 巫) was able to see the anger of the goddess and explained it to them. Only after the father burned incense at the temple in order to apologize, his daughter was cured.³²⁵

We also find shamanist healing in dreams. Xue Yi (薛義), a collator in the Palace Library, was afflicted by malarial fever which kills several people. At about the same time, the youngest daughter of his sister Mrs Wei, with whose family Xue was staying with at that moment, got the same disease. Her mother dreamt of a dog-like creature with the skin of a hairy, poisonous caterpillar. She killed the creature in her dream because it is the monster that afflicted her daughter. She also received charms and an exorcist text which, after waking up, she gave to her nephew. He and the girl both recovered.³²⁶

On the basis of these few examples concerning magical medicine, we can see that, although children very occasionally received special remedies, children and adults were treated similarly, and we do not find much evidence that children were defined as a different category in narratives about healing. Adults and children alike were considered hosts for supernatural powers and possible targets for attack. In the following section I will discuss similar examples with a special focus on medical practice, and we will see that in most narratives covering medical events, there was no distinction between adults and children.

³²³ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 5b-6a.

³²⁴ See Strickmann 2002 (he uses many sources that also derive from pre- and post-Tang times), Dudbridge 1995, and for the Song, harking back at the Tang, see Davis 2001.

³²⁵ *Taiping guangji* 307: 2433-4 (*Shi yi ji* and *Shu yi ji*). On female shamans see Dudbridge 1995: 94-116.

³²⁶ *Taiping guangji* 278: 2210 (*Guang yi ji*); Dudbridge 1995: 184 (no. 54).

Medical practice

The medical treatises that have served as my sources so far, partly consisted of written propaganda against shamanic healing and local practitioners, who did not embrace the kind of literate medicine enhanced by those treatises. This is evident in the foreword to the chapters on children in Sun Simiao's *Prescriptions* that I have discussed and translated in the beginning of this chapter. Why did Sun write so vehemently against shamans, local healers and classical literature? One answer might be found in economic reasons: a doctor (*yi* 醫) had to distinguish himself from numerous other healing practitioners.³²⁷ I assume that we were dealing with a crowded 'medical market' in the Tang dynasty, although it is not easy to find strong arguments other than a few texts that would make this assumption more provable. In that context, Davis formulates for the Song dynasty that:

over and over again in Hong Mai's accounts of healing, we find that the local reputation and charisma of the practitioner counted more in determining the choice of a therapist than the particular devotion, class, or ideology of the client. In matters of healing and, increasingly, in matters of liturgy in general, Buddhists and Daoists, spirit-mediums and lay religious practitioners were viewed primarily as ritual experts and were judged accordingly. Moreover, the choice of a healer, or rather the succession of choices, was often determined by what we might call "hierarchies of proximity and expense." Afflicted families often turned first to a spirit-medium or even to a knowledgeable household member, and then, if treatment failed, to a lay Daoist exorcist, Buddhist monk, or Daoist priest.³²⁸

Towards the very end of the Sui dynasty a Palace Medical Service was established in 605 AD. It "increasingly became a teaching and certifying agency for professional physicians in government service. In the Sui it notably included a Director, an Aide, two Pharmacists, two-hundred Master Physicians, two Herbal Gardeners, two Erudites for General Medicine, two Erudites for Massage and two Erudites for Exorcism."³²⁹ During the Tang, Erudites of Acupuncture

³²⁷ This rivalry was nothing new. Vivienne Lo points out similar behavior of physicians during the Warring States period that depended on patronage, Lo 1998 (unbound version): 41. "Chunyu Yi's biography reveals that rivalry between members of the same profession was a feature of every day life," (Lo 1998 (unbound version at the Needham Research Institute, Cambridge, UK): 45).

³²⁸ Davis 2001: 138.

³²⁹ Hucker 1985: 479 (entry 'Imperial Medical Office' 太醫署).

were added.³³⁰ These officially acknowledged physicians were thus taught and examined by physicians in governmental service. Their knowledge was probably based on theoretical material very similar to the works I have discussed above.³³¹ Physicians who took the exams were engaged in medicine and healing as their profession and, I assume, naturally defended their field of knowledge and income against other competitors who earned their living with healing as well.

The number of other types of medical and psychological practitioners was probably enormous. The 'struggle for survival' among the competitors, as a consequence, was sometimes fought out over the body of a sick customer. In narratives about ailments, we come across accounts that reveal the behaviour of customers in this medical market, controlled by people in need of a healer for themselves or others. The story of Sir Pei's sick son gives an insight to the competition among healers:

In the middle of the Zhenyuan reign period [of Dezong, between 785 and 805] vice governor Sir Pei (裴), his given name is forgotten,³³² had a son in his teens who was very smart and literate. Pei loved him deeply. Then the son suddenly fell ill and no physician (*yi* 醫) or pharmacist (*yao* 藥) could cure him. Pei was just looking for a Daoist practitioner who was good at spells, when one who called himself Gao Shizi and made his living by working with talismans, knocked on his gates and offered his knowledge. Pei invited him into his house and ordered him to have a look at his son. The specialist said: "What this boy has, is not a disease [that you were looking for] but it is caused by a fox. However, I have an art that can cure him." [Pei] thanked him and requested [the healing of his son] from him. The specialist accordingly used his skill in order to examine [the boy] and to summon [the spirits]. When it was close to lunchtime, the son suddenly got up and said: "My disease is now much better." Pei was overjoyed and told specialist Gao that he was a real Master of his arts. They ate and drank together and [Pei] presented [Gao] abundantly with strings of cash and silk. He thanked him and bid him farewell. The specialist said: "From now on I shall come daily and enquire [after your son]." Then he left.

Although the disease of his son was healing, his *shen*- and *hun*-souls were not complete. He would walk around and speak madly, or he would laugh and

³³⁰ Des Rotours 1932: 280 fn 1, lists different numbers for these specialists (ten incantateurs (exorcists), forty physicians, eight herbal gardeners and sixteen masseurs). For a more detailed introduction see Wang Zhen'guo 2006: 143-192.

³³¹ We can draw the conclusion then – due to the repetitive character between the four works I have discussed – that other medical works might have covered roughly the same topics, and that this knowledge was used as the basic material for physicians.

³³² This is Pei Wu, probably a member of the prominent Hedong Pei clan, who also served as a Chief Minister of the Court of the National Granaries. In 814 he became Vice Governor of Taoyuan, see *Jiu Tangshu* 15: 448.

cry and could not stop. Always, when specialist Gao came, Mr Pei described this to him and the specialist would say: "This boy's *jing*-essence and *po*-souls have already been bound by an evil spirit. The reason why they have not yet returned is because ten days are not yet over. Pei trusted him.

After several days another specialist came by, called Wang, who said about himself that he had a spirit-talisman and that he could expel diseases caused by evil spirits with his spells. Pei talked with him and [Wang] told Pei: "I heard that your beloved son is afflicted with disease and that he is not healed yet. May I have a look at him?" Pei then had him look at his son. The specialist was deeply shocked and said: "This young lad's disease is a fox! If it is not cured very soon, it will become worse." Mr Pei told him about specialist Gao. Wang laughed: "How can you be sure that specialist Gao is not a fox!?" Then he sat down.

Just at that moment when he was arranging his mat and prepared the spells, specialist Gao suddenly arrived. Upon entering he scolded loudly: "How can this boy's disease become better, when you invite a fox into the chamber that causes him to be sick!?" When Wang saw Gao coming, he also scolded: "If there is a fox-spirit indeed, now he really arrived! How can you make use of [this person's] skills to examine [your son's disease] and expel it!?" The two persons were in uproar, and were scolding and disgracing each other without stopping.

The members of the Pei household found this very alarming and strange. Suddenly another Daoist master arrived at their gates. Clandestinely he asked a domestic servant: "I heard that Sir Pei has a son who has become possessed by a fox. I am good at seeing ghosts. Could you tell [your master]? Ask him if I can enter and see him." The servant quickly told this to Sir Pei. [Sir Pei] came outside and told him about the whole affair. The Daoist said: "That is [actually] quite simple." He entered and had a look at the two people. The two were swearing once more: "This is a fox-spirit as well!! How can you disguise yourself as a Daoist and mislead people!?" The Daoist also scolded them: "You foxes should return to the graveyards outside of the city. Why are you disturbing these people?" Then they closed the door and were fighting with each other.

Several meal-times later, Sir Pei got very scared, and the servant (家僮) had fainted. Still nobody came out [of the room]. At dusk suddenly no noises could be heard anymore. [Sir Pei] opened [the door] and peeked [into the chamber]. Three foxes were lying on the ground and panting. They could not move at all. Sir Pei whipped them severely and killed them. His son recovered after ten months.³³³

When his son became sick, Pei's first decision was to ask a physician (*yi* 醫). After he failed to help, another officially acknowledged professional, a pharmacist, (*yao* 藥), was consulted. Because his son stayed sick, Pei eventually looked for a Daoist specialist (*dao(shu)shi* 道(術)士). Subsequently, we are introduced to three

³³³ *Taiping guangji* 453: 3704-5 (*Yi shi zhi*).

specialists that are categorized under *daoshi*. Pei was ‘helped’ first by a specialist in healing with talismans and then, additionally, by a specialist in healing with a special *shen*-talisman. Lastly, a Daoist came, who was specialized in seeing ghosts (*jian gui* 見鬼).³³⁴ Thus, after two types of official professionals were ruled out, Pei opened his house to a third type of healing professionals. All turned out to be charlatans, who fought a battle to gain power over the child’s body.

Battles over a child’s disease occurred more often. Not only Daoist healing specialists and fox threats were involved, but also Turkic Buddhist monks as well as supernatural beings such as the Heavenly Emperor. In 805, for instance, Wang Bu’s (王布) fourteen- or fifteen-year-old daughter had a disease that manifested in her nostrils. The father, a rich man from the aristocracy, spent a lot of money in order to heal his daughter, but nobody was able to help her. Finally, an Indian monk (梵僧) came who took the disease away. It turned out that the disease was caused by two herb-spirits that had been hiding in her nose. The Heavenly Emperor wanted them back but the Buddhist monk was faster.³³⁵ This narrative broadens the scope of healing practice even more. Into the picture emerges a foreign Buddhist monk, once all other vaguely defined healers have failed to cure the girl.

The healing practices described here are not only applied to children – adults, men and women alike, receive the same treatment. In folk practices, thence, a boy or girl appear to not be treated different from an adult. Narratives do not have disease at the centre of interest, because they do not specify diseases. At the centre is healing. Often, a child is not defined further than ‘sick’ and likewise not described other than helped by a medical specialist, who in many cases is a non-specified Daoist practitioner.

The medical theories, descriptions of diseases and their treatments as well as activities around birth that I have discussed throughout most part of this chapter are to a great deal unreflected in narratives. The medical texts that I have investigated were products of literate men with a profound knowledge of and access to other medical texts. Among the authors, Sun Simiao represents an outstanding case because he apparently also processed his own experiences into his medical treatise which shows his special interest in the child’s body. The theories have been transmitted and debated within their genre for several centuries after the Tang dynasty. However, if we want to understand medical

³³⁴ On seeing ghosts, see e.g. Sawada, Mizuho 1990 and Davis 2001.

³³⁵ *Taiping guangji* 220: 1691-2 (*Youyang zazu*). In the narrative, the description of the monk is used in the flexible Tang way where *hu* (胡) and *fan* (梵) was used for ‘Indian’ or ‘Indian’-related meanings. See Boucher 2000.

practice in relation to children we have to draw our attention to narratives as well, as I have shown. Narratives display the importance of a child and the effort on behalf of its father to have it healed. Still, narratives do not approach the child as special in healing: children are treated as adults, as bodies with a disease.

This non-specialist presentation of children in narratives does not necessarily infer that in practice children were not treated as a separate category. We could see this in the order of choice of healing methods by elite parents: usually a father first approached an official doctor and then a pharmaceutical expert before he hired a local specialised – fairly often, these local healers appeared even without being called, meaning that the news of about a sick person might have spread quite fast. While the doctors most probably based their knowledge on texts such as the ones that I have discussed above, local healers relied on their own specific healing methods, probably learned orally from teachers. Professional doctors, who ideally held a degree from a medical school, hinged on their knowledge about the division of the female, the male and the child's body to start with. Narratives about disease usually present local healers, often labelled Daoist specialist, as merely succesful or unseccusful and deceitful people; they focused on the practitioner's healing methods and not their patients and specific diseases.

IV. Families, parents and playmates

To care for a child comprises several actions, of which two are more or less extensively discussed in medieval texts. One series of actions concerned physical care, which basically involves feeding, clothing, cleaning, protecting against dangers, and treating diseases. The other type of care included the initial instruction in communal values, norms, and behaviour, as well as the arrangement of instruction for a profession that adults intend children under their care to take up. These two types of care fell under upbringing and education, and they were carried out within families.³³⁶

The main individuals on whom a child depended to be cared for physically, intellectually and morally in the family were the parents. They ideally

³³⁶ Nguyen Tri divides caring into *l'education* (*yang*) and *l'instruction* (*jiao*), Nguyen Tri 2003: 2. In German *l'education* and *l'instruction* are combined in the word *Erziehung*; moral and physical care are thus not separated from each other. I chose to translate *yang* mostly as 'upbringing' and *jiao* as 'instruction' or 'education'. *Yang* is more engaged with the physical care, while *jiao* deals more with the intellectual and social training. Still, both upbringing and education are based on the idea to raise children to moral members of their communities. To the greatest extent, professional education was carried out outside family. Boys usually went to special masters or teachers from whom they learned their skills, and girls were married into other families where they learned different skills as well.

were the biological parents with whom the child formed a nuclear family, together with its siblings. Father, mother and children were always part of a larger network of family members without whom the care and survival of a child would not have been possible in most cases.

In this chapter I will first analyse what family meant with regard to children in medieval China. To start with, I will outline a general definition of medieval families. I stress that here I will focus on which family branches and individual family members were central in child care and not so much on 'the medieval family' in general and its role in communities or its involvement in Tang politics and social change.³³⁷ I will provide a general idea about family size, structure and the kinds of influential people that were crucial for child rearing.

Aside from the extended family, another frequent household composition that I will discuss in the first section was that of servants or slaves living in the household of their master. The household of servants and their master could be tightly connected when it came to child care as I will show. Lastly, I consider the impact of neighbours on children and child care.

Children probably did not spend much time with their biological parents, as I will explain in the second section of this chapter. Therefore I call the major adults that were in charge for their upbringing male and female care-giver. I will also analyse why medieval authors put so much stress on the significance of biological parents, which played an essential role in the identity and representation of a person. In addition I will examine the different tasks and expectations of mothers and fathers regarding their children. I will, moreover, discuss the duties of children towards both their parents. These duties receive more attention in medieval writings than parental duties towards their offspring.

This chapter thus focuses on the social environment of children and the treatment of children by the nearby adults. In addition I will also demonstrate how the interaction between children is displayed in texts. I will discuss the roles and forms of play that were vital in the enculturation of a child.³³⁸ Other

³³⁷ Research about the extended family in medieval times is very important, especially in terms of the important social changes from after the An Lushan rebellion (the 天寶之亂 from general 安祿山 between 755 and 763) onward, when the old aristocracy gradually vanished, intermingled with more local elites, and made place for a bureaucratic elite. See Johnson 1977, Ebrey 1978, Tanigawa 1985, Holmgren 1995 and Clark 2007 whose works focus on large families, communities, and clans in relation to broader Tang politics and in relation to social connections. Even though these discussions are also vital for comprehending family dynamics, taking them into account here would lead me astray from my focus on children. I will therefore touch on questions about the extended family in medieval China whenever it is necessary for my analysis on children, but I will leave it mainly in the background.

³³⁸ Play is at least important in our viewpoint of the twenty-first century, but it did not receive much positive or special attention in medieval China.

important events that made the interaction of large groups of people possible were festivals, which were also visited by children. Children did not only visit fairs they also participated and worked at them, as I will show.

1. Families

The four units – nuclear families, families of siblings and grandparents, masters and neighbours – were the most important groups involved with the process of raising and growing up of children. Occasionally parents also relied on friendship and their membership of a social group to ensure their children's well-being in case they themselves were unable to care for them. Without such broader inter-household relations the welfare of children could not have been ensured under the often violent circumstances of medieval China. Non-blood relations, however, were regarded with suspicion and particularly in times of a crisis one's own children would be preferred over others.³³⁹ For this reason, biological parents were still considered to be the most reliable of all care-givers. A son's loyalty was directed towards his parents, and a daughter would often find her natal family an important resort. There she would find help, especially if her husband died and her in-laws would not keep her.

This section provides a definition of 'family' on which the rest of the chapter is rooted. Here I will analyse structure and size of the average medieval family as far as that is possible. This is vital in order to understand the circumstances under which a child grows up. In addition I will discuss questions concerning natal families and inter-family relations, which take the previous general outline of the medieval family as a set out. In the analysis of these different family connections we will learn much about family dynamics.

Working definition: Families

The composition of a family varied constantly. Each adult family member carried prescribed responsibilities according to his or her position. Although the responsibilities of each member changed with time and the composition of the family, the prescribed roles for 'father' and 'mother' had to be fulfilled and taken over by others if one member was absent.

Generally, the loss of certain members, who for some reason could not be substituted, could have a considerable impact on the life of the rest of the family, resulting even in poverty or migration. Similarly, the growth of a family and the

³³⁹ See chapter VI.2.

disappearing and replacement of individual members in it, changed the relations between members as well. As a consequence, this also affected the growing up of a child. The case of the slow ruining of Zan Gui's family serves as a good example for pointing out the importance and the rigidity of roles within a family:

The mother of an entrepreneur of Chang'an, Zan Gui, died. Her death was followed by a fire which ruined the family and Zan Gui ended up in poverty. He had a wife and six very young sons and daughters. His wife then had the idea to sell herself in order to get money so that her husband could support the children and himself. After being slightly reluctant the husband agreed. The mother sold herself to an old man who pitied the whole situation and bought Zan Gui's wife for a reasonably high sum. He offered the possibility that whenever the children would miss the mother, Zan Gui could bring them to his house in order to visit her. However, the children were all dead after three years and Zan Gui had spend all the money and was poor again.³⁴⁰

Zan Gui's case dramatically demonstrates the fragility of a three generation household. The death of Zan Gui's mother, apparently the last surviving relative he could rely on, and the following fire that destroyed his property, were the beginning of the destruction of his family. His wife sold herself to another man in order to provide the material means for her husband to raise the children. They, under the care of their father, starved nonetheless.

The entrepreneur's family initially consisted of nine persons: three adults – grandmother, mother and father – and six female and male children in their teenage and pre-teenage years. His case displays just one example of a family structure and the functions of different family members that we can summarize as follows: the grandmother as the family eldest, and apparently the last survivor of the paternal family, kept the family together. The mother sacrificed herself for the upbringing of her children. The father, who worked as an entrepreneur for a living to provide his family with financial care, and he did not manage to do a woman's work, namely to provide the basic care of feeding, cleaning, dressing and protecting, next to his daily occupation. The children were the recipients of care and the cause of their mother's sufferings. Due to improper care they were doomed to die young.

Zan Gui's family was not flexible and its members were not exchangeable with other family members, because the family appeared to have been isolated. Therefore the chance for survival was small. Neither the female head of the family, Zan Gui's mother, nor the mother, Zan Gui's wife, was substituted,

³⁴⁰ *Taiping guangji* 455: 3717-8 (*Qi shi ji*; see *Xin Tangshu* 59: 1542), for a complete translation see Blauth 1996: 165-6. The old man, in fact, turned out to be a fox.

leaving a vacuum in the essential daily female care. The functions of both are only implied: Zan Gui might have had a close emotional relationship with his mother, which would conform to the norm of an ideal medieval mother-son relation. Furthermore, the grandmother fulfilled an important role, otherwise her death would not have been mentioned as the first of a couple of devastating events leading to the ruin of Zan Gui's family. Subsequently, without his wife, Zan Gui was not able to successfully earn a living and simultaneously raise his six children, who starved to death, perhaps due to wrong care.

Zan Gui's case is extremely dramatic. There are, in fact, not many narratives in relation to children that express this danger of existential loss with such far-reaching consequences. Moreover, the narrative shows a family in isolation. Father and mother depended entirely on their own resources and they could not resort to any other institution that helped them out when they were struck by several disasters.

Most of the narratives, however, mention families whose members had the ability to take over the tasks of those who became functionally incapacitated. These families belonged to the fortunate elite who could rely on a larger, usually economically well-endowed family network to keep them alive by means of gifts and marriages, but that was endangered by politics and the patterns of migration, as we will see in several examples below.

The flexibility in exercising individual tasks, and the mobility in the composition of the family in an elite medieval Chinese condition is well enhanced in a broad modern definition of 'family', which is a useful tool for the understanding of the family as I discuss it in this thesis:

Families are complex social units that serve diverse functions, including helping offspring survive, teaching them skills in order to be economically productive adults, and teaching them the values of the culture. Family members' behaviour influence one another and can alter the functioning of the entire family. Moreover, family dynamics are affected by a number of factors, including changes in the parents, changes in the child with development, and changes in family circumstances.³⁴¹

The definition points out family dynamics and implies that care-givers possibly alternate. It further stresses the functions care-givers have regardless of whether they are biological mothers or fathers or performing another role. Adult and adolescent family members care for the children's survival, and instruct and integrate them into their customs. The modern definition's omission of the

³⁴¹ Siegler *e.a.* 2006: 455.

biological mother and father matches the family situation in medieval China. Although medieval texts put great emphasis on the biological parents, towards whom the children have to pay respect, in reality most children probably did not live with them.

Addressing family dynamics and its impact on children in late Imperial China, Hsiung Ping-chen points out that children grew up with a variety of adult care-givers. In this respect she also draws attention to the rather low life expectancy during that era, with adults passing away around the age of forty.³⁴² For medieval China, Knapp proposes an average life expectancy of thirty-two years for men, while the average male age for marriage is between twenty-five and thirty years. These numbers back his suggestion that “in order to see his son marry and have children, [a man] would have to live until he was forty-five to fifty years old, but given his expected life span, chances are good that he would not live to see that day.”³⁴³ That would mean, before a child was able to care for itself, the child had to deal with the loss of a parent and another person than the parent had to fill in as a care-giver.

Yet, if we turn our attention to tomb inscriptions, we find numerous men and women who lived to well over fifty and reached ages in which they could be grandparents and great grandparents. The people who were praised in the tomb inscriptions, we should note, belonged to the same group of men who authored the texts I use as sources for this thesis. We can therefore assume that the children who appear in narratives probably for the greater part belonged to families that consisted of many members, who were well connected with each other and who would help each other in times of need. Narratives, however, often focus on minimum relations within families, and mostly concentrate on the nuclear families; the role of the extended family is therefore hidden, yet perceptible.³⁴⁴ It is this loose framework of family, between the ideal extended and the ideal nuclear family, that we are concerned with here.

Family size

Demographic information on any period in Chinese history relies mostly on speculation, for material from the Tang dynasty is scarce. The most interesting information derives from Dunhuang, a remote area in the border region of northern China, where demographic information had been documented at one

³⁴² Hsiung 2005: 157 and 165.

³⁴³ Knapp, Keith 2005: 17.

³⁴⁴ In these cases we also deal with idealised situations. I will discuss this below.

point in time during the Tang.³⁴⁵ Relying on this material, as well as on data from both official *Tang Histories*, several scholars have analysed a possible composition of Tang population and household sizes and have agreed on an average of 5.6 persons per household.³⁴⁶

Ikeda On presents the family sizes and ages of family members as they are displayed in 'The registers of grants of grain made by the Commissioner for Revenue and Public Lands of Ho-hsi province during the latter half of the eighth century.'³⁴⁷ These registers show that nearly fifty percent of the listed population was underage, that means, eighty-two out of one hundred and sixty-six people were between one and fifteen years old. These eighty-two children were part of twenty-seven families that have been registered in a part of Hexi-province. Of seventy-five males, forty were aged between one and fifteen; of seventy-eight females, thirty-five were in that age group; of twelve slaves, seven were male and female slaves under the age of fifteen.

In other words, there are forty-two male and female children, including four slaves, in the age group one to five; twenty-three children, including three slaves, in the age group six to ten and seventeen children in the age group eleven to fifteen. The average household size in Hexi, On further assumes, was close to

³⁴⁵ The material from this oasis proves to be important because it did not fall victim to imperially ordered compilations of texts, which caused the selection, editing and destruction of numerous other texts. For instance, material that would have been thrown away as rubbish, writing exercises, letter samples, recipes etc. has been preserved at the Dunhuang 'cave library' which is how the place of discovery is called. But the material should be approached with caution when applied to Tang history, because of the relative remoteness of the oasis and the extraordinary composition of people living there, who came from many non-Chinese places and from different linguistic backgrounds.

³⁴⁶ On 1973, and Liao 2001. For the latter half of the Tang, for example, "Tu Yu sees 8.9 million households listed in the 755 household registers as the peak of registered population under the T'ang..." (On 1973: 144). On also points out that these numbers are very unstable and can change considerably even within only five years time. For a comparison see Laes 2006, who writes about Roman children between 200 BC and 400 AD. Laes relies on the Model Life Tables from the UN to make estimations about demography and mortality rates in ancient Rome (http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/Model_Life_Tables/Model_Life_Tables.htm, last visited on October 26, 2008). He uses models South (which is based on the assumption of young ages of marriage and a high infant mortality rate) and model West (used for societies from which we do not have enough specific information). Yet, Laes emphasises that these tables are nothing more than support tools with which we can attempt a rough outline only, and which is not based on demographic material of the period he is studying, because such material does not exist in sufficient quantity nor quality. He further points out that one has to take into account epidemics, wars, nature catastrophes, regional differences, climate etc. (Laes 2006: 19). He, for example, estimates that 33% of the Roman society consisted of under fifteen years old, 60% was aged between fifteen and fifty-nine years old and 7% was fifty-nine years and older (Laes 2006: 21).

³⁴⁷ On 1973: 137ff.

the average of the whole Tang area in 754, namely 5.6 members per household. On average with a rate of nearly fifty percent of underage members, 2.7 members would be between one and fifteen years old.³⁴⁸

The average size of a household estimated with the help of the records, however, does not reveal much about the actual size of households, which was very divergent.³⁴⁹ We therefore should take into account more demographic information. Tomb inscriptions reveal that a Tang woman would have an average of 3.34 children and a Tang man an average of 3.84 children. The historian Ping Yao approaches these sources with suspicion because they often omit the daughters of a woman and only consider sons. By further calculating and adding an estimated number of omitted daughters to the statistics, Yao suggests that a woman from the elite had an average of 4.77 born children.³⁵⁰ Even so, this information does not inform us any further about a possible family size, since a woman in an elite family could have been one among several other women who would bear several children of the same man.³⁵¹

The two scholars, On and Ping, used two different kinds of sources – partly idealised household registers of two oases at the northern border of the Tang realm and Hexi, and several thousands of tomb inscriptions with acknowledged omissions of information concerning family structure. However sketchy the information of these sources are, these estimations are helpful in creating a rough idea about how big the immediate social environment of a child might have been.

The elite custom of taking concubines suggests that a child shared a mother with three, four or more children. We can further deduce that a child grew up together with children of its father who did not share the same mother but who might have been raised by one female care-giver referred to commonly as mother in various texts. The statistics further imply that, at least at the border

³⁴⁸ Ikeda On 1973: 139.

³⁴⁹ On suggests that household sizes also depended on the grade of the male family head in the bureaucracy. If he (only very few heads of a household were female) had a low rank, his family usually comprised only the nuclear family. If he had a high rank (and therefore was financially better off) the household would be in the form of an extended family, On 1973: 136-7.

³⁵⁰ Ping Yao 2005: 267.

³⁵¹ Futing Liao analyses two-hundred seventy-six household registers of the two oasis Dunhuang and Turfan, most of which have been composed during the Tang dynasty. He observes that household sizes in these locations varied between one and thirty-three members, whereby the average size of a household was 5.6 and the average percentage of male members was forty-five percent. Liao furthermore observes that about one third of the families of the two-hundred seventy-six registers consisted of a married couple with their unmarried children. Another rather larger percentage of households consisted of a widow living with her unmarried children (twelve percent), Liao 2001: 339-41.

region of the Tang empire, it might have been common for a child to grow up without its biological father. Lastly, a child would grow up in an environment that consisted for more than fifty percent of children.

Family structure

Father, mother and children form the nuclear family, which was the prevalent household structure throughout most of medieval China. Knapp suggests that during times of peace and protection by the government, “small families functioned sufficiently well [...] but they were unsafe havens when times were chaotic and the might of local bullies went unchecked.”³⁵²

Most literary works and biographies, in fact, point at the prevalence of the nuclear families. Additionally, sutras focus on the nuclear family without considering ancestors or living family members further away from the nuclear family.³⁵³ Likewise, registration documents, which consisted of household registers and documents dealing with financial administration, also mostly feature nuclear families. Ikeda On emphasised the “limited statistical value on account of the smallness of the sample”, however, he further states that

we can still clearly perceive that the basic form of family they portray is identical with the small, peasant ‘nuclear family’ that was almost universal in the Han period. The “extended household” including collateral kin was, however, by no means rare, and there are households listed in which uncles and aunts, the spouses of brothers and sisters together with their children, or the close kin of the wife or the head of the household, and so on are entered in the same register.³⁵⁴

From On’s findings we can understand that in different kinds of writings we find the propagation of two family ideals. These were, as I have mentioned above, the nuclear family, and the extended family that comprised several generations living under the same roof.

Narratives often focus on small-scale relations, such as the relation of one biological mother to one son. Such narratives usually neglect all other relations a child or a mother had with other people that might have lived under the same roof, and we gain the impression that reality was presented in an incomplete way. Manuals on family rituals such as Yan Zhitui’s on the other hand, propagate the ideal of undivided extended families. The emphasis on both

³⁵² Knapp, Keith 2005: 19, see e.g. *Taiping guangji* 123: 871-2 (*San shui xiao du*) partly quoted below.

³⁵³ Cole 1998: 53-4.

³⁵⁴ On 1973: 135.

structures points out that neither the undivided extended family nor the isolated nuclear family but a combination of both was most probably dominant. We find that children occasionally had been transferred to other family members, who did not live in the same area and that they often had loose contact with other family members, who were living further away.

Ebrey, who discusses communal families during the late Tang and Song dynasties finds that a communal family could consist of several hundred and up to more than a thousand members spread over many generations, who would live together. Communal families, thence, consist of “a *jia*, a family with common assets, and a *zu*, an organization including distant agnates.”³⁵⁵ Ebrey, however, infers that living together in a big cross-generational crowd “was seen as the moral and ritual ideal, extremely difficult to attain in practice but much to be admired.”³⁵⁶

Likewise, Knapp detects extended families with restriction. He suggests that the number of extended families in chaotic times might have been higher, due to the fragility of small nuclear families with only a few adult members to provide security and upbringing. Yet, “despite their joint registration, each family within the household probably still held its wealth separately and functioned independently.”³⁵⁷ Despite an admiration for and the upheld ideal of the extended family, big extended families were not the standard medieval family structure, and we find that families regularly broke up into smaller units. The splitting up of large families was usually understood to be the result of the death of the head of the household.³⁵⁸

Nevertheless, isolated nuclear families were not the norm either. Instead, families with more than one adult male and female member were the normal structure in which children grew up. Family units were socially linked with blood- or marriage-related families or through other social and communal responsibilities.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Ebrey 2002: 120.

³⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁵⁷ Knapp 2005: 18.

³⁵⁸ Ebrey 1991: 57.

³⁵⁹ It is in fact rather difficult in many cases to point out the nature of the relationship between members of one community that features in a narrative – people could be (distant) blood relatives, but they can also be non-kin. The narratives are not clear about the relationships of neighbours, leaving room for the speculation that the authors presume their readers to know what a common communal composition looks like.

Natal families

Girls

The relation of a woman and her offspring with her natal family, the maternal family, was very important in medieval times. Unfortunately, research is scarce, because it is difficult to analyse reports of that relation which is intricately embedded in biographies and narratives.

Especially for the upbringing of children, the natal family connections were significant. When a daughter did not die but was eventually married out, her relation with her natal family still remained strong.³⁶⁰ In times of crisis, the daughter could at least rely on the help of her brothers or sisters. In fact, women apparently stayed in contact with their siblings rather than with their parents. They would live with their brothers or sisters or would give their children to them.

Her natal family could also be the place of refuge for a married woman, for if her husband died, a woman was basically left with three options to ensure herself and her offspring's security and economic well-being. One was her own dowry that she would receive back from her in-laws; the other option would be that her in-laws still would keep her at their home. A third option was to go back to her natal family.³⁶¹

Boys

The father-son relationship gained its importance especially through the power of the patrilineal system and ancestor-worship. But although the patrilineal relation was emphasised, in reality the father-son relation did not necessarily had to be biological for the hereditary and ancestral system to become effective. The idea that a son of one family could become the son of another family in order to carry on this other family's ancestral rites, not least in order to inherit power and wealth, was visible, for example, in cases of eunuchs who adopted sons. But also rulers adopted sons. Emperor Taizu of the Liang dynasty (852-912), for example, adopted nine sons, among whom also the future emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang dynasty (r. 926-933).

³⁶⁰ Although Davis 2001 states that "...we have learned that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a woman's legal, economic, and personal ties to her natal family persisted long after marriage and with greater intensity than in earlier or later dynasties," (19), I believe that this was already the case during at least the Tang dynasty. Li Runqiang 2004 proposes that a wife's bond with her natal family started to strengthen around the Wei-Jin Dynasties (75).

³⁶¹ Li Runqiang 2004: 77ff.

The chapter “Biographies of Righteous sons” of the Historical Records of the Five Dynasties lists eight of the nine, and we can see that most of the sons were adopted during their late teens or when they were even older.³⁶² Li Sizhao (李嗣昭), however, was adopted soon after he was born. According to his biography, Li Shizhao’s original surname was Han (韓) and he

was born to a commoner family at Taigu County, Fenzhou. The future Taizu [Li Keyong 李克用] once approached his home during a hunt, noticing a vapour of vast dimensions within the woods. He marvelled and summoned the father to make inquiries. The father indicated that a son had recently been born to the family, so Taizu left behind gold and silk and took the boy, hence instructing younger brother Kerou to raise him as son.³⁶³

This adoption appeared to have been taken course rather smoothly: the emperor found a boy, paid the family and thus got a son. We have no evidence if this event happened as emotionless as described, but we also have other biographies, which show that adoption did not have to be entirely voluntary, and parents occasionally were forced to part from their child.

One example is a case of the chief of a village Wang Biao (王表) in 889. Wang Biao was a widower, who was left with one son aged seven or eight. Pei Guangyuan (裴光遠), head of Weinan district in Huazhou, who was hated for his cruel administration, was very fond of the beautiful boy. The boy often followed his father to the district city, where they were observed by Pei. The latter at one point proposed to Wang to give the boy to him, because he had none himself. The father then pleaded to keep his son, and Huangfu Mei (皇甫枚, 874-910), the author of this narrative, put moving words into his mouth: “[My son] has already lost his mother in the age of [wearing] swaddling clothes, how would he get over the fact of losing his father, too?” The appeal unfortunately did not show effect, for Pei killed the father and took the son away. Pei is reported to have died eventually because of this act.³⁶⁴

Pei Guangyuan unscrupulously adopted Wang Biao’s son by using violence during the very violent times just before the fall of the Tang dynasty. To Huangfu Mei, the problem seemed only to be the way by which the head of the

³⁶² Ouyang Xiu 36. In his foreword Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) was outspoken in his disapproval of the practice of adoption. He saw a parallelism between the degenerating times and the decline of “the more of humanity [...] the norms for regulating family relations can be subverted, culminating in strife among kinsmen as persons of different blood bond, like father and son,” (Ouyang Xiu; Davis (trsl.) 2004: 296).

³⁶³ Ouyang Xiu; Davis (trsl.) 2004: 296-7.

³⁶⁴ *Taiping guangji* 123: 871-2 (*San shui xiao du*).

district got access to the son, not that the son in later years might question his adoption and try to return to his original ancestral family.³⁶⁵ Indeed, we hardly find that authors saw a dilemma with adoption in relation to the ancestor cult. That may mean that knowledge about a blood relationship was not expected of a young son. That means furthermore that the belief in the possibility to “create” a son through education must have been strong. Therefore, a father instructed his son in his ancestral rites, so that the son would understand and would be able to practice them, which marked him as a part of the family. I could only find one strong piece of evidence in a narrative in which a father preferred a daughter of his own bloodline over a son from a poor, unrelated family, even when that meant to reject the male heir, who had been educated for many years in that family.³⁶⁶ Nonetheless, overall the biological bond appears less important than the bond created through instruction.

Based on Yan Zhitui’s and the general opinion during the medieval times, Cole proposes that “in an effort to maintain the father’s authority, some stock was put in keeping the father-son relationship distant.”³⁶⁷ This distant relationship between father and son would of course support a relatively easy adoption, because the son would not feel emotionally close to his father. However, as I will show in the following section, the relationship between biological father and child contained extra complexities, for instance the occurrence of sons and daughters sometimes being used as scapegoats for their fathers.

Grandparents

One social role that exerted some impact on children was that of the grandparents. Yet in the relatively well-documented lives of, for example, Yan Zhitui and the children of the Cui clan (崔氏), they do not appear to play a crucial role. Given the low life expectancy during medieval times, grandparents could not have had a great impact on a child’s life, because in many cases they

³⁶⁵ Waltner 1990 says that “the *T’ang Code* explicitly prohibited the adoption of a male child of a different lineage; commentary interpreted that one was not to be punished for adopting a female child. The notion that kinship proceeded through the male line implied that the adoption of a female was of less ritual significance than that of a male,” (49). Waltner also points out the implications of that law and proposes that “a stranger of lower social rank is more of a stranger than one of equal social status,” (49).

³⁶⁶ *Taiping guangji* 312: 2527 (*You ming lu*); the point in that narrative, however, is probably that the male child was from a commoner’s family, and not from an aristocratic; see further below for a translation of the narrative.

³⁶⁷ Cole 1998: 30.

would not have lived up to the time when their offspring produced children. Nonetheless, in elite families life expectancy was probably high enough for some children being able to meet their grandparents, as I have mentioned above.

For the late imperial period, Hsiung assumes that the labour organisation of grandmother and grandfather nearly resembled that of mother and father, because grandmothers occasionally would take care of the child's daily physical needs, and the grandfather would supervise the child's work and play, "paying close attention to and getting directly involved in [the child's] intellectual development, his participation in the farming activities, also playing with him a good deal and taking him around to social entertainments."³⁶⁸ Grandmothers occasionally were taken care of by their grandsons as if they were their mothers – I did not find any evidence that the same occurred with respect to grandfathers.

Regarding the young age at which women produced children, a grandmother could still have been physically able to take care of grandchildren if they lived long enough to meet them. Likewise, the educational, playful or emotionally caring side of grandfathers that we find in some narratives came close to that of fathers. Such playful behaviour is similar to grandfathers who are described in late imperial texts, discussed by Hsiung.³⁶⁹ Dai Zuo (戴祚), for example, wrote down a narrative that took place during the Jin in which the ghost of a grandfather remembered how he held his small grandson in his arms, and therefore he did so as a ghost as well. However, the child could not endure so much ghost-*qi* and nearly passed away. The grandfather then revived him.³⁷⁰

Mothers and fathers of adult offspring had a vested interest in obtaining grandchildren, and the mother was often shown as playing an active role in finding ways to ensure that her daughter-in-law fell pregnant. For example, the mother of Zhang Keqin (張克勤) prayed to the God of Mount Hua and asked for a son for her husband's wife with the desired effect. When Zhang ascended in bureaucracy he took a concubine who also did not give birth to a son. The mother-in-law then prayed again with equal success.³⁷¹

Concerning maternal grandparents, Hsiung states that "the maternal grandparents, though not usually living together with the child, could also take an active interest in providing some assistance if residing within a reachable distance."³⁷² This also appeared to hold true for medieval China. When, during sixth century, Wang Sengqian (王僧虔) was seven years old, his maternal

³⁶⁸ Hsiung 1988: 5.

³⁶⁹ Hsiung 2005.

³⁷⁰ *Taiping guangji* 325: 2584 (*Zhen yi ji*).

³⁷¹ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3094 (*Hui chang jie yi lu*). On the many wonders happening in connection with the God of Mount Hua, see Dudbridge 1995: 86ff.

³⁷² Hsiung 1988: 5-6.

grandfather invited him to enter his studio, where he had arranged a selection of precious things from which the boy could pick whatever he liked.³⁷³ In this narrative we see the concern of a maternal grandfather with the intellectual development of his descendants.³⁷⁴

Lastly, when a pregnant woman still lived in her paternal home, something was considered amiss. The daughter of Hu Xi (胡熙), for example, miraculously became pregnant without being married, even though her father had just found a husband for her. Her grandfather, in whose household she was living together with her parents, did not even flinch from threatening to kill her.³⁷⁵ As elder of the family, and therefore responsible for holding up the family's reputation, the grandfather would see an act of ordering the murder of his unmarried granddaughter as the only option to sustain the position of his family.³⁷⁶

Inter-family relations

The narrative of Zan Gui that I have quoted in the beginning of this chapter shows a family in isolation. Father and mother depended entirely on their own resources and they could not fall back on any other institution that helped them out after they were struck by several disasters. Accordingly, the family was destroyed within a few years. Zan Gui's story is a particularly gloomy one, which might represent numerous other cases. Hence we also see that other families during the Tang took measures to insure themselves against such isolation. This was done by maintaining inter-household relations.

Among interdependent households that were in constant contact with each other, several types of relations were salient: households of siblings and households of master and servants or slaves that were bound together.³⁷⁷ A further type of relation was made up by families that were bound together in

³⁷³ *Taiping guangji* 207: 1585 (*Tan sou*), see also *Jiu Tangshu* 188: 4929.

³⁷⁴ The grandfather might have been engaged in the activity of *zhuazhou*, which means having a young child pick a significant object and therewith predicting its future. In later times this custom is usually done one year after birth, see Zhou Yuwen 1996.

³⁷⁵ *Taiping guangji* 317: 2513 (*Lu yi ji*).

³⁷⁶ On the author of this narrative, Du Guangting, and his sources see Verellen 1998.

³⁷⁷ A family was part of a lineage, in which several families were grouped around an ancestral temple. However, there were strict regulations governing who could erect a private ancestral temple. Officers of rank six and below were only allowed to set up a shrine for father and grandfather, (Johnson 1977: 95). Johnson, therefore, points out that more important than a large descent group is the mourning group, consisting of the members who "wear mourning for the same person's death," (Johnson 1977: 91).

social or religious communities, and neighbouring families that were not necessarily blood related – this category also included contact among families that came from one region and met occasionally during festivals or on the market.³⁷⁸ The interdependence here was much looser and such relationships did not necessarily provide aid in the case of serious problems.

Before discussing these relations, I will first analyse a child's dependency of its broader natal family other than grandparents. Not unexpectedly, quality and nature of the relation differed regarding boys and girls, and a natal family had a different connotation for a girl than for her brother.

Families of siblings

Towards the fall of the Han, accounts of families taking care of each other's offspring were still rare. They included reports of a brother taking care of his younger brother in case of their parents' death, or a boy who grew up with his uncle and cousins.³⁷⁹ In the period during and after the fall of the Han dynasty, then, there was a rise in mutual dependency caused by the sharing of resources. Due to governmental weakness, I assume, families to a greater extent than before had to rely on each other in order to survive. This meant for example, that families banded together in mutual-aid 'societies' (*she* 社) organised expressly for the purpose of defraying the cost of funerals.³⁸⁰ This furthermore meant that, although men saw their agnates primarily at weddings, funerals and seasonal sacrifices, in case of need they would support each other's offspring provided that their economic situation allowed this aid.³⁸¹

From at least the sixth century onward it became more common that families of siblings lived together. The childhood experience of the author of the *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*, Yan Zhitui, is a common example: As a little boy, Yan Zhitui was raised by his older brothers because their father died.³⁸² Another high-ranked family, the Cui from Boling (博陵崔), provides ample examples of inter-family aid, and we can trace back for many cases how this family supported its members over several generations. For example in the first half of the sixth century Cui Xiaofen and many other male members of his family died mostly for political and military reasons. Cui Xiaofen's execution in 534, for

³⁷⁸ It is not always clear in narratives which relation people have to one another.

³⁷⁹ Knapp, Keith 2005: 14-5.

³⁸⁰ Teiser 1994: 78.

³⁸¹ Ebrey 2003: 110.

³⁸² Yan Zhitui became 'an orphan when he was young,' (becoming an orphan often meant losing one's father).

instance, resulted in the captivity of his family members and their transportation to the northern capital Jinyang where his four youngest sons died.³⁸³

The account of Cui Xiaofen is the history of just one famous, politically involved person of a culturally and economically successful medieval family. The example points out the fragility of life during the beginning of the sixth century.³⁸⁴ The Cui flourished during the following centuries, which means that although so many members of one generation vanished, some of their children survived nevertheless, carrying on the family's name. Examples from the Cui family from the seventh and eighth century then show how successfully mutual family aid was conducted.

Cui Kai (632-705), for example, lost his mother when he was ten and his father when he was fifteen years old. Ebrey suggests that "he may have lived with an elder brother or uncle." Later he took care of his widowed sister, sister-in-law and their offspring.³⁸⁵ Cui Yufu (721-80) took care of several orphaned children and widowed women.³⁸⁶ Apparently it had been normal for the Cui clan that men took care of their widowed or temporarily abandoned married sisters together with their offspring and provided education for at least some of them. They also took over the care for the orphaned children of their deceased siblings. Furthermore, when fathers lived somewhere else due to official service or business interests, their brothers also took in their children and wives. The biographies of other famous medieval figures indicate that a child frequently was raised by other family members who were not close blood relatives, even though the biological parents were still alive. In fact, Li Runqiang, in a study based on tomb inscriptions, suggests that one out of ten children grew up in his or her natal family, usually together with the mother.³⁸⁷ Bai Juyi (白居易, 772-846) and his mother, for instance, presumably lived with relatives, while his father held a post somewhere else.³⁸⁸

The function of the matrilineal side of the family appears to have been nearly as important as the patrilineal side, at least concerning the influence on child-rearing. For example, between 742 and 756 when a young man ordered a matchmaker to search for a bride, the woman – a sixty-year-old awe-inspiring

³⁸³ Ebrey 1978: 70-1.

³⁸⁴ Another example, from the fifth century, can be taken from Shen Yue's life. The poet was twelve years old, when his father and the rest of his family were executed. Nonetheless, he managed to escape together with his mother, Mather 1988: 11. It was probably rather difficult (and not really the aim) to kill off an entire powerful family.

³⁸⁵ Ebrey 1978: 181-2.

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*: 184 and 186.

³⁸⁷ Li Runqiang 2004: 71.

³⁸⁸ Waley 1949: 11.

lady – told him that her sister had a daughter who became an orphan when very young, and who subsequently was raised by her other sister.³⁸⁹ The girl eventually married the man because she was raised properly and endowed with all the manners required for a lady and the wife of a scholar. The effort by her maternal aunts to raise her well was then repaid by finding a good match for her, securing connections with a scholar-family. However, on the maternal line, especially on maternal uncles, rested the stigma of being violent against and dangerous for offspring of their in-living sisters, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

Families of master and dependents

Slaves and their children or slaves as children and their masters, had a very close relationship with each other. The following late ninth century narrative is an excellent representation for this. The author Huangfu Mei provides us with a summarized biography of the slave boy Peng Yan (捧砚) in which the role of upbringing and education is demonstrated in a condensed way.

Peng Yan was Pei Zhide's (裴至德) servant boy. His mother was called Chunhong (春紅). She was matched with the servant Gao Fan (高璠) and gave birth [to a son]. When [the boy] was around one year old, [the mother] gave him a bath on a summer day and put him naked on the ground between two corridors. Suddenly a dog from a labourer called Qinghua (青花) came, bit off the boy's testicles and ate them. When Chunhong heard the crying noise, she ran to him in a great hurry and [saw] blood saturating the mat. She trusted [on the fact that her master] Zhide had good medicine, which he gave her. After a hundred days [the boy] was like before [and the testicles had grown back]. In the summer of the following year, [Chunhong] put [her son] to sleep on the front porch. [The dog] Qinghua, waiting until no one was paying attention, came again – and again he ate the testicles [of Peng Yan]. He then dropped to earth and died. Again they fed the boy with the medicine he had before. He recovered and became a eunuch. [His master] gave him the name Peng Yan and he received the responsibilities of a page.³⁹⁰

Physical care by his biological mother dominated Peng Yan's early biography and his future life; or rather the neglect of proper care, as it is presented by the

³⁸⁹ *Taiping guangji* 281: 2242-44 (*He dong ji*).

³⁹⁰ *Taiping guangji* 275: 2166 (*San shui xiao du*). The author Huangfu Mei lived around the time when this incident took place. This narrative is also taken up in the *Tianzhongji*, where it is part of the 'dog narratives' section.

author. Peng Yan's biological father is only mentioned as the mate of the mother Chunhong. The social role of the male care-giver was taken over by the master, who provided the material means for Peng Yan's care.³⁹¹ Pei Zhide also provided the necessary medicine for Peng Yan's recovery after the boy was wounded, and later he made use of his physical abilities, and gave him the responsibilities of an eunuch. Peng Yan's mother only excelled in not taking good care of her son after giving him a bath.

Huangfu Mei's dramatic narrative summarizes an account from the childhood of a person from the perspective of an elite male author. It covers four aspects that were intrinsic parts of childhood. First, it shows male expectancy of the wrong-doings of female physical care giving. Second, it displays dangers of childhood in the disguise of an animal. Third, it shows the man as the financial and medical care-giver. Fourth, we find the man as the person responsible for the child's education, taking its special abilities or features into consideration.

Close interaction between a slave's child and the master's family was probably common. In the fifth century, a six-year-old slave in the family of Sun Mian (孫緬), who held the title of Director of the Left, for example, sat together with Sun's mother on a carriage and suddenly talked to her about occasions from his former lives during which he had already met her.³⁹² Although the focus of the narrative is the act of the sudden remembrance of the former lives and the fact that the boy could not or barely talk before, we also learn that a young slave was in the physical vicinity of his master's mother and communicates with her. Slave holders were also reported to feel affection for their young slaves. Shi Jilun (石季倫), for example, was fond of a slave called Xuanfeng (翾風). He bought her from Hu people when she was ten years old and brought her up in his house.³⁹³

In the context of servants and their impact on their master's family, the wet nurse played an intricate and important role in several biographical accounts. Dai Fu, for example, tells a narrative, which he had heard from an informant called Liu Quanbai. This narrative was about the son of Liu's wet nurse, who caught a fox spirit. Although this narrative does not feature children or childhood, it displays the closeness of Liu not only to his wet nurse, a servant of his family, but also his knowledge about incidents happening within her

³⁹¹ Another reason for his unimportance and anonymity is perhaps that his son became a eunuch and therefore was unable to produce descendants.

³⁹² *Taiping guangji* 388: 3094-5 (*Guang yi ji*); see Dudbridge 1995: 213 (no. 200).

³⁹³ *Taiping guangji* 272: 2141-2 (*Wang zi nian shi yi ji*), about Shi Jilun see *Jinshu* 33: 1004. The narrative proceeds as a love story.

family.³⁹⁴ However, wet nurses were hardly typical cases of servants, and usually had a close bond with the family of their fosterlings.

In many cases wet nurses were, in fact, praised for doing an extraordinary job and they occasionally were even credited for saving the lives of their employer's children.³⁹⁵ One case was that of the wet nurse of Yuan Can's young son, which we will encounter again below. Towards the end of the fifth century Yuan Can (袁粲) and his whole family were punished by the emperor for disobedience. He had a young son, whose wet-nurse wanted to save his life. She therefore handed the child over to a protégé (門生) of Can. However, that person and his mother killed the boy. Several years later the murderer suddenly saw the boy riding on a dog in play like he used to do. A short while later the dog returned, ran into the traitors' house and bit them to death.³⁹⁶ While the child could rely on his wet nurse to a certain degree, a protégé was not a reliable source of protection – although the wet nurse counted on the protégé, assuming that his relationship to Yuan Can was strong, and that he would feel responsible for the child.

Neighbours and communities

The help of family members or the closeness of masters and their slaves or servants was different from the ordinary kind of neighbourly help.³⁹⁷ Yet, a connecting factor in all those relationships seems to be dependency. Women and children who came to live in their sibling's house depended on their benevolence; similarly slaves and servants depended on their master and although the relation between neighbours was much looser, narratives also point out a level of dependency here.³⁹⁸

The household of Chen Su (陳素) from the Yan district was prosperous by the first year of the Shengpin reign period of the Eastern Jin (357). [Yet] his wife had not given birth to a son for ten years, and her husband was about to marry a concubine. [The wife then] prayed and offered sacrifices to the gods and suddenly became pregnant. The wife of her petty neighbour was pregnant at the

³⁹⁴ See Dudbridge 1995: 220 (no. 234) about the informant. This story is *Ibid*: 230, no. 287; *Taiping guangji* 340: 2695-2698.

³⁹⁵ See chapter IV for more narratives about wet nurses.

³⁹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 119: 837-8 (*Gu jin ji*).

³⁹⁷ The assistance often is not displayed as mutual. Widow and child, who live in the family of the widow's brother-in-law are presented as depending more on him than he on her, although she probably does some crucial work in his household.

³⁹⁸ Neighbours, in fact, could also very well be (distant) family members as well.

same time. Thus Chen's wife made her a proposal: "If I give birth to a boy, it is the will of Heaven. If I give birth to a girl and you to a boy, we shall exchange the children." They both agreed to this. The neighbour's wife bore a boy and Chen's wife a girl three days later, and they simply exchanged them. Chen Su was happy [in his ignorance]. [The boy] was raised [as his son] until he was thirteen, [until a day] when he had to offer a sacrifice to his ancestors. Su saw a ghost,³⁹⁹ who said that it saw the grandfather [of Su] coming to the front of the door and then turning. But then it saw a boy of a low descentance who was chewing on what had been laid out at the sacrifice. The father became decidedly suspicious, and he invited somebody who was able to see ghosts. At the time of the sacrificial offering to the ancestor he told him to watch out, and [the ghost-seer] told him exactly the same [as he had heard before]. Su then entered [the inner chambers] and asked his wife. His wife was startled and told him about the whole affair. He [then] send the boy to his original family and called the girl back to return to [her family].⁴⁰⁰

This narrative from the fourth century displays a brilliant picture about the rigidity by which a family head of a noble family tried to keep 'low blood' out. This fear about getting soiled by non-noble families through intermarriage and adoption still could be found in the seventh century *Tang Code*. The mother's concern obviously was not in line with her husband's. In order not to lose her position in her husband's family, she had to take the risk and go as far as exchanging her own child with that of the neighbour of low birth.⁴⁰¹ The author of this narrative does not give any information about the consequences that the re-exchange of both children had at the age of thirteen.

Narratives often emphasized a dependency in the relation between neighbours. Tensions that arise, as a consequence, between poor and wealthy or powerful and powerless neighbours were also shown to be fought out on the back of children.⁴⁰² While the two five- or six-year-old boys Wan'er (萬兒) and Fengliu (封六) played together, for example, their female care-givers fight a war about social inequality on their offspring's back:

³⁹⁹ Through a medium, an older female servant of Su's household.

⁴⁰⁰ *Taiping guangji* 319: 2527 (*You ming lu*).

⁴⁰¹ What is more, the poor neighbour woman's son was three days older than the girl. That means that the father of the girl might have already seen the child at the three-days bathing ritual that I have discussed in chapter III, and agreed to the deal. Therefore more people probably knew about the exchange. Perhaps it was even the old female servant, who was involved in talking to Su's ancestors, who hinted at the possibility.

⁴⁰² See also chapter VI in which I discuss the pivotal role of child death in communal conflicts.

Guan Sifa (關司法) took care of an older lady whom he called Auntie Niu (鈕婆). She had a grandson, called Wan'er who was five or six years old. Mrs Guan also had a son, called Fengliu who was about the same age [as Wan'er]. Mrs Guan's son often played together with Auntie Niu's grandson. Fengliu always had new clothes, and [his mother] gave his old clothes to Wan'er. One day, unexpectedly, Auntie Niu said angrily: "Both are little children! Which of them is of high birth? Which is of low birth? [No one can tell.] However, this boy's clothes are new and my boy receives his old ones! That's not fair." Mrs Guan [answers]: "[My son gets new clothes because] he is my son. Your grandson is a servant's son. I recall that he and my son are of the same age. Therefore I dress him. How should I distinguish them otherwise?" Thenceforth she did not give the old clothes to [Wan'er].

Auntie Niu laughed: "Why should you distinguish those two children?" Guan's wife said: "In which respect are servants and people from high birth the same?" Auntie Niu said: "I want to judge their dissimilarities. Let me examine them." She then took Fengliu and her grandson and put them under her skirt where she pupressed them down on the ground. Guan's wife got up startled and snatched them [from under the skirt]. The two boys now were both [like] Auntie Niu's grandsons. Body, appearance and clothes were all the same! One could not distinguish them. [Auntie Niu] said: "Well, they are the same now."⁴⁰³

Auntie Niu appears to have had a rebellious character and she threatened to disturb the hierarchical order by transforming Fengliu to look like her own grandson. This fear of disorder thus is central to the two narratives about neighbours I have discussed. In both narratives, the female members of the lower social group found themselves in a disadvantage. Auntie Niu turned out to be witch-like and scared her hosts. But nothing was told about the consequences of the thirteen year old false son of Mr. Su, and especially nothing was told about Su's neighbours, who suddenly found themselves presented with a probably well-educated son.

Neighbours or people who lived in a small town or community were not only afraid of each other but they also helped each other out with child-care and they were usually aware of each other's whereabouts, including the whereabouts of their offspring. The thirteen-year-old boy of Jizhou (冀州小兒), who was arrested by supernatural powers for stealing and roasting an egg, for example, was observed by the village people. When they saw him playing, they wondered about his strange way of acting, and upon returning home from the fields they

⁴⁰³ *Taiping guangji* 286: 2281-2 (*Ling guai ji*). After a while the auntie restored Mrs Guan's son back to his original looks. Auntie Niu was a powerful woman who terrorised the family in other ways, too.

tried to call him home.⁴⁰⁴ This is just one example of this kind of involvement by the community in its communal offspring. The adults in the field did not manage to call the boy back home, a task that could only be done by his father. Although they cared and knew where he was and assumed to know what he was doing, their calls could not exert any power over his situation. They could not help to release him from his supernatural prison.

In another example, when a young cow herder started a fight with a neighbouring boy over his mysteriously vanished clothes, the cow herder's father intervened with physical violence, reprimanding his own son in front of the neighbour.⁴⁰⁵ The other boy's father does not appear in the picture.

All these examples show the different functions of dependent neighbours. In many cases, neighbours might have been lineage members, but the narratives did not point this out, and often only speak of 'neighbours'. Notwithstanding that, some narratives suggest that blood-related families lived in each other's neighbourhood. When a family was in need of practical help, they could count on these family-neighbours. When the seven-year-old daughter of the military officer Wang (王將軍) suddenly vanished, for example, the family-neighbours helped the father look for her for several days.⁴⁰⁶

Neighbours supported and supervised each other, while their children played with each other. Concerning children, the relation with the neighbour must have been a crucial one. Neighbouring children grew up together and met each other regularly. Additionally, I assume, that they must have learned important lessons from the interaction with their acquaintances from next door.

Although members of a community did not necessarily have to be neighbours, sometimes their relationship suggests that their way of interacting with each other was comparable to a relationship between neighbours. For example, when a five- or six-year-old girl lost both her parents, who were gardeners, her acquaintances looked for a care-giver for her in the original district where her parents came from. When no-one could be found, her case was taken to the district official of the place where she was staying at that time. A district official then adopted her.⁴⁰⁷ We do not know if the gardener and the district official were family members or neighbours, but because they lived together in one district – as a type of distant neighbours – the girl was taken care of.

⁴⁰⁴ *Taiping guangji* 131: 934 (*Ming bao ji*), for a translation see Gjertson 1975.

⁴⁰⁵ *Taiping guangji* 395: 3160 (*Ji shen lu*).

⁴⁰⁶ *Taiping guangji* 132: 935 (*Mingbao ji*), for a translation see 'Responsibilities and obligations towards parents'.

⁴⁰⁷ *Taiping guangji* 160: 1151-2 (灌園嬰女, *Yu tang xian hua*), see chapter IV 'Stereotypical victims' for a more detailed summary of this narrative.

Similarly, when General Yan Zhiwei (閻知微) was executed around 664 and his whole family shared his fate, his seven- or eight-year-old son managed to escape and ran to another noble family. This family pitied him, fed him with sweets and played with him until the executioner came to finish his job. In the end the executioner did not dare to kill the playing child.⁴⁰⁸ This narrative is played out in Chang'an and the *baijia* (百家), the noble family the child sought refuge at, might have been neighbours. At any rate, these people and the boy had the same class background, and the boy knew where he could run to in the city. He was pitied by the noble families because he was from their social background.

2. Mothers and fathers

The bond between parents and their offspring in literature got two emphases, which were both culturally and biologically defined. First, the importance of biological parents was highlighted. Second, filial piety, which was instructed to a child, was understood as to form a tight bond between children and parents.

Narratives implied two problems with regard to these common ideals. For many narratives deal with cases of children of whom at least one of the biological parents was deceased, which meant that the child grew up with somebody else. If these other care-givers were specified in their roles, they were only mentioned when they were exceptionally good or bad, and most non-parental care-givers did not receive special mention at all. I therefore argue that the blood relation between children and parents might not have been as significant in practice as it was often emphasised. This problem became clear in the light of adoption in relation to the practice of filial piety because in the case of filial piety usually the biological bond between a father, a mother and a child was emphasised.⁴⁰⁹

In this section I shall analyse the relation between child and care-giver and the problems of responsibility. Within that framework I first focus on the responsibilities care-givers carried for children. These responsibilities did not find as much explicit attention in texts as the responsibilities children take on for their fathers and mothers, as I will discuss toward the end of this section.

Yan Zhitui's opinion about the bond of children and parents provides an idea about how children and parents were expected to behave in the years after

⁴⁰⁸ *Taiping guangji* 163: 1181 (*Chao ye qian zai*).

⁴⁰⁹ This problem was solved with education, as I will argue in chapter VI.

the third year of life. It was from which age onward that the child was gradually removed from the mother's side, according to its sex:⁴¹⁰

Relations between parents and children should be dignified without familiarity; in the love between blood-relations there should not be rudeness. If there is rudeness, affection and fidelity cannot unite; if there is familiarity, carelessness and disrespect will grow. ...⁴¹¹

This quote points out an interaction between parental guidance and responding behaviour of the offspring. Therewith, Yan Zhitui is one of the rare persons in medieval China who pointed out awareness that fathers and mothers do carry responsibilities for their children in addition to protection and the physical care of the first three years after birth.

Mothers and fathers compared

Mothers and fathers did not necessarily have to be biological, but could also be foster parents. Although children living with non-biological and adoptive parents might have been a common situation, narratives fairly often emphasised if a child had lost his or her biological father. We find, for example, in biographies that a person became an orphan, which often means that he has lost his father and not necessarily his mother, in early years. A father's role as instructor of, before all male, ritual behaviour could only be taken over by his own family. And even then the loss of the father was expected to be of great impact. The mother was easier to exchange. For example, if a mother was a concubine, the legal wife of their husband would occasionally be assigned the role of the 'mother'. In addition, other women than the birth-mother could be found to nourish a child.

Still, sources also mention fairly often, when a person's biological mother had passed away during childhood. This points out that the concept of biological mother and biological father was crucial for the identity and moral integrity of a person in medieval life.⁴¹²

The mother was discussed and presented to be the loving parent: "when a woman is spoken of in her specific capacity as a mother, however, she is identified as the loving parent. [...] the mother is the one who can be loved

⁴¹⁰ Yan Zhitui, in fact, believes that education of children should start around day sixty after birth, see chapter VI, part 1 on education.

⁴¹¹ Yan Zhitui II, Teng (trsl.) 1968: 4.

⁴¹² See below for a discussion on step-parents.

without fear entering into the relationship."⁴¹³ The father on the other hand had to be approached with some kind of awe. Cole points out that the father supposedly had to receive both, love and reverence, from his sons. He further remarks that "while it is possible to love and revere the same person, there is every likelihood that the filial submission required of the son would generate conflicting emotions toward the father, with a strong component of hostility likely present."⁴¹⁴

Mothers and fathers, deriving from different backgrounds, most probably had conflicting interests.⁴¹⁵ Such incompatible concerns of care-givers were well displayed in the narrative about the son of an instructor for court entertainers. The instructor's boy had suffered from very severe jaundice for some time during the Tang dynasty. A Daoist master who passed by said that he could cure him. The Daoist then took the son away with him, treated him with special medicine and prescribed a certain diet. After one or two days the boy felt better and returned to his parents. After his recovery and to his mother's distress, he wanted to leave his home and seek the Daoist in order to study with him. His mother pleaded him not to leave, but his father agreed, arguing that without the Daoist, the son would have died anyway and that things just had to be this way. The boy left and nobody ever saw him again.⁴¹⁶ The boy at that time was ten years of age, which implies that he was in the right age to leave his home in order to take up professional education with a teacher. Still, the mother was afraid of losing an ostensibly only son.

This theme was already a popular one in early medieval China, and often occurred in narratives concerning sons who wanted to become Buddhist priests. We find it also at the centre of the narrative of Uttara, which precedes the famous narrative about Mulian who saved his mother from her fate as a hungry ghost. In this story of Uttara "the father's absence frames the original story as a mother-son conflict arising from the fact that Uttara wants to be a monk and his mother will not let him, fearing that she will be left with no means of support."⁴¹⁷ Although the father was still present in the narrative about the court instructor's son, the mother was nonetheless afraid to be left by her son, which could have a negative impact on her future economic security.

⁴¹³ Cole 1998: 29. This is in contrast to her role as one of the greatest dangers that I will discuss in the following chapter. This is also partly in contrast to the role as the straight-forward instructor of her children, as whom she is discussed by Chiu-Duke 2006. Chiu-Duke for the most part discusses the relation between mothers and their adult sons during the Tang dynasty.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*: 29-30.

⁴¹⁵ Wu Hung states this for the early imperial period, Wu Hung 1995: 92.

⁴¹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 85: 556-7 (教坊樂人, *Ji shen lu*).

⁴¹⁷ Cole 1998: 53.

The focal point in these narratives was the responsibility of the child towards his parents. With respect to the mother, we find a shift in emphasis regarding the behaviour within the parent-child relationship. The mother at first loved and took care of her offspring, gave breast feeding and suffered for her child. Yet, the narratives also quickly point out the requirement, namely that the son accordingly had to love his mother and repay her labour and sufferings. The same approach is valid with respect to the father whenever he was mentioned in a loving attitude towards the child. The focus of our evidence, then, typically lied on the behaviour of the child towards the parents instead of on the parents' behaviour towards the child. In this respect, the *Sutra on the Filial Son* (佛說孝子經) serves as a good example because it mentions the physical and emotional labour a mother and a father went through for their infant child:

The Buddha said to the monks, 'When your parents gave birth to you, [your mother] was pregnant for ten months, her body was as though it had a severe sickness. On the day of your birth, she was scared and your father was terrified. These emotions are hard to describe. After you were born she put you in the dry places and slept in the damp ones. She was so completely sincere [in her caring for you] that she even turned her blood into milk [for you]. [Then] you were petted, fed, bathed, and given clothes, food and instruction [on the need] to pay respect to teachers and friends, and to offer support to the worthy and the elderly.⁴¹⁸

The idea the sutra expresses shows great similarities to the definition of the family that I have quoted earlier: parents were "helping offspring survive, teaching them skills in order to be economically productive adults, and teaching them the values of the culture." The sutra additionally put emphasis on the emotional input of parents and on breast feeding, with which we will deal below.

The weight of the gendered responsibilities of fathers and mothers became evident when either the female or male care-giver dropped out of the family, usually caused by death, kidnapping or other reasons. In this case the other care-giver should take over the necessary tasks regarding the offspring, although those gendered tasks formerly pertained to the relevant parent. In the case of the entrepreneur Zan Gui for example, whose welfare and domestic luck subsided with dramatic speed after he lost his mother and then was struck by the calamity of a fire, this flexible task-sharing apparently did not work out. In this event the father could not sufficiently fulfil his wife's duties towards their children.

Ideally, the father would undertake basic physical care in the mother's absence, but reports of such cases are rare. On the other hand, we have several

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*: 69 (quoting T.16.687).

examples of women who took over an offspring's literary education in case of the male carer's absence. Despite that fact that this task was often ascribed to women in tomb inscriptions and in exemplary narratives from the Han dynasties, it may have been an ideal in most cases.⁴¹⁹

Female care-givers

Secondary research about the lives of women during the Tang dynasty features a suspicious lack of children.⁴²⁰ The closest these works come to discuss children is when their focus lies on pregnancy.⁴²¹ This absence of children in connection to women is interesting and probably results from the fact that medieval sources actually rarely deal explicitly with a mother-child relation other than pregnancy.

Nonetheless, when reading the sources closely, we find that women were depicted in different ways as care-givers, and that narratives focused on a small range of themes between the categories 'pregnant women' and 'dead mothers'. Topics included: 'emotional vicinity of mothers and children', 'dead mothers caring, fearing for and protecting their offspring' and 'mothers going through difficulties for their illegitimate offspring'. Such themes come as no surprise to us for we find that they fitted best into the world of the male author's fantasies and worries about a part of child rearing that they had little control over. Nonetheless, to a certain degree these topics might still hint at reality, and given the nature of our sources it is in any case only from this male perspective that we can discuss the mother-child relation anyway.

The female care-giver was the most important person for an infant. Mostly this would have been the biological mother if she survived labour and if she was in good health. In the case of elite families parts of the female care-giving role would be fulfilled by a wet-nurse. If a mother died during the delivery or shortly thereafter, the child usually had not much chance of survival either, unless a

⁴¹⁹ See chapter V for examples about educational tasks of mothers and fathers.

⁴²⁰ See for example Deng Xiaonan (ed.) 2003. In the articles of the two volumes women are discussed in different contexts such as literature, education, art and marriage, in terms of their relation to men, work and law. Both volumes focus on adult women and are devoid of children, except occasionally touching the education of girls. The articles in these volumes reflect the content of other secondary literature on women. Although some of the women that can be discussed because they are mentioned in male literature might be (preferably) childless such as some entertainers and perhaps some nuns, nearly every woman had to be concerned with children sooner or later in her life, because being concerned with children was one their major tasks. Chiu-Duke's article from 2006 discusses women in relation to their son. See also Cole 1998, who writes about sons and mothers within a Buddhist framework.

⁴²¹ Ebrey 1993 has a whole chapter on children, which is exceptional, see footnote above.

substitute care-giver was found who can feed the child and care for it. Economically well-off parents could afford a wet nurse who took on tasks such as breast feeding, cleaning, feeding, playing with the toddler and practicing gross basic skills.⁴²²

Medieval sources frequently mention three different types of female care-givers. First, the most prevalent female person was the biological mother. If the sources did not mention that she has died, they presented her as being emotionally very close to her child – in most cases to her son. The second type of frequently mentioned female care-givers was the stepmother. She was described as a dangerous and nearly fatal care-giver for the child of the former wife or concubine, similar to the stepmother in European narratives. At the other extreme, the stepmother could be described as exceptionally benevolent, neglecting her own interests in favour for her foster child. A third motherly figure who was commonly referred to was the adoptive mother, who could be a paternal or maternal aunt, an older sister or a non-relative person, although the latter occurred only rarely. The adoptive mother's role was usually not depicted as especially significant, unless, similar to the literary treatment of the stepmother, she excelled in cruelty or in selfless behaviour. Nonetheless, she was at least implicitly mentioned as the care-giver in many instances and probably was a common type of female care-giver.⁴²³

Medieval Chinese mothers were known for their love. This, at least, is the motherly feature that was promoted and emphasised by Buddhist and Confucian texts. Motherly love was mainly directed at sons, which is above all articulated by the mother's dependency on men, as I will show below. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that mothers in narratives were typically mentioned together with their sons. Ahern and Cole have both analysed the position of women in relation to their sons in early medieval as well as modern China and have shown that part of the mother's love was a well-calculated means in securing her own future welfare.⁴²⁴

⁴²² See Lee, Jen-der 2000 and 2002 about pre-Tang wet nurses and Hsiung, Ping-chen 2005 about wet-nurses during late imperial China, with a few discussions about wet nurses in the medieval era.

⁴²³ Lee, Jen-der 2000 points out that during the Han and until the sixth century wet nurses to the greatest extent probably were official slaves and convicts (8-9), which was opposed to the prescriptions of the Classics "which stated that a feudal lord's sons were to be nursed by the servicemen's wives, a grand master's sons by his maidservants, and a serviceman's sons by his own wife," (11). Lee therefore concludes that "the scholar-official's criticism of the wet nurse did not address the quality of her milk nor the style of her care, that is, the substance of wet nursing. Instead, it was mainly about her breaking of class and gender boundaries," (31).

⁴²⁴ Ahern 1975, Cole 1998. This is not surprising and quite similar to western cultures.

The closest picture to reality, however, is that mothers died when their own children were young, after which the father married again. Ebrey, among others, has pointed out that during the Song dynasty “dying in childbirth or a few days later as a direct consequence of the birthing process was apparently quite common, even among the relatively privileged educated class.”⁴²⁵ Ping Yao, in her study on Tang epigraphs on women, has shown that “a crucial factor that caused the low birthrate among the Tang elite women was maternal death.”⁴²⁶ Yet, she further points out that due to the development in medical knowledge and the different political and social circumstances during the first half of the Tang (618-752) women apparently fared better than during the second half (752-907).⁴²⁷ Chiu-Duke, however, brings up several examples of elite women, who carried out powerful impact on their adult sons. Some of these mothers, then, became old enough to witness their son’s success.⁴²⁸

In the case of maternal death in a household with several wives, surviving children grew up with a non-biological female care-giver, who, according to conventional preconceptions regarding stepmothers, preferred her own children above those of the former wife.⁴²⁹ Notwithstanding that when the true mother was still alive children were given into the care of other women. The choice of who carries the responsibility for the upbringing of a child, was based on hierarchy within a household with several women of childbearing age.

Mother-daughter relation

Before analysing the mother-son bond as it is displayed in numerous narratives, I discuss cases of the mother-daughter bond, which are less well-documented. From some narratives we gain the impression that mothers were much attached to their daughters as well, despite the over-emphasis on the mother-son relation. We can further assume that often sons and daughters were even equally loved by their mothers. This is, for example, displayed in the undated case of the wife of farmer Su (蘇) Taixuan from Yangshuo. The mother of three infant children, consisting of both sons and daughters, died an untimely death and returned as an invisible ghost with a voice. She caressed and fondled (憐撫) her children and sew and repaired their clothes. Before she left her family for good, she had a

⁴²⁵ Ebrey 1993: 175.

⁴²⁶ Ping Yao 2005: 275.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*: 282.

⁴²⁸ Chiu-Duke 2006.

⁴²⁹ Wet nurses as surrogate mothers, on the other hand, are often remembered as very kind.

good look at her sons and daughters.⁴³⁰ Children of both sexes were shown to be equally dear to her.

Similar to the case of the farmer's wife is the narrative featuring Mrs Zhang (張). Mrs Zhang, the wife of the older brother of Mr Zheng (鄭), who was prefect of Runzhou in the troubled and violent, war-torn reign of emperor Su (r. 756-762), had a daughter of sixteen called Miss Cai (采娘). The author, Qiu Zhaolin (丘兆麟), told that Mrs Zhang's other children had all died. When Miss Cai suddenly fell ill and was about to die, the mother became pregnant again. Tired of having lost so many children she exclaimed: "I have lost five sons and daughters when they were young. For what am I pregnant again!?" Having said this, she wanted to take medicine for abortion. In Mrs Zhang's case the author again did not point out any preference for boys or girls. The mother appeared to be depressed about the loss of any child, regardless what sex it had.⁴³¹

In another example, the wife of military official Xiang Jing (向靖), who lived at the turn of the fifth century, was depicted in her bereavement for a daughter. In order not to be reminded about her she hid away the toys the deceased girl liked to play with.⁴³² Lastly, the mother of Meimei (妹妹), seven-year-old daughter of Chan Zhao (彦昭), pleaded for her young daughter's life when the family expected to be wiped out by the father's political enemy in 782. The mother did not ask for the life of her son because she probably was sure that the executioner would not be able to make an exception for male children.⁴³³ This mother, thus, did what was in her power to save her daughter – which was a noteworthy act for the author of that narrative.

⁴³⁰ *Taiping guangji* 351: 2779-80 (*Guilin feng tu ji*), compare this narrative with *Taiping guangji* 352: 3786 in which the mother explicitly does not want to see her children in order not to cause the disease fright in them.

⁴³¹ *Taiping guangji* 387: 3088 (*Shi yi*). The mother is then convinced by her dying daughter not to take the abortion medicine. The story goes that the girl made a deal with the Weaver Girl, promising three days of silence for receiving skills for needle work. The Weaver Girl is a supernatural being, who was especially venerated on the seventh day of the seventh month, and who was very important for young girls. Interestingly, the Weaver Girl threatens the teenager that if the girl would tell about their deal before three days are over she would die and be reborn as a boy. For a partial translation of this narrative see also chapter IV 'Abortion'. Even more interesting is a sutra discussed by Yü Chün-feng 2001, which has "a special message for women," who wanted to become a man in their next life. In order to achieve that high goal they would have to ask somebody to "write this dharani for them and enshrine this in front of a Buddha image," Yü Chün-fang 2001: 120.

⁴³² *Taiping guangji* 387: 3086 (*Ming xiang ji*), see below 'Toys and games' for a summary of this narrative.

⁴³³ *Taiping guangji* 270: 2122 (*Guang de shen yi lu*), see chapter IV 'Migration' for a summary of this narrative.

Mother-son relation

The few examples I have given above suggest that mothers loved their children in general, regardless their sex. Still, medieval male narrators emphasized the different quality of relationship between a mother and her son, and we consequently get the impression that sons were more loved than daughters. We find both an economic and psychological reason for the emphasis on sons rather than daughters. The economic interest of the mother and the husband's family in the son was based on similar grounds. "Both hoped he would grow up strong and productive so as to support them in their old age."⁴³⁴

The mother-son relationship could be more broadly understood as a mother-male relation, and was based on a general woman's dependency on men. A woman who lived in her husband's family was an outsider in that family and was highly dependent on it. Her dependency on her son or sons was depicted as even greater than that on her husband's family. Cole, who has analysed the changing engagement of the mother's role under Buddhist influence, points out that a boy's "mother had other interests in him, both due to her outsider status and because, as a woman, she probably had little voice in family matters. Her position of weakness was compounded by traditional Chinese law, which by and large did not allow women to own or inherit their husband's property directly: property was to be divided by sons. Should her husband die before her, a woman needed a son if she was to gain control over any property or wealth her husband had."⁴³⁵ Mothers thus were interested in creating a strong bond with their sons as the narratives put it. Narratives made this clear by emphasising a mother's bond with only one son, not with more, as we can see in many examples throughout this thesis.

Cole proposes that mothers found security by emotionally binding their sons to themselves.⁴³⁶ Furthermore he points out the Buddhist influence in support of understanding the mother's immense importance to her child, specifically to her sons. Cole interprets the growing literature on the theme

⁴³⁴ Cole 1998: 35. This does not match with the more probable average life expectancy of people, as I have shown above.

⁴³⁵ Cole 1998: 35.

⁴³⁶ Sons are bound to their fathers in terms of heredity, wealth and power. This bond is created through several means, before all through education and emotional control. He sees parallels between early medieval China and the findings of Ahern's fieldwork from Taiwan, published 1975.

featuring sons rescuing their mothers from hell as preliminary Buddhist propaganda in medieval times.⁴³⁷

The power of a woman over her son, however, was intrinsically linked to the power of a son over his mother. In this respect we find numerous narratives of mothers who struggled against losing their sons. When the above-mentioned teenage son of a court musician-instructor wanted to follow the Daoist master who had cured him from a grave disease, his mother did not want him to go at all because he apparently was her only son.⁴³⁸ Her resistance against her son and husband's decision, seen in the light of the above discussed dependency of mothers on their sons, can thus partly be understood as emotional fear for a future without the presence of her son. In that sense, sons exerted some power on their mothers' decision-making and on their future. Another example is the boy whom Xie Miaozhi's (謝邈之) servant encounters in a tomb. Although he was dead, he could prevent his mother from a new marriage. The ten-year-old boy was crying constantly on his bed in his tomb, because, as his fifty-year-old dead companion explained, his mother was about to marry a new man. When Xie Miaozhi's servant met the mother by chance and told her the condition of her dead son, she cancelled the marriage.⁴³⁹

The mother-child bond was usually depicted from the angle of the responsibility of the son towards his mother. The emotional bond therefore can be seen as the counterpart to the hereditary bond between father and son that supposedly lacked emotion. Yet, sons, no matter what age, were hardly ever depicted as depending on their mothers. However, the responsibility that especially sons and daughters-in-law were burdened with, resulted from the economic weakness of women. The narrative about Zan Gui that I have quoted above hints at the fact that the mother – Zan Gui's mother and his wife as mother – was actually crucial for the survival of their offspring. The responsibility of sons to take care of their mothers was explained by the responsibilities a mother had for her son, and their relationship hence rested on mutual care. Motherly duties consisted of physical care and basic education. By listing the hardships mothers went through for their offspring, responsibility is shifted to their children.

Cole demonstrates how sons were gradually made aware of their responsibility for mothers in early medieval China. That responsibility (filial

⁴³⁷ Cole 1998. The emancipation of the mother apparently was wanted, otherwise not so many scriptures would have been created to support the idea of the mother as somebody who has to be rescued.

⁴³⁸ *Taiping guangji* 85: 556-7 (*Ji shen lu*).

⁴³⁹ *Taiping guangji* 318: 2520-1 (*Lu yi ji*).

piety, *xiao* 孝) was taught to sons opposed to – or in addition to – the one they carried for their father, who was the main target of filial responsibility in the dominant moral theories and practices, based on the *Classics*. Occasionally narratives reported what had happened when a mother was the object of such an education in filial piety. In 817, for example, Kang Zhongqi (康仲戚) left home for Haidong and did not return for several years. He was his mother's only son and she missed him very much. She told this to a Buddhist monk who persuaded her to read the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing*, 金剛經). Because she was illiterate she ordered to have it copied and it turned out that this action saved the life of her son. The son returned home not long after.⁴⁴⁰

The mother's dependency was often expressed in depictions of extreme emotional proximity to her son. Consequently unsurprisingly we also find a motive in narratives that describes mothers dreaming of their sons when they were in great danger – or, as in several cases, when they were already dead: Sometime during the mid seventh century, for example, the thirteen-year old son of Wang Shen (王申) saw a very young woman looking for water. After he told his father, who was a tree planter, about her, the father invited her to come in. Everybody liked the woman and the father married her immediately. At night the mother of the boy dreamed that her son told her: "I have been completely devoured." The father assured her that the son was save with the new wife and she went back to sleep. When she dreamed again of her son, father and mother called for him and the new wife. After receiving no answer, they had a look and only found a strange looking being and the hair and brain of their son.⁴⁴¹

This narrative displays the mother's close feelings for her son. It additionally might express fear on behalf of the wife to lose her position in the family, fear of a new unknown concubine, and fear of losing her son. Emotional proximity was expressed in ways other than through dreams. Liu Yiqing (劉義慶, 403-444), for instance, wrote about a mother who lost two young sons and grieved for six years.⁴⁴² Of further interest are the cases of illegitimate children, who were only sons in the narratives. There, the mother – threatened by her husband or her natal family to abort or abandon the child – kept the child and raised him against all odds, which again displays her dependency. In such narratives we find the mother's dependency on her son, as well as her love towards him, on the one hand, and independence from her family – from her natal family as well as in-laws – on the other.

⁴⁴⁰ *Taiping guangji* 107: 726-7 (*Bao ying ji*).

⁴⁴¹ *Taiping guangji* 365: 2897-8 (*You yang za zu*); see also *Taiping guangji* 276: 2177 (*Lie yi zhuan*), in which a mother dreamed of her son who died when he was away from home.

⁴⁴² *Taiping guangji* 320: 2538 (*Youming lu*)

In a narrative by Li Yinda (李隱大) from the Tang, we read about the cleverness of a woman, Mrs Zhao from Changshan (長山趙), who managed to protect her illegitimate son against her suspicious husband Ran Sui (冉遂). As the son of a district magistrate, Ran had a childish character (幼性) and was not very clever. Worst of all, he could not write. His wife, Mrs Zhao, once came across a mysterious man in silk clothes on a white horse, whose entourage numbered more than a hundred men. Mrs Zhao was impressed and wished that he would be 'her man' for a short while. The man in silk did not mind at all. At their parting, the man told Mrs Zhao: "you shall get one son who will be an illuminated spirit. Take good care of him and love him!" Mrs Zhao became pregnant and in due time gave birth to a five *cun* long boy with red hair, a green-blue face, red hands, and shining eyes. Ran was rather suspicious and told her that this child could only be a demon, and he asked if he could kill the boy. Mrs Zhao told him: "This child has been entrusted to you! Be it a demon or a mishap – how can you kill it!? If you kill it, it might be inauspicious!" Sui was surprised and refrained from killing the child and Mrs Zhao raised the boy in seclusion until he was seven years old.⁴⁴³

In another case, a mother bore an illegitimate son to a 'white dog' and, despite the demands and threats by her husband's family to return, she moved into the mountains and lived together with her dog-husband. After the dog died she remained in the mountains and raised their son. The son became a criminal, killed the family of his mother's former formal husband and took his mother along with him.⁴⁴⁴

These example demonstrate that in the absence of a husband, or despite having one, the woman's only hope for survival is her son. She chose and went through hardship for him. She even would abandon her natal family in order to raise her son. With an illegitimate child a woman was unlikely to find a new husband, and her own family would view her as a nuisance, trying sooner or later to get rid of her. And so her son might have been the only guarantee for her provision in later years if she became old enough.

⁴⁴³ *Taiping guangji* 306: 2423-4 (*Qi shi ji*). The boy had supernatural powers and the rest of the narrative deals with that. In the end he told his mother that he is on the path of divinities and would no longer stay amongst mankind. Then he left her for good. The mother played an important part in the narrative but the father was not mentioned anymore after the beginning.

⁴⁴⁴ *Taiping guangji* 438: 3569-70 (*Xie xiang lu*). This narrative resembles motives from the ancestral narratives from the South Chinese ethnic group the Yao. On the Yao, see Alberts 2007.

Breastfeeding and the son

After birth, a female person breast-fed the infant, which, if the biological mother did it herself, “was taken as a sign of her motherly devotion.”⁴⁴⁵ Breast feeding ideally should be done for the first three years after birth.⁴⁴⁶ The infant then, and later the young child, grew up in the women’s quarters of a rich household or was otherwise always close to the female care-giver.⁴⁴⁷ The praise of personal breastfeeding hints at the possibility that it was rather exceptional – at least in wealthy households.

Breastfeeding was actually one of the most emphasised reasons for the duty that sons carried for their mothers. The mother’s blood was generally believed to turn into milk during breastfeeding for the first three years of her child’s life. For this reason, in a Buddhist view, the child build up a milk debt, which he had to repay as an adult. From a Buddhist standpoint, he therefore had to donate money to monasteries that would organise prayers and sacrifices for his mother on his behalf.⁴⁴⁸ Daughters did not carry that responsibility, because, similar to their loose blood-relation with their fathers, they also had a loose blood/milk-relation with their mothers.

Maternal responsibilities throughout the years

The role of the mother in the years after breast feeding and before the beginning of the child’s formal education around the age of ten remained vague in narratives. Jen-der Lee assumes that the breast-feeding period was two years long, instead of the ideal three years. At least in the Song dynasty, and probably in earlier periods as well, those who breast fed were also expected to gather toys, prepare meals, instruct and protect. These were the activities that were probably done by the mother, an aunt, older sister or a wet nurse.⁴⁴⁹

The only female influence on sons that we find in narratives occurred at a much older age of the child, namely when mothers are reported to instruct their children in basic literacy. Teaching from mothers with the goal to take exams, was an activity that usually only happened in the absence of the father. Tomb inscriptions of deceased women emphasized that mothers were very important

⁴⁴⁵ Ebrey 1993: 179.

⁴⁴⁶ See Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 74-87, she discusses breast feeding in late imperial China. For her analysis she also draws on Tang sources. What is more is that breastfeeding can limit a woman’s chance of becoming pregnant again too soon.

⁴⁴⁷ See Ebrey 1993 for the Song dynasty.

⁴⁴⁸ See Cole 1998. This only counts for sons.

⁴⁴⁹ Lee, Jen-der 2000: 18.

in teaching the first literary pieces to their offspring, male and female. These women probably only represented a very small percentage of literate or semi-literate wives. In most cases the form of literacy and teaching was not explained. Hence we can assume that it might not have been necessary to know characters, but only to know texts by heart and then be able to point out the characters in these texts.⁴⁵⁰

Mothers as instructors of literacy mostly came into the picture in extreme cases. For example, when a pregnant woman was kidnapped by boat-people sometime between 742 and the An Lushan rebellion, she gave birth to a son and clandestinely taught him characters when he was growing up.⁴⁵¹ Similarly, when a mother whose husband, Li Wenmin (李文敏), was killed in war sometime during the Tang dynasty became a prisoner together with her son she was able to teach him. The boys in both narratives eventually participated in the state exams.⁴⁵² Chiu-Duke, however, has shown that the depiction of the mother as an instructor of morality to her son was a very important part in the biographies of persons mentioned in both Tang *Histories*. Although strict mothers who helped their sons to power and fame were not standard images in the women's biographies, they feature in the biographies of their sons and husbands.⁴⁵³ That means a mother was not merely interested in her son's career and successful education, but took an active part in it – at least in the few cases we find from elite sources.

Even when they did not teach, mothers were depicted to at least care for their son's education. In one case during the first decades of the Tang dynasty, for example, the ghost of a deceased mother predicted to her in-laws that her son would become a renowned statesman and she stressed: "I wish that you will educate him well!"⁴⁵⁴

Fathers generally were accredited with taking care of their son's education, especially the instruction of the family rites which the sons had to continue. Still, unless a dead or absent father would return by means of magic, his knowledge about ritual practice concerning his family would be lost. Women were hardly ever mentioned as capable to take over this kind of instruction, because a mother of young children had probably lived in the household of her husband for a few

⁴⁵⁰ See below, in chapter V 'Family education'.

⁴⁵¹ *Taiping guangji* 121: 854-5 (*Yuan hua ji*).

⁴⁵² *Taiping guangji* 128: 908-9 (*Wen qi lu*).

⁴⁵³ Chiu-Duke 2006: 57.

⁴⁵⁴ *Taiping guangji* 115: 798-9 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

years only. Therefore in most cases she would not be familiar with the household's specific customs on particular occasions.⁴⁵⁵

Liu Jingshu (劉敬叔) noted down one incident, in which a single mother lived in poverty with her two sons, all of whom loved drinking tea. In their residence was an old mound to which they raised a toast each time they drank tea. Yet, the sons did not understand why they should do that.⁴⁵⁶ This narrative does not point out a family ritual, but it shows a specific religious worship in a family-context. This narrative also is one of the very few instances I could find about the involvement of mothers in the general instruction on ritual behaviour to her sons.⁴⁵⁷

Household tasks and children

Tasks like cleaning the child, handling its clothes and putting the child to sleep exclusively fell into the care of women. Next to these child-raising duties, female care-givers also fulfilled various other chores in the household. This multi-tasking sometimes happened at the expense of the child's well-being, as we already have seen in the case of Peng Yan, the boy who was briefly neglected by his mother and consequently fell prey to a wild dog.

Moreover, for their child's care, mothers occasionally took practical solutions that were impure from a religious point of view, subsequently bringing danger to themselves. For example, when Chen Anju (陳安居) died some time in the fifth century, he ended up in front of the underworld administration.⁴⁵⁸ There he witnessed the pleading of a woman about her wrongdoing. One of the charges against her was that she once had put her child to sleep on the furnace where it was crawling around and defecating into the cooking utensils. When the woman returned to the kitchen and saw the mess, she asked for ghost-money in

⁴⁵⁵ However, women also came up with their own ideas. Chiu-Duke presents one example about the funeral-ideas of Lady Li, Chiu-Duke 2006: 80.

⁴⁵⁶ *Taiping guangji* 412: 3356 (*Chao gu shi*). After the ritual was in danger not to be performed anymore, the mother dreamt of the person on whose behalf the ritual action was carried out. He told her about a treasure that her sons then found. Thereafter they carried on with the ritual.

⁴⁵⁷ For more on mothers, see chapter IV 'The child's physical weakness.' Mothers are depicted by men in literature, and they are often said to be dangerous to their children. Their special emotional vicinity also poses a potential danger to the male community and integrity, this is why they are understood to be an even greater peril.

⁴⁵⁸ The compiler of the *Fa yuan zhu lin* from which this narrative is taken points out that Chen Anju's uncle was a shaman – which might explain his adventure.

order to clean it.⁴⁵⁹ Anju then witnessed the verdict, not guilty, because the judge said that sleeping on the stove in this case was not a crime, since the child was unknowing. The underworld judge also did not consider asking for ghost money as a crime.⁴⁶⁰

The woman was not punished, but the way how the author of the narratives described these handlings, namely putting her child to sleep on the cooking place and cleaning the faeces with ghost money, points out that they might have taken place indeed. Moreover, such behaviour of a female care-giver might have been rather common, much to the annoyance of the male observers who were powerless in the sight of such an unorthodox behaviour.⁴⁶¹

Using ghost money as toilet paper to clean baby-faeces was considered to be appalling but in the above-quoted case it was not judged to be a crime. In another narrative from the pre-medieval era, the usage of sutras as clothes for children in times of scarcity, however, costs the life of the mother in question: Ni Zhitong (尼智通) was a nun when she was young. When the religious master of Nu Zhitong died, she disavowed her religious life, married and gave birth to a son. She then lived in poverty and had no material to make clothes with. From the time when Zhitong was still a nun, she had several rolls of sutras left. She used them all to dress her son with. A year later she got a strange skin disease, and just before she died she heard that this was the punishment for using the sutras as clothes.⁴⁶²

The narratives of Peng Yan's mother, the mother in the underworld and Ni Zhitong allow some insight into the busy life of a mother and her creativity. Peng Yan's mother and the mother who let her child soil the hearth had much work to do and took the risk of leaving the child alone to an uncertain fate. The mother in the underworld and the former nun Ni Zhitong also revealed a certain kind of pragmatism. Without much thinking about future consequences, female care-givers used whatever was in the vicinity to solve a problem caused by their children, for example using ghost money as toilet paper and sutras as clothes.

⁴⁵⁹ On the use of ghost-money from the eight until the tenth century AD, see Hou Chin-lang 1975: 8-14.

⁴⁶⁰ *Taiping guangji* 113: 785-87 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

⁴⁶¹ It does not appear to be an issue that it was the woman who had put the child asleep on the stove. The judge only decides that it does not matter that the child was crawling on the stove, because it is unknowing (i.e. too young to have a consciousness). Here again, the underworld puts the responsibility for the child on the child itself rather than on the care-giver.

⁴⁶² *Taiping guangji* 116: 806 (*Ming xiang ji*).

Male care-givers

According to Chinese mythology, documented from the Han dynasty onward, a family without a man meant chaos, an uncivilized gathering of women and children that obeyed neither the moral nor the social order. Thanks only to the synthesizing creation of the serpentine god Fuxi, “man and wife were united and ordered social life in communities was possible.”⁴⁶³ How, then, did male care-givers fulfil their role as the civilizing part of a family? What did fathers do with their children? We will see that their major tasks lied in teaching their offspring ritual behaviour, and providing instructions and organising instructors that enabled the future economic welfare of the sons. Lastly, they took care of their sons and daughters’ health in cases of disease, mostly by providing financial means for treatment.

Men appear to be more independent of children than women. Male independence was especially built on the fact that they were allowed a greater mobility than women. That means that even though a man had a child he would move away if he saw the necessity to do so. The father of Zengzeng, for example, abandoned his wife and infant son, in order to find his luck and wealth in the South.⁴⁶⁴ Nonetheless, men’s dependence on their offspring, which was based on labour and ancestral belief, should not be underestimated. Below I will point out salient themes that talk about fathers in relation with their offspring. These are basic care or the absence of it, the function of fathers in education, the mention of fathers showing emotions and the role fathers play when a child fell ill.

Fathers and basic needs

Fathers in contrast to mothers were hardly mentioned in connection with the basic needs of clothing, bathing, feeding and sleeping. There were some exceptions, however. Narratives in which fathers were mentioned as fulfilling the basic needs of their children involved dramatic situations in which the father was completely left alone with a young child for which he is reported to care single-handedly.

During the time that Jiangling was in war (江陵陷 around 550),⁴⁶⁵ there was a man from Shanxi, Liang Yuanhui (梁元暉), who captured an aristocrat with the surname Liu (士大夫姓劉). Before [his capture] this person had already met with

⁴⁶³ Wicks 2002: 160.

⁴⁶⁴ *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075 (*Qianding lu*), full translation at the beginning of the thesis.

⁴⁶⁵ For a brief introduction of the Jiangling uprising, see Wright 1979: 55-6.

the chaos and destruction of Hou Jing (侯景) and he had lost his whole household. He was left only with a young son who then was a few years old. Liu personally carried him in his arms. There was much snowfall and the [group] could not move forward. Liang Yuanhui directed them into the pass and forced Liu to abandon his son. Liu deeply loved and pitied the child and pleaded for death [for both of them]. Nonetheless, [Liang Yuanhui] took the child with force, threw him into the snow and beat and trashed him until he crumbled. He then rushed [the group] to leave. With each step Liu was looking behind. [The child] was crying endlessly and suffered a violent death. This added to the grief of Liu and he died several days later. After Liu died, Yuanhui daily saw Liu stretching out his arms and asking for his son. Hence Yuanhui became sick and died shortly thereafter.⁴⁶⁶

Yan Zhitui, the author of this narrative, did not reveal from whom he got the information about this moving account. He also did not say how the father took care of the boy. Nevertheless, the cruel murder of the child contrasted with the efforts of the father to single-handedly save and care for his son is central to the narrative. It is a rare account in its openness, and its anti-war-style makes clear that the author found the act of killing the child outrageous.

Neither this nor other narratives reveal any details about the kind of care fathers supplied their offspring with, but they imply that the fathers managed to provide their children with the basic needs for a while.

Fathers and instruction

A father had as his foremost duty to instruct his children – with the focus lying on the instructions of his sons and not his daughters. Yet ideally a father did not teach his son certain texts, such as the *Poetry* (詩經), due to its partly provocative contents.⁴⁶⁷ With respect to literacy, fathers therefore employed others to train their sons since they were also often absent themselves. The greater part of fatherly instructions thus was teaching his son family rituals, including, for example, how to behave in a significant situation such as funerals. Yet, not many narratives actually address the instructing father. An interesting narrative, in that respect, is that of the otherwise unknown Wang Kui (王瞻) who gained knowledge in a dream that he would die in five days. Accordingly, he uses the time to teach his son or sons ‘the rhythms of crying and jumping around in grief (哭踊之節)’⁴⁶⁸.

⁴⁶⁶ *Taiping guangji* 120: 841-2 (*Huan yuan ji*).

⁴⁶⁷ Yan Zhitui VIII, Teng (trsl.) 1968: 52.

⁴⁶⁸ *Taiping guangji* 279: 2227-8 (*Ji shen lu*).

Family rituals were determined by the male head of the family, and in most cases “would reinforce all of the hierarchical distinctions in the family,” as in the formalized greetings that Sima Guang (司馬光) described for the eleventh century.⁴⁶⁹ The rituals a girl learned in the family she grew up in, differed from those of her husband, which she had to learn anew. Therefore the ritual knowledge of a mother might not be acknowledged as well-funded enough until she had become a grandmother.⁴⁷⁰

Fathers and emotions

In general terms concerning the division of labour, “women feed, men teach.”⁴⁷¹ Nonetheless, Hsiung Ping-chen points out that in late imperial times fathers “who had the opportunity to be with their young did not refrain from picking them up, hugging and teasing them. Indeed, an increasingly affectionate father seemed to be looming large from social documents at this period.”⁴⁷² Such an image is also transmitted to us from medieval times.

These emotionally caring descriptions of fathers stand in contrast to the role of the mother, who cleaned and fed the child and put it to sleep.⁴⁷³ The father, instead, was described as showing his loving affection. Displaying affection towards one’s offspring was easier for a father as long as the child was in his early childhood. This was because from the age onward that a child was physically independent and became the focus of instruction, the relationship between father and child became more formal due to household-ritual obligations.⁴⁷⁴

Before that moment of serious instructions, medieval fathers were often displayed showing affection towards their young offspring.⁴⁷⁵ They not only carried their children and took naps with them, but they also played with them. While mothers bind their sons emotionally, fathers were more often depicted in an educational, yet relaxed playful situation with their children. The famous

⁴⁶⁹ Ebrey 2003: 30.

⁴⁷⁰ In chapter VI I will discuss education in more detail.

⁴⁷¹ Hsiung 2005: 107.

⁴⁷² *Ibid*: 162.

⁴⁷³ Such an imaginary is also contrary to what we just learned about the emphasis on the emotional bondage between mothers and sons, emphasised in before all Buddhist texts.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 163.

⁴⁷⁵ In Han dynasty depictions on funerary monuments, on the other hand, fathers do not appear at all as care-givers. Wu Hung therefore suggests that a father “was the invisible instructor behind all these moral lessons. He did not need public exhortations to ‘public duty’ because for men, in the institution of patriline, private love coincided with public duty,” Wu Hung 1995: 96.

courtesan Li Jilan (李季蘭) of the eighth century,⁴⁷⁶ for example, was carried in her father's arms into the courtyard when she was five or six years old. When he composed a poem that she finished, her father is reported to have said: "this girl will be a gifted writer but she is a lost cause for marriage."⁴⁷⁷ For the medieval male authors it apparently was important to point out the emotional bond of a father with his offspring.

In the tragic narrative of the aristocrat from Jiangling I have summarized above, we have been told that the father carried his son in the arms. This behaviour of fathers was described in several narratives in order to sketch, I assume, a men's character as caring for their family. Similarly caring, the scholar Gui Xi (歸係) was described taking a nap with his son in the kitchen. When suddenly there was a cat making a lot of noise, Gui was afraid that it would frighten the child and ordered a servant to beat the cat with a pillow.⁴⁷⁸

A common expression about fathers in narratives hence was: "He loved his child very much."⁴⁷⁹ With respect to emotional bonds, we saw that mothers often dreamed about their sons – at least when the latter were in danger or when they had just died. Fathers appear to dream comparatively seldom about their offspring. The few instances that can be found in narratives are about fathers dreaming about their daughters. For example, when a teenage girl suddenly vanished, her father dreamed that his own father told him that the daughter had insulted a tree. When the father found his daughter back, she was sick. After he had the tree cut down she recovered.⁴⁸⁰ In the dream, the father was motivated to action and was shown solutions on how to cure his sick daughter. This dream, in fact, hints at another function of fathers, namely their responsibility to care for their offspring's physical health.

Fathers and disease

While mothers provided daily care for their children, fathers took action only in crisis situations such as a grave illness. Taking care of the medical treatment of his offspring appeared to be the major task of fathers, next to providing

⁴⁷⁶ Li Jilan, also known as Li Ye, was a contemporary of the poet Liu Zhangqing (c.710-786). See Idema and Grant 2004: 176-182. See page 180 for a translation of this anecdote from her biography..

⁴⁷⁷ *Taiping guangji* 273: 2150 (*Zhong xing xian qi ji*).

⁴⁷⁸ *Taiping guangji* 440: 3584 (*Wen qi lu*). Unfortunately, the cat suffocated. At the same time the child made a cat's voice and died after several days. This incidence is depicted as an unfortunate case not as a fault on behalf of the father.

⁴⁷⁹ *Taiping guangji* 362: 2872 (*Ji wen*).

⁴⁸⁰ *Taiping guangji* 416: 3387-8 (*Yi shi zhi*); see also *Taiping guangji* 278: 2210.

education. This engagement could be explained by the greater freedom of the father to approach people in the world beyond the household, unlike elite women, who probably for the most part had access to the outside world through their servants. Male care-givers had the duty to find the fitting healer and they were depicted as being not parsimonious to do so. This duty was generally reasoned by emotional motivations. “Huangfu Ji (皇甫及) was born just like other children and very much loved by his father.” When Ji was fourteen he was afflicted by a strange disease that nobody could cure, although his father had consulted many specialists.⁴⁸¹ Another example is the behaviour of local official Zheng (鄭), who had a daughter who was very important to him. However, she was sick since she was a little child and her father searched for a specialist for a long time.⁴⁸²

Distant care-giving

Children did not necessarily grow up with both of their biological parents. While the reason often would be the death of at least one of the parents, there were other causes that could separate children from their mothers and fathers. We find ample evidence of two of the causes in narratives and other medieval documents. One was based on the occupation of the father, who as an official or as a member of the Tang army would be sent across the country. Another disturbing practice that is omnipresent in sources from the Tang was the parting of mothers and fathers in order to join a Buddhist monastery. In such cases, children stayed behind with the remaining family members.

If a parent did not want to abandon his or her family completely, as Zengzeng’s father did when he ran off to find wealth, they resorted to what I call distant care. The best evidence we have of such distant care giving are sample letters found in Dunhuang, which can be read as signs that the absent parent actually did care and wanted to keep in contact with his or her offspring. Since probably a large group among the mothers and fathers were basically illiterate, they had to revert to the help of sample writings and to literate professionals who would copy these for them.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ *Taiping guangji* 220: 1691.

⁴⁸² *Taiping guangji* 358: 2837 (see chapter IV ‘Body substances’). See also *Taiping guangji* 220: 1691-2 (*Youyang zazu*).

⁴⁸³ Those letters, however, do not necessarily address little children. In the cases where a parent left his or her offspring, the latter could also be grown up already.

Letter to sons and daughters

I have not seen you for a long time, and thoughts of you fill my heart. [Here] it is very cold and I hope you are well. I am as always. Take care of yourself and do not cause me to worry. I have not yet asked the oracle when I will see you but I have much time to think about you. Because there are not many messengers to hand down the letters, it is difficult to write [to you]. Prefecture, such and such district. Granted by the authority in month, day.⁴⁸⁴

Unfortunately the letter does not reveal the age of the addressed and it could have been directed to offspring at any age. We also do not come to know by what kind of people the letter had been commissioned, for what reasons the parent would have stayed away from his or her children.

The army in particular, which was vast during medieval times, kept many young men away from their families.⁴⁸⁵ These men then had the opportunity to father a child around the camp for military camps were not devoid of women. Although we are not well-informed about camp life and the life of female entertainers at military camps, we are allowed a few glimpses into the social life related to military camps through anecdotal narratives. Zhang He (張褐), for example, a husband and father of several children in Chang'an spent part of his life in a military camp before embarking on a military career in the palace sometime during the Tang dynasty:

Zhang He was in love with a camp-prostitute and they got one son. But his wife was a jealous person, so he did not dare to take the son back home with him. Instead he gave him in the care of a friend in Jiangze. He often wrote letters and asked about his son's condition, if he was dead or alive, and paid [his friend] in silk. Thus the son grew up in Zhe and the father's friend taught him to read books. Once, somebody told the boy that he was not Scholar Chu's son but that his father worked in the Imperial Palace. He then left Scholar Chu to find his father and learned that his father already passed away. However, his brothers found out about him and brought him home to their mother who said: "I knew it! When I was young, I had no decency, and I have caused that father and son were separated for eternity in life and death. I have done wrong!" The family assimilated him among them, and he got the name Rengui. He then was able to successfully pass the exams.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁴ P4050 1990: 350 (vol. 5).

⁴⁸⁵ See Graff 2002: 183-251, to gain a comprehensive overview of military movements and sizes of the military during different periods of the Tang dynasty.

⁴⁸⁶ *Taiping guangji* 272: 2146-7 (*Bei meng suo yan*). The *Bei meng suo yan* is a text that particularly focuses on entertainers.

Zhang He took the responsibility for his son – and therewith, apparently, took him away from his biological mother in order to provide him with a social environment and education that he could not have enjoyed if he had stayed with his mother, a professional female entertainer. Zhang He paid his friend to raise his son – and, as a noteworthy fact, the friend did not betray him in this service.⁴⁸⁷ We are given no further information regarding the biological mother. For instance, we do not know if she kept her child until a certain age and breastfed him, neither do we not know anything about the female care he received in the friend's home.

The letter and the camp-narrative illustrate that some parents, literate as well as illiterate, tried to stay in contact with their children, although they had taken the decision, or felt the necessity to move away from them. This is again evidence of how important the bond between biological parents and children was considered. Yet, while the biological mother of Zhang He's son disappeared out of the picture as soon as the son was born, he was 'adopted' by Zhang He's formal wife. The successful son of her husband was thus not maltreated, but well received by his stepmother.⁴⁸⁸

Responsibilities and obligations towards parents or: The downside of having parents

In the scope of analysing parent-child responsibility, two factors demand special attention. One factor points to the responsibility of a child towards its parents, generally summarised under the term 'filial piety' (*xiao* 孝).⁴⁸⁹ The other factor is concerned with the moral-social relation of a father and his children in which the child was harmed on behalf of the father's wrong-doings. With respect to the mother, children, especially sons, were troubled with a different kind of responsibility.

The patrilineal family transferred a responsibility onto their offspring that the matrilineal side could not do, namely the responsibility of retribution. The idea of retribution became very complex during medieval times, because Daoist and Buddhists notions about this merged. Concepts of these world views were

⁴⁸⁷ Not only men begot children far away from home. A woman, lady Wenji, whose story was famous during the Tang dynasty, had a forced relationship with a Xiongnu, with whom she had two children towards the end of the Han dynasty. The woman left her two children with the non Chinese father and went back to the Han-people of the Tang realm. By doing so she is said to have shown the superiority of the Han people, see Wicks 2002: 165.

⁴⁸⁸ Of course, as the formal mother she then could claim the filial behaviour of that newly found son.

⁴⁸⁹ See chapter V 'The child's responsibilities'.

fitted into ideas that were transmitted from pre-imperial and early imperial texts, which were partially embraced by family ritual practices and partially by ideas about a punishing Heaven.⁴⁹⁰ With respect to the connective ideas of Buddhist and Daoist world views, Maeda Shigeki suggests that “it is above all in the transformations found in the Daoist idea of retribution as it developed through a consciousness of Buddhism that we may reach an understanding of how the Chinese understood and perceived the theory of karmic retribution.”⁴⁹¹

Children as members of the powerless groups in medieval communities, together with servants and women, were often displayed as the victims in the belief of retribution. Mostly, they were represented as scapegoats for their fathers or grandfathers. Sometimes, retribution could be witnessed on the spot and thus the relation between misdeed and punishment could be easily detected and disastrous consequences could be mended. Such was the case of the commoner of the district Pi (鄆縣民) who had caught a snake at the border of Southern Guoliang.

The snake was longer than one *chi*. [The commoner] cut it open and picked out its organs. Hanging it on a string, he put it into a vessel, placed it above a fire and dried it for several days.

[At the same time] the young son of the commoner suddenly turned very red all over his body. The skin was roasted and broke open. Then the son spoke in his own voice: “Your family is rudely killing me. As they have taken out my intestines and place me over a fire, I have let your son know about the pain.”

When the commoner’s family heard that, they were surprised and found it strange. They took the snake, rooted bamboo and sprinkled water over it. They lit incense and prayed to it. Subsequently they brought it back to the place [where it was picked up]. After quite a while, it wriggled away. The son’s [condition] also calmed down and he recovered.⁴⁹²

The son of the commoner suddenly was afflicted with a severe skin disease that resembled burns. The child showed symptoms that were interpreted as possession by a snake that had been caught and prepared to eat just before or simultaneously with the disease of the child. By immediately setting the snake ‘free’ again, and soothing it with incense, the child was healed from its disease. The person, a member of a family unit that feared for its offspring, who had captured the snake and prepared it for drying, was the father, not the child. Yet, the author presented this case in a way that causes his readers to think that

⁴⁹⁰ Itano 1976: 84.

⁴⁹¹ Maeda 2006: 102.

⁴⁹² *Taiping guangji* 459: 3755 (*Lu yi ji*).

killing the snake triggered punishment not directly for the body of the still-living transgressor of morality, but for his son; his descendant and hope for a future. The son's position in this case was considered that of atonement for his father.

Narratives like this are numerous in medieval China. Children contracted a disease that at first sight could not be explained, but then could be linked to his father or forefather's misdeeds. Likewise, when children were born physically handicapped, the explanation was often found in the cruel character and deeds of their fathers. Thus we find a child during the Liang (502-557) born without hands. His handicap is explained by the father's occupation, character and deeds, because he, a merciless commandery governor, had ordered to cut off the hands of several commoners who turned to thievery during a period of extreme poverty.⁴⁹³ Another child between 605 and 617 could not walk and died very young. The reason for this also lied in the occupation, character and deeds of the father, who was very cruel towards prisoners in his function as a gaoler.⁴⁹⁴ Similarly, Zhang Hesi (張和思), who was sentencing prisoners in an unjust way during the Northern Qi (550-577) was confronted with children with weird deformations resembling chains and other prison devices.⁴⁹⁵ Another child was born without a tongue because its father once ripped out the tongue of an ox: "people say that this is the revenge of the oxen."⁴⁹⁶

In the above-mentioned cases, children – often sons – were punished for their father's unseemly and asocial behaviour. Several ideas existed about whose misdeeds children were punished for. Maeda points out that there were Buddhist ideas about punishment of misdeeds, as well as Daoist and Confucian ideas. With Daoist ideas, Maeda probably meant those that were found in texts of the Maoshan tradition. Confucian ideas were ideas that are displayed in those texts that were chosen as the moral classics by the literary elite. The ideas in the three written moral traditions coexisted alongside each other, and we thus find narratives that tell of children who paid for their grandfather's, but mostly for their father's misdeeds. We also find reports of people who paid in the underworld for misdeeds they had committed during their own childhood. The common feature of children and misdeeds is that regardless of their age, children were often punished severely by falling ill, and sometimes this punishment resulted in death.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹³ *Taiping guangji* 120: 844 (*Huan yuan ji*).

⁴⁹⁴ *Taiping guangji* 120: 848 (*Guang gujin wuxing ji*).

⁴⁹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 126: 889 (*Huan yuan ji*), their mother committed suicide because of depressions.

⁴⁹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 131: 932 (*Shu yi ji*), no specific time of the event is given.

⁴⁹⁷ See also Wolfram Eberhard 1967, who analyses the relation between class and punishment in his sources that are mostly nineteenth and twentieth century narratives (87). He also remarks that in his sources "the sufferers are the closest relatives only," (29).

Strickmann, whose research mostly touches the pre-Tang period, points out that the disease of a person was not always the result of the misdeeds of the sick person himself, but that the reason for disease often went back to a dead ancestor and “had its origin in the abysmal morass of bad omens, the realm of death.”⁴⁹⁸ Bokenkamp specifies this, and writes that “all manner of illness could be ascribed to the beginnings of a suit. As spectral litigations proceeded, the unfortunate defendant would inevitably be brought into court to answer charges. This, of course, meant death. More horrifyingly still, one need not have committed any crime oneself. By the law of familial responsibility holding sway in the courts of the quick and of the dead, the consequences of serious crimes committed by a family member fell equally on patrilineal descendants.”⁴⁹⁹

The fathers in the narratives I have quoted and summarized above were not punished physically in person for their sins, but their offspring was. Nonetheless, the narrator reveals that the father’s, as well as the mother’s feelings were deeply hurt by the punishment of their child. Additionally, the narratives do not provide explicit information about further consequences of the punishment for the father; the implicit message, however, especially in cases when the son died, was that he could not keep up the ancestral rites that were important for a family’s continuity. The same idea about punishment of some sorts applied for those children who were born handicapped, for their handicaps implied that they could not continue their fathers’ line either.

Nonetheless, losing a child did not always automatically mean injuring the ancestral system and cutting off one’s line of ancestral worship. Parents were depicted equally sad about the loss of boys and girls. The feeling of sadness, in that case, was a feeling that was considered the worst that could have happened, regardless of whether the loss concerned a son or a daughter, and regardless of how many other children there were. For example, when General Wang of a cavalry from Daizhou in the late sixth century, was presented with a daughter after already having fathered five sons, he and his wife were very happy, and the girl was loved by everyone. However, Wang “was by nature fond of hunting, and had killed countless animals,” a fondness for which his daughter had to pay:

One morning when the girl was in her seventh year, she disappeared and no one knew where she was. At first it was suspected that some neighbour was hiding her away in fun, but upon inquiry they found that no one had seen her. Her elder brothers all mounted their horses to extend the search, and when they were more thirty *li* from home they saw her among some brambles. When they attempted to get her, she became frightened and ran off a distance. They chased her on

⁴⁹⁸ Strickmann 1985: 195.

⁴⁹⁹ Bokenkamp 2007: 131.

horseback, but were unable to catch her until the brothers and several tens of other riders surrounded her. From her mouth there issued cries like those of a rabbit, and when they carried her home, she was unable to speak. Her body had been injured by the thorns of the brambles, and her mother picked them out, obtaining a double handful. [The girl] would not eat and after a month or so she died. Her father and mother were deeply bereft, and the whole family devoutly took up the precepts.⁵⁰⁰

Officer Wang made much effort to find his beloved daughter, who was especially dear to him because he already had so many sons.⁵⁰¹ Consequently, the punishment by moral powers for his fondness of hunting was directed at the child who was most precious to him.

The reason for the harm of children, thus, was seen as an emotional and physical harm of a father who committed misdeeds for which he could not have been officially punished by law – such misdeeds as killing a snake or hunting. Children were used in atonement regardless of their sex and their age. For this reason, premature death and strange diseases can be explained by violation of the social order and by disregarding certain moral values that were based on a basic understanding of Buddhist morality.

The punishment of children on behalf of their living father or a deceased male ancestor was actually considered as direct punishment of the wrongdoers – children in these cases were tools, or extended bodies, with which the father or grandfather could be punished. Children themselves were not capable of crimes until the age of five or seven.

In the words of Zengzeng who died as consequence of catching a cold before the age of seven: “Usually, when someone dies prematurely and has not reached the seventh year yet, he has not committed any crimes during his life time, and he does not receive retribution.”⁵⁰² These words put into the mouth of the ghost-child are consistent with an idea of the Celestial Masters that says “any sick person must only recollect and repent all the sins and misdeamors he or she committed from first reaching consciousness at about age seven.”⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ *Taiping guangji* 132: 935 (*Mingbao ji*), translation by Gjertson 1975: 230 (no. 30).

⁵⁰¹ An ideal family situation is having five sons and two daughters, see below.

⁵⁰² About a possible reason for the piling up of sins on a previous (usually dead) male generation, see Davis 2001: 43 and Strickmann 1985: 196-7. The latter argues psychologically and assumes that the living must have had great feelings of guilt with respect to their dead fathers and uncles. Therefore, whenever problems occurred the thought was not far fetched to see the reason for that problem in their recently deceased ancestors.

⁵⁰³ Davis 2001: 40, translates from a fifth century A.D. text from the Celestial Masters. In the Celestial Masters tradition children have been initiated at around age six or seven.

In the understanding of the Celestial Masters often forefathers were the most probable cause for children's diseases or death before they have reached the age of seven. Zengzeng, however, did not accuse his father of a crime. In fact, Zengzeng's narrative has not been written with the purpose of pointing out the father's crime of leaving his wife and child by themselves. The narrative pointed out a case of appeasing the dead. Yet, this narrative in addition is very clear about the idea of age and blameworthiness. Narratives of the kind I have summarized above, in which children were punished for their violent fathers whose violence was directed against the animal world, are numerous. They resemble a collaboration of Buddhist ideas concerning intertwined global fates and *karma* with the inheritance of crimes, or rather punishment, within the paternal family.

The special case of mothers

The transmission of misdeeds to the following generation was confined to fathers only. Mothers could not hand down misdeeds to their offspring or anybody else. Nevertheless, Cole points out that the "Buddhist version of filial piety also introduced a new complex of sin, guilt and indebtedness into the family. Buddhists texts increasingly asked sons to feel indebted to their mothers for a range of kindness (*en*) received in infancy, including the kindness of giving birth (*huai en*) and the kindness of breast-feeding (*ru bu zhi en*). Sons were also threatened with the possibility that their mothers, presented as such loving souls, were actually sinners, who would languish in a hell or purgatory after death."⁵⁰⁴ A mother could therefore be understood as the cause for the first crime of a child. Furthermore, when a child died at birth it caused emotional pain to its parents.⁵⁰⁵ Because of the birth process and the first three years of care they receive, children later were supposed to mourn for their mother's death for a certain period.

In the *Bloody Bowl Sutra* we find a description of pollution of birth, and the reader learns that the birth process alone was a reason for bringing a woman to hell. The Bloody Bowl Hell was inhabited by women only, and the women came to that specific hell "for such offenses as contaminating the ground spirits with the blood of childbirth or washing blood-stained garments in rivers with the result that those downstream inadvertently offered tea to gods brewed from contaminated water."⁵⁰⁶ Cole explains that "what has not been noted thus far is that much of the Buddhist literature on sin came to focus on the family and its

⁵⁰⁴ Cole 1998: 2.

⁵⁰⁵ See Ebrey 1993: 175-6 (she provides examples for the Song dynasty).

⁵⁰⁶ Ebrey 1993: 175.

principal function – reproduction. Buddhist authors drew on nearly all aspects of reproduction – including conception, pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, and child-care – to construct theories of reproduction that sought to problematise and even demonize biology for Buddhist ends.”⁵⁰⁷

With respect to a child’s sins against its mother, Cole especially mentions milk-debts, and quotes a Chinese Buddhist narrative from older Indian background. He writes that “mother and son are held together both by her irrepressible passion to mother him and by his continuing willingness to accept this love and milk even as an adult.”⁵⁰⁸ Analysing another narrative, Cole furthermore points out that “breast-feeding is the one kindness which sums up and overshadows all the other gifts bestowed on the young boy.”⁵⁰⁹ Children thus did not commit any misdeeds, but they rather had inherited a debt from their birth and the first three intensive-care years that they had to attend to in their later years. Sons were made to feel pity for their mothers and took the burden of helping them on their shoulders consciously. They had a choice to help their mothers and were not used in atonement, unlike the hereditary crimes from the paternal male line. Although the ideas of milk-debts and the Bloody Bowl Hell might not have been widespread outside of Buddhist texts, they have been read and disseminated by some people at certain places, and they thus formed a part of medieval thoughts about crimes, responsibilities, parents and children.

Mugitani Kunio regards especially this notion of duty from children to their parents and birth-guilt as problematic. Biological parents, he explains “contribute to the karmic causes and conditions that render the newborn child a creature of desire and illusion. [...] In this sense, the biological parents represent a hindrance to Daoist spiritual self-realization, although children must repay their parents for their kindness in bringing them up.”⁵¹⁰

To sum up, the ability for somebody to commit a moral transgression started at the age of seven – with the exception of the view according to which children already sinned because they had their mother given birth to them. The retribution system that I have described in the previous part is patriarchal, which means that sin could only be conferred from a father to his offspring. The sex of the child that was punished for its father did not matter. What counted was what was most hurtful to the father. A mother apparently did not hand down crimes, but was the cause of feelings of guilt and responsibility, which usually concerned male offspring only.

⁵⁰⁷ Cole 1998: 1-2.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*: 67.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 73.

⁵¹⁰ Mugitani Kunio 2004: 115.

The child's own misdeeds

Buddhist ideas also contained a notion of transferring misdeeds. However, generally seen, in Buddhism, disease, individual catastrophes and post-mortem punishment were repayments of the individual person, the original sinner, in the course of several lives.⁵¹¹ Children were therefore fully responsible for their own deeds. In Zongmi's (宗密, 780 - 841) words: "Even with parents and close relatives one cannot stand in for the other [and suffer the other's karmic retribution]. Therefore all wise people must themselves be diligent. Even if they have good karmic affinities [from previous lives], they should not make idle mistakes."⁵¹²

Generally, a child in Buddhism had the same value as, for example, an adult or a cat. Retribution of good or evil acts took place in different ways and times. It also did not matter if an evil act was big or small, as "an offense need not be great to warrant a severe punishment."⁵¹³ That is the reason for the incredible cruelty that we often face in narratives of retribution, for example when a girl who stole money from her parents in order to buy make-up was punished with death and subsequently was reborn as a goat within her former family.⁵¹⁴

Often, underworld trial was depicted in order to illustrate the punishment and the severity of certain transgressions. In one of those trials, Kong Ke, an administrator in the early years of the Tang dynasty, tried to explain to an underworld official why he had cooked eggs at the age of eight – eggs he was later accused of murdering as an adult in the underworld after his death:

"I was eight years old. It was Cold Food Day, and my mother gave me six eggs, which I cooked and ate." "That's right," said the official, "but are you trying to implicate your mother?"⁵¹⁵

This shows that one was responsible for one's own deeds in a Buddhist system of retribution. This Buddhist system of retribution was different from the belief-systems that had been applied prior to the introduction of Buddhism, which – again – "did not admit the possibility of a succession of rebirths, and

⁵¹¹ Gjertson 1975: 124.

⁵¹² Teiser 1988: 202.

⁵¹³ Gjertson 1975: 127.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*: 240 (no. 42).

⁵¹⁵ Gjertson 1975: 249 (no. 48).

posthumous retribution could therefore not be received by the person concerned, but only by his family or descendants.”⁵¹⁶

Yet, the last narrative should not be interpreted in too much Buddhist light, because the boy had also committed a crime with respect to the spirit of the special day, since at Cold Food one was not supposed to lit a fire and eat warm food. The boy thus paid for disregarding this ritual point as well.

3. Play and the community

The previous sections focused on the child-adult relation in a family context, concentrating on the moral behaviour which parents and children were expected to apply in each other's presence in general. The interaction between families in the upbringing of children bore a vital impact on the child's enculturation. We learned that the social environment of children consisted of more than fifty percent children. That means that the interactions among children should be crucial in their upbringing as well. Yet, given the nature of our sources which were composed on the basis of adult moral and political aims, interactions among children unsurprisingly did not have a prominent place in writings. In this section I will nonetheless analyse the few examples from medieval texts that describe how children played with each other.

I will also discuss how children played together with adults, that means, how adults and children are displayed to interact in a manner that did not focus primarily on instructing moral and hierarchical behaviour; although playing, of course, is instructive as well. In this respect, we find a few instances in which adults used toys to interact with children. The most significant events in which children and adults intermingled in a way that cannot be summed up as primarily morally instructive were fairs and festivals. At these events children played several roles, as participants, main actors or audience accompanying their care-givers, as I will show in the last part of this section.

Playing

Playing is done in interaction with others. Playing in general terms is one of the most important socialising activities in a child's development to adulthood. In

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*: 122. Yet, in the non-Buddhist idea, the child does not consciously choose to suffer for his father. Neither does the father ask for a transferal for punishment from himself to his offspring (or other innocent relatives).

play, children train physical coordination,⁵¹⁷ linguistic competence and intellectual abilities. Most significantly, in playing with other children, a child learns to deal with emotions that occur when they are winning and losing. Moreover, they learn to deal with subordination and domination, and gender roles. In fact, most literature that deals with play and socialisation is concerned with this last point. The study of children's play in general became most prominent through the works of Freud, Piaget and Erikson in the beginning and middle of the twentieth century.

Children in medieval times played 'in a crowd', with their fathers or they were provided with toys from their parents. And this is about all that we know about the practice of play in that era. For play was considered unsuitable for intelligent or filial children in medieval China and beyond. Both *Histories* of the Tang used the play of children only in a rhetorical argument, when the ridiculousness of a situation was explained, in order to dramatically envision it.⁵¹⁸

The ideal child would quote poems. Another ideal child would be witty and entertain adult the guests of his or her father. Still another ideal child would be filial and study hard. None of those ideal children would play. An example that is good as any other is the description of the childhood of Seventh Teacher Xin (辛七師) who is reported to have been very respectful and who did not dally around. At the age of ten he was fond of the Buddhist methods, and he carefully read Buddhist scriptures on a daily basis. He also worked out the Siddham script by himself.⁵¹⁹ Biographies of eminent Tang people thus depict childhood as rather devoid of play. Hence, precocious or spiritually active children like seven-year-old Wang Sengqian, for example, were depicted picking objects like a *qin* (琴, a musical instrument) and a picture book of filial children (小子圖) when presented with several objects.⁵²⁰

A different representation of ideal childhood could be observed in the picture of one hundred children, *baizitu* (百子圖). No such painting has been preserved from the Tang dynasty, and it probably was not yet painted as

⁵¹⁷ For example they train their fine motor skills, as can be seen in some Song paintings.

⁵¹⁸ See e.g. *Jiu Tangshu* 29: 2129; 132: 3648; 135: 3723; 181: 4692; *Xin Tangshu* 107: 4077; 202: 5769.

⁵¹⁹ *Taiping guangji* 96: 642 (*Yi shi zhi*). For more on precocious children, see below. More on the ability to read Siddham, a script used for writing sanscrit, see chapter V 'Education at home'.

⁵²⁰ *Taiping guangji* 207: 1585 (*Tan sou*), see above 'Grandparents;' on the ceremony 'choosing objects' (*zhuazhou* 抓周) in order to predict the child's future career see chapter V 'Introduction;' Tse Bartholomew 2002: 76 on some eighteenth century examples of that custom, which was taken seriously by many parents at that time.

commonly as it would be from the Song onward.⁵²¹ Yet, Zhou Yuwen quotes a text from the Song which reports the common Tang custom of using “One Hundred Sons” screens during marriage rites.⁵²² What is more, one of the earliest depictions of an individually playing child can be found on a stoneware ewer that dates from the ninth century which shows a boy carrying a lotus leaf. The motive is assumed to be a copy from depictions of Roman children, imported via the silk route,⁵²³ and it can also be found among the hundred-playing-sons motif. Nevertheless, the reason for this depiction was not to focus on the playing of the child with the plant, but on the symbolic meaning of fertility, “the combination of plants and boys, originally borrowed from the West, worked very well in China as fertility symbols.”⁵²⁴

Playing children as symbols for longevity were also part of the reality in narratives. A messenger, for example, sees a Daoist who carries two large jars, containing several tens of children some of whom were laughing, some were crying. They were in pairs of two and three and were playing alone and with each other.⁵²⁵

Despite these rather persistent and rigid ideas about the perfect child, we also come across many children who were playing. These children, who were often depicted alongside the main line in a narrative, played in crowds, and they were often between three and eight years old. That means they were usually below the age when continuous formal education would begin. Nonetheless, people occasionally still expected playful behaviour from older children.

Writing in general about imperial China, Limin Bai concludes that although “childish traits and playfulness were discouraged or even forbidden within the well-established Confucian norms [...] a study of children’s games, toys and play in traditional China, however, may suggest a childhood beyond the Confucian shadow.”⁵²⁶ To add, Children’s play might have been overlooked or interpreted and put in use differently than we would interpret it now. Since “integrating adult activities into their own play is one of the characteristics of children’s society,”⁵²⁷ children who mimicked their parents or imitated certain

⁵²¹ See Tse Bartholomew 2002: 57-83. Tse Bartholomew focuses on toys and games in connection with the one hundred child pictures during the Ming and Qing dynasties, but that were rooted in Song paintings already.

⁵²² Zhou Yuwen 1996: 65-6 (*Feng chuang xiao du* 楓窗小牘 by Yuan Jiong 袁褰).

⁵²³ See Tse Bartholomew 2002: 59 and Wicks and Avril 2002: 6ff.

⁵²⁴ Wicks and Avril 2002: 11.

⁵²⁵ *Taiping guangji* 346: 2738 (*He dong ji*).

⁵²⁶ Limin Bai 2005 (b): 9.

⁵²⁷ Limin Bai 2005 (b): 26; Erikson 1963: 222, “the playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery. I propose the theory that the child’s play is the infantile form of the human ability to

rituals and ways of talking might just have been called precocious or filial. Evenso, often children's play might not be of such an interest to adults. The case of a cousin of Duan Chengshi (段成式), sometime during the ninth century, is one of the few examples that tell about the incorporation of a real life experience in play:

An older cousin of Duan Chengshi dreamed that he saw drums beaten. When he woke up, his little brother was [actually] beating on the door, taking it for yamen-drums.⁵²⁸

Space for play

Children's play is described to take place in the house, the garden, at a pond near the house, in the fields of the child's dwelling, the sides of a street, on the streets during festivals, or the banks of a river.⁵²⁹ These places thus circumscribe the potential sphere of activity of a child. With respect to the processing of symbolic content in narratives, we do however observe that the further away from a house playing children were depicted, the more likely they were to be involved in strange events,⁵³⁰ finding strange objects in rivers or lakes,⁵³¹ or they themselves were strange and not human.⁵³² Playing children in the wilderness or semi-wilderness were consequently often interpreted by their adult observers as demonic and had to be exorcised.⁵³³ We can thus conclude that 'real' children would rather be found playing in groups close to houses where people dwell.

Children playing in and alongside streams were a frequent sight, when houses were not too far away. What exactly they were playing is unclear. The picture that the authors conveyed is just that of a 'group of playing children,' who occasionally would fight with each other. For example, we do not know if

deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning."

⁵²⁸ *Taiping guangji* 282: 2246-7 (*You yang za zu*).

⁵²⁹ Limin Bai 2005: 15, suggests that "peasant children played in the fields where their parents were working. ... adults work-places are also children's playgrounds," which can also be possible places for play in the Tang dynasty.

⁵³⁰ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 131: 934 (*Ming bao ji*).

⁵³¹ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 365: 2899 (*You yang za zu*); *Taiping guangji* 399: 3199 (*You yang za zu*);

⁵³² E.g. *Taiping guangji* 469: 3867 (*Qiang guai lu*); *Taiping guangji* 369: 2934 (*You yang za zu*); *Taiping guangji* 370: 2942-3 (*Xuan guai lu*).

⁵³³ The connections between death, longevity and children as well as between children and nature, and children as creeps are analysed in "The Other Child" (Pissin, not yet published).

children were actually swimming in the water, just walking in its lower parts or playing in boats.⁵³⁴

When playing in a crowd, children were often said to take over the space alongside roads. Playing next to the road was dangerous, like it was for a boy who nearly died when driven over by an ox-cart.⁵³⁵ The observation of children playing along the streets as well as in streams also implies that they must have learned about the rules and dangers of the street and how to handle or move in water.

Playing in a group in places away from ones dwelling was considered suitable only for older children. Very young children stayed with their mother, which means they played in places confined to women, such as the kitchen. Earlier we have already come across the woman who had let her son crawl on the kitchen stove.⁵³⁶ Children in the kitchen and other places confined to women were not always well attended and had to cope with the dangers of such places.⁵³⁷

Children also played in gardens. These children probably were from better-off families and did not necessarily join the youthful crowds that occupy the streets and rivers.⁵³⁸ They were usually older than seven and around ten years of age, that means they supposedly had to study and should follow the ideal of not-playing, they ought to be serious instead. Children in these situations did not necessarily play alone, because they probably had play mates and boy servants accompanying them in their family garden.⁵³⁹

Mates and foes

The description of children 'playing in a crowd' did not specify the age or the gender of the children involved or the exact games they played. I do not know whether girls made up part of the crowd, because the gender composition of 'the

⁵³⁴ Compare these images that are described in texts with the painting of Su Hanchen from the Song.

⁵³⁵ *Taiping guangji* 314: 2489 (*Yutang xianhua*).

⁵³⁶ *Taiping guangji* 113: 785-87 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

⁵³⁷ Of course, in the narratives we also have to deal with male fear and the preconception that one cannot trust a woman concerning child rearing.

⁵³⁸ Well-off families might also have been equipped with ponds in front of their houses in which their offspring would play and experience adventures. *Taiping guangji* 278: 2214 (*Ji shen lu*); *Taiping guangji* 370: 2939-40 (*You yang za zu*); *Taiping guangji* 159: 1144-5 (*Xuan guai lu*).

⁵³⁹ *Taiping guangji* 352: 2787-8 (*Ju tan lu*). This narrative takes place during the later Han dynasty. In this instance, strangeness enters the human realm, but as a blessing and not as something creepy.

crowd' was never specified. We can only guess that children in a crowd were most probably boys below the age in which they were more rigorously bound into social obligations such as studying and working.

A local group of children was not exclusive. It appears that they would play with any child that came along, as the narrative of the orphan, and later Chan master, Yiguang (儀光禪師, died in 736) suggests. The future monk, after his wet nurse had abandoned him when he was eight years old, was playing with children alongside the road in a village where he incidentally passed through. The children obviously did not object to accept another child, whom they had never seen before in their group.⁵⁴⁰

Only occasionally did narratives specify the play-mates of children. We have already come across neighbour's children that played together, for example the ox-herder and the neighbour boy, who were in a fight.⁵⁴¹ Another pair of play-mates was made up of Wan'er and Fengliu, whose female care-givers had a disagreement about social hierarchy which they fought out over the heads of their offspring.⁵⁴²

Possible play mates other than neighbours are siblings. The son of Gu Kuang (顧況), who died and was later reborn in his father's family, played with his brothers and sisters at the age of seven during his second life in that family. When a brother slapped him in play the seven-year-old boy protested loudly. Apparently he played with hierarchy, stating that he was actually the senior child (兄) instead of his older brother and therefore should not be beaten by him.⁵⁴³

Finally, Schafer mentions an episode of emperor Jing Zong's (敬宗, r.825-827) play-time, when the young emperor used concubines as play mates: "The boy emperor Jing Zong made a bizarre game of shooting his concubines with paper arrows containing powdered borneol and musk, which gave a powerful fragrance to the lucky ladies who were hit."⁵⁴⁴

Children also play alone. Xianyi, for example, plays alone in the garden when suddenly a person calls her and foretells her future.⁵⁴⁵ Xianyi was not only

⁵⁴⁰ *Taiping guangji* 627-9 (*Ji wen*). Only the head of the household became suspicious before dinner time, and the boy then sneaked away – taking care of himself, as his wet nurse had strongly advised him to do.

⁵⁴¹ *Taiping guangji* 395: 3160 (*Jishenlu*).

⁵⁴² *Taiping guangji* 286: 2281-2 (*Ling guai ji*).

⁵⁴³ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3091 (*You yang za zu*).

⁵⁴⁴ Schafer 1963: 167.

⁵⁴⁵ *Taiping guangji* 159: 1144-5 (*Xuan guai lu*). Xianyi was very frightened. The stranger addressed her with *bi* (鄙) and tells her that one son of hers will be called Qin Taizi; Xianyi fell unconscious,

playing without playmates, but apparently was also without supervision and was not aware of the possible danger of a stranger. The thirteen-year-old son of a villager, to give another example, was observed by the other village people, 'playing and dancing' in the field, as they told the searching father.⁵⁴⁶ The villagers apparently did not find it strange to find a child playing alone in the fields nearby their dwellings.

Children at play were also used as a motive in paintings representing innocence, joy and fertility – for painters and consumers of paintings at least. For some adults, children were just a source of great annoyance. The older cousin of Duan Chengshi was awakened by his little nephew, who played yamen-drums with the door. Yet, he was only bemused about his dream and was not bothered by the child. Another person, Li Ningdao, known for his choleric nature, on the other hand, reacted violently against his cousin whose playing irritated him. When Ningdao did not manage to catch the little boy who ran around, he lured him into his vicinity with a cake and then bit his breast and back until the child was bleeding.⁵⁴⁷ The spheres of adult men and women, as well as children were thus very close to each other and collisions were unavoidable. Mothers or other women in charge often had to intervene to protect their very young children against their older siblings and other family members.

Toys and games

Duan Hui (段暉), whose style name was Zhangzuo (長祚),⁵⁴⁸ was studying with Ouyang Tan (歐陽湯). There was also another student who studied together with Duan Hui. This other student was leaving his teacher's home after two years and asked for a wooden horse from Hui. Hui made a toy horse from wood and gave it to him. The boy was very happy, thanked him and said: "I am the son of the Lord of Mount Tai (泰山府君子). I followed the orders to study abroad. Now I want to return home. I thank you very much!" After he finished talking, he mounted the wooden horse, ascended into the air and flew away.⁵⁴⁹

but because her family was attending her well, she did not get any disease in the following ten days.

⁵⁴⁶ *Taiping guangji* 131: 934 (*Ming bao ji*).

⁵⁴⁷ *Taiping guangji* 244: 1886-7 (*Chao ye qian zai*). Backbiting is actually mentioned as one of twenty-two misdeeds (for Daoists) and is punishable by reducing once lifespan, according to the *Demon-Statutes of Nüqing* (*Nüqing guilu*, HY 789; see Strickmann 2001: 84).

⁵⁴⁸ Father of Duan Chenggeng (段承根), a fifth century historian.

⁵⁴⁹ *Taiping guangji* 360: 2861 (*Hou Weishu*); *Weishu* 52: 1158.

Wooden or bamboo horses often were used as symbols for childhood. Yet, bamboo or wooden horses did not feature a lot in anecdotal literature, except in a symbolic function.⁵⁵⁰ In the above-mentioned case of the sixth century, the way the action of making the wooden horse is described is: ‘making in play’ (戲作). Hui made a toy horse, which is then actually used, because its rider was the son of a non-human being.

More often than bamboo horses we see that almost anything could be used as a toy.⁵⁵¹ Yan Zhitui, for example, warned about leaving books lying around, because scattered books spotted by children would be destroyed in play.⁵⁵² Adults also resorted to their immediate environment and gave a child whatever was at hand. When a certain scholar once found a stone in the mountains, he took it home and stored it for some years. Later he gave it to his toddler child to play with, who subsequently lost it.⁵⁵³ Other objects children would frequently play with, besides stones, were knives, pearls, lacquer balls, gourds, and mirrors.⁵⁵⁴

Children are described as being rather attached to the objects that they had chosen as toys. Often toys are mentioned in narratives that concern children who remembered their former life as children. Children in these cases inquired about their old toys. A little girl, for example, used to be fond of playing with a little knife, and incidentally even hurt her mother’s hand with it. She then died when she was seven years old, and one year later the mother bore another daughter. When she was four years old she asked the mother about the whereabouts of the knife. The mother had put the knife away, because seeing it

⁵⁵⁰ We come to know of a great variety of toys especially from Song paintings. Tse Bartholomew offers a long list of the different toys children were playing with “According to the illustrations, Song dynasty boys played chess and other board games. They kicked balls, spun tops, rattled the *bolanggu* (a drumlike device on a stick with two beaters attached by strings), pumped swings, and played with toy carts. They liked percussion instruments such as the drum, cymbals, wooden clappers and gong, and they accompanied puppet shows, and lion dances with their music,” Tse Bartholomew 2002: 58.

⁵⁵¹ Limin Bai 2005 (b): 19.

⁵⁵² Yan Zhitui V, Teng (trsl.) 1968: 20.

⁵⁵³ *Taiping guangji* 424: 3451 (*Yuan hua ji*). The stone turned out to be a dragon-egg. See also *Taiping guangji* 370: 2939 (*You yang za zu*), where a bewitched piece of wood in the form of a demonic child played with the writing utensils of a scholar. *Taiping guangji* 360: 2857 (*Lie yi zhuan*), during the Han dynasty, the little daughter of Zhuan once split reed and made rats in order to [play] hunting. When she put them on the ground the reed-rats suddenly could walk. The girl made more and put a curse on them. She died a sort time thereafter.

⁵⁵⁴ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 334: 2651 (*Guang yi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 196 (no. 112), Official Wei Li’s ten year old daughter asks her father to buy her a lacquered mirror from the city, which he does not do immediatly.

reminded her painfully of her deceased daughter.⁵⁵⁵ Another example of toys can be found in the narrative about Wen Dan (文澹), who fell into a well, died and was reborn. When he was still young, he made his care-givers look for the toys from his former life. In a tree trunk they found a silver *hulu*-gourd (葫蘆), a lacquered ball (漆毬) and a perfumed bag (香囊).⁵⁵⁶

The theme of the remembered toy might be connected with the practice with which the future career of a child was predicted by presenting it with several meaningful objects out of which it has to choose one – which was later often done on a child's first birthday.⁵⁵⁷ This practice, in fact, also took place in Tang times, but not necessarily on the first birthday. Wang Sengqian's grandparents, for example, presented the later famous Southern Qi (479-502) scholar with several objects of which he could choose some, at the age of seven.⁵⁵⁸ He had chosen a *qin* and a picture book on filial piety, which was seen as a significant choice when viewing his later years.⁵⁵⁹

Emperor Xuanzong (玄宗, r.712-756) had a similar experience, being chosen as the favourite grandson by female emperor Wu Zetian (武則天), because he behaved differently than the other children of the court when confronted with many toys. The empress would order all her grandsons into the hall and let them play there as she would watch. She then had many toys 'from the West' brought in and put them everywhere in the room and watched the ambitions of the children.⁵⁶⁰ Only toddler Xuanzong was sitting in the middle and did not move. The empress patted him on his back and said that this child would become the Taiping emperor. Then she gave him the magical object "Jade Dragon" (玉龍).⁵⁶¹

When young, children of both sexes would play with any of the objects mentioned above. Most of the objects such as mirrors, needles and scissors were part of the female sphere. Because children would usually be together with women until their seventh year of age at the latest, it is not surprising that they were reported to play with especially those objects. Thus, finding an object to play with was not a big problem if anything at hand could be a toy. One characteristic that was essential for finding objects and putting them to use or investigating them, was curiosity on behalf of the child. Curiosity, interestingly, is hardly discussed in medieval sources. To provide a rare example, a four-year-

⁵⁵⁵ *Taiping guangji* 387: 3086 (*Ming xiang ji*).

⁵⁵⁶ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3095 (*Ye ren xian hua*), see also *Taiping guangji* 387: 3087 (*Guang yi ji*), see chapter V 'Failed education.'

⁵⁵⁷ *Zhua zhou* (抓周) or *shi er* (試兒).

⁵⁵⁸ For Wang Sengqian's biography, see *Nan Qishu*: 591.

⁵⁵⁹ *Taiping guangji* 207: 1585 (*Tan sou*).

⁵⁶⁰ 'From the West' means: exotic toys.

⁵⁶¹ *Taiping guangji* 396: 3165-6 (*Shen yi lu*, *Guang de shen yi lu*).

old member of an aristocrat family during the fifth century was very curious about three nestlings that were fed by their mother on the top of his bed. When he tried to feed the nestlings himself he used some plants that they could not digest and died. In order to investigate their death, the boy cut their bellies open and had a look in them. He apparently did not feed the nestlings with the aim to kill them, but only as a result of a child's curiosity.⁵⁶²

Children also took part in the leisure and fun activities of adults. While adults, for example, enjoyed cockfights, little boys enacted cockfights with wooden cocks.⁵⁶³ Children, like adults, also played *tanqi* (彈棋) chess,⁵⁶⁴ a game that was played by people of all social strata. Even six-year-old boys knew this chess-game. The much-told tale that the school boy Yang Laoxin of Huayang was humming a poem about *tanqi*, is just one example.⁵⁶⁵ The *Bulu jizhuan* reports of Xizong (僖宗 r. 874-889) that the later emperor had many abilities when he was a teenager – he just did not understand how to play chess.⁵⁶⁶

Another game that children enjoyed together, alongside adults, was polo.⁵⁶⁷ When in 904 the official Zhu Quanzhong accompanied the emperor Zhaozong (昭宗, r.888-904) from Chang'an to Luoyang, two hundred polo players, including little boys, were with him.⁵⁶⁸ Another adult's game, called *shubu* had a gambling character rather than being a physical exercise.⁵⁶⁹ It was played with dice, and several poems show that teenagers could be nearly addicted to it.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶² *Taiping guangji* 131: 930-1 (*Xu Sou shen ji*), later the aristocrat had three sons who instead of talking could only make weird noises. A Buddhist who, passing by and hearing the weird noises of the children, made him remember the killing of the nestlings, and made him repent it. The sons thereupon could talk.

⁵⁶³ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 330. Wencheng's sources are wide ranged. Primarily, they comprise narratives from the *Taiping guangji*, and he finds much information on play in the story *Dongcheng laofu zhuan* (東城老父傳) by Cheng Hong (eighth/ninth century), *Taiping guangji* 485: 3992-3995, but he also relies on other narratives and on biographies from the *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*.

⁵⁶⁴ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 341, 342.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*: 342.

⁵⁶⁶ *Taiping guangji* 279: 2211-2 (*Bulu jizhuan*).

⁵⁶⁷ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 346. See also Xu Yuanmin 2003: 103ff. Xu gives a short account on the history of polo in China, which was a popular sport in the Tang dynasty, and he discusses its military background. One would need great fields and good horses in order to play it, for this reason, it could not have been done by just anyone and most likely only in Northern China.

⁵⁶⁸ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 346.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid*: 350ff.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 351-2.

Some games were confined to women and girls.⁵⁷¹ One game was called “Competing with Flowers” (*dou caohua* 鬪草花), in which women and girls filled a pretty dress with flowers. Li Wencheng suggests that this game might also have had a gamble-character. Women and children liked it, because of the beautiful flowers. Rich people would spend lots of money in order to plant flowers which they then could gather in spring time.⁵⁷² Another game was swinging (*qiuqian* 秋千). Women of wealthy families would make several ropes in different colours and set up swings in the gardens, sometimes up to several metres high.⁵⁷³ Most of these games supposedly took place during the Cold Food Festival (寒食節),⁵⁷⁴ although it is not impossible that some games would be copied by children into their daily games.⁵⁷⁵

Festivals, fairs and other attractions⁵⁷⁶

Festivals were important fix points in the annual schedule of communities. Children and especially adolescents were part of them in many respects: as audience or performers in rituals of the fairs that would accompany the festivals, or as symbols in images that would be given away on the occasion of special days.⁵⁷⁷ Wicks and Avril, for example, discuss a fragment of a greeting card from the seventh century which displays a boy playing with a dog next to auspicious plants. This card, which held the symbolic meaning for the wish for male progeny and thereby the wish for prolonged life, was probably a gift between friends on the occasion of Man Day (人日), which was celebrated during one of

⁵⁷¹ However, since all little children, at least below the age of around ten, would be together with women, I assume that boys below the age of ten would participate, too.

⁵⁷² *Ibid*: 333. Children and flowers are also symbols for fertility. Thus children that play with flowers during a special festival season, especially during the New Year festivities are given a clear function within the activities

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*: 334-5; see also Xu Yuanmin 2003: 96ff, who underscores the special female character of that game, which is done before all by palace women.

⁵⁷⁴ Li Wencheng 1998. On the ‘Cold Food’ festival, which took place around the 105th day after the Winter Solstice and which might continue for three days, see Holzman 1998.

⁵⁷⁵ The seventh century commentary of the sixth century almanac *Jing Chu suishi ji* also mentions those games that are ritually played at certain days, see e.g. *Jing Chu suishi ji*: 72 and 156.

⁵⁷⁶ Davis 2001: 61.

⁵⁷⁷ Limin Bai broadly suggests that “the celebration of various festivals also contributed to some forms of children’s toys and games. Take toy lanterns for example. In traditional celebrations, children often mixed happily with other age groups and, indeed, were usually privileged to play an active role,” Limin Bai 2005: 20.

the first days of the first month.⁵⁷⁸ Wishes for sons were not confined to Man Day, but in fact “are tied in some way to all major festivals held in China.”⁵⁷⁹

Major festivals, special days in the annual schedule, were celebrated by everyone, especially if they were held in order to ward off evil influences, particularly plagues and epidemic diseases. Except for the Man Day when noise making by the whole household was required, there was also the Lantern Festival. This is the climax of the first month celebrations, but we mostly know of Song descriptions about children’s participation.⁵⁸⁰

Another important festival is the fifth day of the fifth month.⁵⁸¹ Because the influence of ‘evil energy’ was especially great on that day, children, like adults, searched for and collected medicinal herbs. They then competed to see who had found the rarest plant and whose plants were more effective in healing.⁵⁸² At least during the Song dynasty, toads were associated with that festival, because they “were used for medicine to combat disease and poisonous insects, and they were thought to be at the height of their curative power on this day.”⁵⁸³ In paintings of the Song dynasty children were thus depicted with toads. This was probably again done for symbolic reasons, as a means to ward off evil from one’s descendants.

The following big day in the calendar was the seventh day of the seventh month. This festival was held for the occasion of the auspices of fertility and under the erotic meeting between Cowherd and Weaver Girl, two star constellations.⁵⁸⁴ Girls on that day performed special rituals to test and display their needle work skills.⁵⁸⁵ The day was for this reason probably more significant for adolescents just before marriage than for young children.

⁵⁷⁸ Wicks and Avril 2002: 10. That day is also known for a mass appearance of demonic birds that especially like to attack little children; see *Jing Chu suishi ji* and chapter IV ‘Supernatural and natural dangers’.

⁵⁷⁹ Wicks and Avril 2002: 11.

⁵⁸⁰ Zhou Yuwen 1996: 55-6.

⁵⁸¹ This day, like the fifth day of the first month also bears connotations of violence against children, although danger on the fifth day of the fifth month is more intricate than on the fifth day of the first month. Children born on this day are said to pose a danger to their parents. Therefore sayings advise that children born on that day are to be killed. That means that on the fifth day of the fifth month children are protected as possible victims of evil vapours. They pose a possible danger for their parents and hence are again possible victims of their parents.

⁵⁸² Tse Bartholomew 2002: 71; this game is played like pokemon cards.

⁵⁸³ Tse Bartholomew 2002: 67.

⁵⁸⁴ Dudbridge shows that this day is intricately woven into Tang narratives, Dudbridge 1995: 107ff.

⁵⁸⁵ See *Taiping guangji* 387: 3088 (*Shi yi*).

Occasions for holding a fair were numerous. They included events such as the third day of the third month, the fifth day of the fifth month, the emperor's birthday and temple festivals of any religious group. The Japanese tourist-monk Ennin (圓仁, ca. 794 - 864) briefly noted some of the festivals that he witnessed during his travels through the Tang realm in the ninth century. He found especially noteworthy the celebrations of New Year, Winter Solstice (around the eleventh month), Spring Begins, Cold Food (middle or end of the second month),⁵⁸⁶ Spring Time Triumph Song (end of the third month), and All Souls (fifteenth of the seventh month). He also wrote about a "great festival of Yangzhou" in 838 on the twenty-third day of the ninth month.⁵⁸⁷

Although Ennin obviously was aware of the celebrations, he did not mention fairs that were held simultaneously with the religious celebrations. He also did not mention if other attractions and amusement for non clerics and also non-lay participants were provided. Only regarding the All Souls festival near Taiyuan *fu*, where Ennin stayed in 840, do we get an idea that some more additional activities, apart from sacrifices in the monasteries, must have taken place. Reischauer writes that "at this time, [Ennin] noted that the celebrations lasted for three days and that the various Buddhist cloisters had all arranged displays of great beauty and wonder, which were respectfully viewed by the whole populace of the city, though in the evening the people 'carried on wantonly.'"⁵⁸⁸ Still, we only learn from Ennin that many celebrations took place, but we acquire hardly any information about the actual extent of such celebrations.

During these occasions people actually organised plays, games and other attractions, sometimes also referred to as 'a hundred Games' (*baixi* 百戲). The 'Hundred Games', which had the character of a fair, were subject to many bans during the Sui and the Tang dynasties. Such proscriptions point out that it was impossible to forbid the games. Indeed, Li Wencheng notes that fairs were en vogue during both dynasties and many entertainment arts had been perfected

⁵⁸⁶ The Cold Food Festival was celebrated around the middle or the end of the second month. The Buddhist tourist Ennin, who travelled for several years within the Tang realm and visited numerous monasteries during the ninth century, reports in 839 that the celebrations lasted three days in Yangzhou. "Two years later at the capital he noted that the Cold Food Festival lasted from the sixteenth to the eighteenth of the second moon. On this occasion he remarked that 'all the households paid reverence to the [family] graves,'" and three years later he implied that that it was customary for government labourers to receive a seven-day vacation at this time," Reischauer 1955: 130.

⁵⁸⁷ Reischauer 1955: 124-135.

⁵⁸⁸ Reischauer 1955: 131.

during the medieval times.⁵⁸⁹ As an illustration, I summarize a narrative by Li Chuo (李綽, around 889), the author of the *Shangshu gushi* (尚書故實), about one event when a Hundred Games was held during a festival around a Buddhist temple:

During the time when Zhangqiu Jianqiong (章仇兼瓊) was governor, a Buddhist temple held a big festival,⁵⁹⁰ and a Hundred Games and other attractions were displayed in the courtyard. A ten-year-old boy danced on the tips of bamboo-poles. Suddenly something came in the shape of an owl, took the child and flew away. The crowd was startled and brought the festivity to an end. The parents found their son several days later on the top of a Buddhist pagoda. His spirits and body were dull and it took a while until he could talk. He told that he saw something like a flying *yaksha* (夜叉) that was painted on walls, which made him enter the pagoda. During the day it was feeding him with the taste of fruit, drinks and other food, and he had no idea where he was. It took ten days before the boy's spirits were restored.⁵⁹¹

These Hundred Games must have been the activities that Ennin described with some distaste as 'wanton'. The actual motivation for having the Hundred Games in this case was a Buddhist celebration at a temple. In this example we are also provided with information about one of the most discussed attraction of such a fair during medieval China, which was pole-dancing.⁵⁹² The performers danced and sang on the tip of a pole at various heights. Understandably, light bodies were preferred, which is why we can find many child-, especially girls, among the performers.

This form of entertainment enjoyed great popularity and of one famous pole dancing girl during Xuanzong's reign period (712-756) we even know the name, Wang Daniang (王大娘). We do not know this dancer's age, but she impressed the audience in the imperial court where she performed on the emperor's birthday. Her performance even inspired ten year old 'Divine Boy' Liu Yan (劉晏), who was working on the correction of characters in the library, to write a poem about her and present it to the famous emperor's concubine Yang Guifei (楊貴妃, 719-756).⁵⁹³ Many decades later, during a birthday celebration for

⁵⁸⁹ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 318ff; see also Xu Yuanming 2003: 176 ff.

⁵⁹⁰ Zhangqiu Jianqiong was a politician active towards the end of Xuanzong's reign (r. 712-756). He was a governor in Sichuan, where this narrative takes place, around 739-46.

⁵⁹¹ *Taiping guangji* 356: 2818 (*Shang shu gu shi*).

⁵⁹² Li Wencheng e.a. 1998: 323ff.

⁵⁹³ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 324; *Taiping guangji* 175 (*Minghuang zalu*)

Jingzong (敬宗, 809-826), a group of five girls who were about eight or nine years old entertained the court with pole dancing as well.⁵⁹⁴

Another major attraction for the whole family was a magician.⁵⁹⁵ Magicians would not only perform on fairs during special days, but could also appear on the market place at any time.⁵⁹⁶ In 815 Li Xibo (李僖伯) from Longxi told the famous poet Wen Tingyun (溫庭筠, ca. 812-870)⁵⁹⁷ about an event in 806, when he happened to meet a short woman who traveled into the city and walked rather weird. When they arrived in the city, the woman gave a show. People crowded around her and especially children found her interesting. She put a veil around her head and performed for them, making the children laugh. That went on for two days. At last a child rushed forward and, what no child had managed to do before, it picked away the veil and revealed a three *chi* long bamboo stick instead of the woman.⁵⁹⁸ According to the biographical dates of Wen Tingyun and the dates he gives for the events of the telling of the story and the magic show, he probably heard the story when he was still a child.⁵⁹⁹

Apparently, the adult onlookers did not use their senior position to tell the children off for approaching the female magician. Still, some magicians included children in their show. A Daoist magician, who was persuaded by the guests of his host to give a performance, for example ordered the little servant-boys among them to close the porch.⁶⁰⁰ This magician thus integrated the help of children into his performance, and subsequently might not have been so rudely interrupted as the female magician who turned out to be a bamboo stick.

This example shows that children not only participated in festivals as entertainers, but that they were also among the audience.⁶⁰¹ The narratives

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 324-5.

⁵⁹⁵ On magicians see e.g. Robinet 1979: "Magic is a reproduction of the natural process. It is conceived as a mimesis, a production and not a pretense; it produces a living form, not a copy. The difference between magical and natural processes is that, above all, the effect of the former is superficial and unstable," (46).

⁵⁹⁶ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 328.

⁵⁹⁷ Wen Tingyun's biography can be found in *Jiu Tangshu* 190.b: 5078-9. See Rouzer 1993 on Wen Tingyun's poetry.

⁵⁹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 343: 2722 (*Qian sun zi*).

⁵⁹⁹ Maybe he was a bit older than three years otherwise he could not have remembered the story so well. I do not know whether mentioning the dates are only a matter of style or whether the narrative is actually one of his childhood stories.

⁶⁰⁰ *Taiping guangji* 75: 468-9 (*Yi shi zhi*).

⁶⁰¹ Perhaps the scene is not so different from a depiction from Li Gonglin, who lived later (ca. 1041-1106). In one of his illustrations of the *Xiaojin* under Emperor Huizong (r. 1101-1126) he included a scene that "shows an older couple enjoying the entertainment of a magician, a puppeteer, and a drummer provided by their grown children. The couple's son and his wife

further show what sort of audience children were. Apparently decorum, regarding respecting a performer who would not belong to the child's usually known social circle, did not apply for such occasions and children could interrupt a performance.

Children did not go alone to festivals, but in the company of adults. Adults, then, expected children to enjoy the fair. Only precocious children like Zhang Ding (張定) could resist the temptations of theatre plays and other performances:

[One day] Zhang Ding went to relatives together with his parents in the Lianshui district. When they reached the village, there was a music play. Everybody went to see it. Only Ding did not go there. The parents said: "That play is really good! All your cousins are going. Why are you alone not watching it?"⁶⁰²

Zhang Ding was a special case, because he secretly studied Daoist arts of longevity since his early teens. Like most precocious children, he looked down upon attractions and despised fun such as fairs.⁶⁰³ Still, despite being proud of their wise offspring, his parents ironically treated him with a lack of comprehension.

bring food while the grandchildren sit in the foreground, facing their grandparents and watching the entertainment," Wicks 2002: 163 (illustration on page 164).

⁶⁰² *Taiping guangji* 74: 464-5 (*Xian zhuan shi yi*).

⁶⁰³ Li Wencheng (e.a.) 1998: 1-5. On precocious children, see chapter V.

V. Danger and violence

The greatest danger for children lied in their own physical weakness. In Chapter III I have focused on the growing body of the child as it was understood by medical authors, and in the previous chapter I have addressed the sometimes problematic relation between female care-givers with children. Both themes form parts in this chapter that discusses the child as one of the weakest member of an elite community.

The first section provides a thorough analysis of the child's physical weakness. The risks for its survival were found in its own body and the developmental processes it experienced rendered it particularly vulnerable, which I explain here. Moreover, this physical weakness made the child an easy victim of inexperienced physical care. In that respect, male authors suspected women to purposely or unconsciously attack and endanger those that were under their care.

Medieval children were prone to demonic attacks. There, in fact, existed a row of demons in medieval China that specifically focused on children. I discuss those demons in the second section of this chapter, alongside natural dangers in forms of predatory animals. This distinction between demons and predators is not based on medieval representation of cases in which children were attacked, because the realm outside human borders was a conglomerate between wild animals, demons and other beings with the ability of shape-shifting. Demonic attacks, however, appear to be feared more than attacks by wild animals. At any rate, more texts about protection against demons than against animals exist.

In the last section I discuss those dangers that can be grouped under 'social violence'. There I analyse the stereotypical malevolent people such as the stepmother and the maternal uncle, but also the stereotypical child victim, such

as the offspring of a concubine. Within that framework I also discuss abortion which I classify as violence against children.

We already have learned in previous chapters that it was common for elite children to move from one place to another. Such migration had different causes. Sometimes it was for the better of the child and done to ensure its upbringing. When migration was caused by economic crisis or war, children were easy victims of it. In the last part of the last section I therefore discuss cases in which migration had a cruel impact on children's lives.

1. The child's physical weakness

The young child, particularly until the age of two, but also until the age of ten, was physically vulnerable. The reasons were its growth process and its physical incompleteness. With incompleteness, medical authors did not mean that the child lacked substances, but that these substances were not yet stable and at their right place.

Furthermore, the dependence of children on their female care-givers could be fatal in the eyes of male authors. Reading our sources closely, we find that men suspected women to be in charge of treating their offspring in the wrong way. This suspicion went so far that men often believed that women were the cause of their offspring's death. In this part I concentrate on this dangerous relation between young infants and female care-givers, because this relation was also based on the infant's physical weakness. At the end of this section I also discuss some of the most common incidents of household accidents that ended fatally. All such incidents – disease and death through their physical condition, female care-giving and household accidents – happened to children below the age of five and therefore can foremost be reasoned by their physical condition and dependency.

Body substances

One crucial point of the understanding of the child's body was the knowledge about the unfinished status of the child. Therefore, medieval medical theorists emphasized the process Changing and Steaming, which was the moulding of the child into its place among humans. It was of great concern to care-givers to observe the child's body temperature, its crying, smell, the colour of face and eyes, urine and faeces, spasms and other appearances and movements, and to interpret these signs correctly. Symptoms had to be considered by whether they

were side effects of the process of Changing and Steaming, based on a general disease or whether they were a sign of a special disease that only afflicts children. The process Changing and Steaming, thus, was visible on the body and could be felt by touching the body. By detecting this process the prevention of complicated diseases could be guaranteed.

The physical signs were related to invisible processes and partly invisible substances in the child's body. These substances, in fact, were vaguely defined, but frequently mentioned as a cause for disease. They were the *shen*-spirits, the *hun*- and *po*-soul, blood and *qi* energy.⁶⁰⁴ Accordingly, one description about the condition of children often returned as the most significant one: "blood and *qi* of little children are weak. Nerves (*jing*) and spirits are also weak."⁶⁰⁵ Many variations of this statement can be found throughout the medical literature that addressed children. Not only blood and *qi*, nerves and spirits were weak or "not yet substantial," but also skin, flesh, *yin* and *yang*. Because of these weaknesses, children could be hurt by the slightest sudden change.⁶⁰⁶ The greatest concern was that the child might be hurt by demonic *qi*.⁶⁰⁷

Medical texts on children, however, did not give much information about the *shen*-spirits, and the *hun*- and *po*-souls, and were not specific about how they could be damaged or how they could cause disease.⁶⁰⁸ A narrative from the early ninth century, tells more about the intrinsic relation between the *hun* and *po* souls and the body:

A local official Zheng (鄭君) in Huichang of Tongzhou had a daughter who was very important to him. She suffered from many ailments since she was young and it seemed as if her *shen*-spirit and her *hun*-soul were not sufficient. Zheng asked Wang Jushi [王居士 who was locally known to be refined in Daoist art] about what could be done about it. Wang said: "This girl has no disease, but when she was born, her *hun*-soul had not yet returned from its former life [in another person]." Zheng wanted to know more about this and Wang Jushi told him: "So-and-so from so-and-so district has the former body of your daughter.

⁶⁰⁴ The three worms are only rarely mentioned.

⁶⁰⁵ *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 47: 2 on corpse-*zhu*. This basic definition of children was part of the medical theory about children until the nineteenth century, see Hsiung 2005: 36.

⁶⁰⁶ *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 6 on fits; *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 47: 7 (14). See also the *Tang Code* that calls children young and weak, and therefore cannot be punished, (Johnson (trsl.) 1979: 169). This prescription derived from the *Book of Rites*, Part I: "When he is seven, we say that he is an object of pitying love. Such a child and one who is very old, though they may be chargeable with crime, are not subjected to punishment," Legge translation.

⁶⁰⁷ *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 47: 1 on *zhu*-disease; *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 48: 1 on 'open skull'.

⁶⁰⁸ They only mention that the numerous (one hundred) *shen*-spirits enter the child in the last month of pregnancy – after they have entered the child's body, it is ready to be born.

[The person] was supposed to have died several years ago. [The person] was good during life and the underworld-administration made a mistake, so that [that person] lived longer and is now aged in the nineties. On the day [the person] receives the order to die, your daughter will recover.” Zheng immediately sent somebody out to visit [that person] who indeed was older than ninety years. A month later, his daughter suddenly fell into something like a drunken sleep and the disease healed. Zheng sent out somebody again to investigate [the old person’s situation]. And indeed: the day his daughter recovered from her ailments, [the person] suddenly had passed away.⁶⁰⁹

Although the narrative does not mention that the souls were generally insufficient in a newborn child, this girl’s souls were clearly not even sufficient for the standard of her age. Withal, weak souls at a young age were not uncommon as her father might have learned from medical texts or local doctors, and therefore he waited until an age when the souls should be fully sufficient. And so, when after several years of treatment she still displayed symptoms of weak souls although they should have settled at that age, her father finally asked a practitioner who was specialised in matters of disease in relation to the souls.⁶¹⁰

A disease reflecting the child’s initial physical weakness was the childhood disease called ‘frights’ which was explained in medieval medical texts. Frights could cause convulsions and could also lead to death, which was commonly known. In an undefined time during the Tang, the cherished wife of *jinshi*-scholar Zheng Zong (鄭總) died while he was away taking the exams.

In the depth of the night he suddenly woke up, and he heard the noise of a person walking outside the room. Zong opened the door and had a look – it was his deceased wife. He called her into the chamber and they sat down. Zong asked her what it is that she desired, but she only wished to have some tea (茶). Zong brewed it personally, and gave it to her. When she finished sipping her tea, Zong wanted to call their sons and daughters who were asleep and let them see each other. [Yet] the wife said: ‘You cannot [do that]. They are very young and I am afraid that I would frighten them.’⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ *Taiping guangji* 358: 2837 (*Yi shi zhi*).

⁶¹⁰ The author Zhang Du is not specific about the number of souls (which is often fixed at three *po*-souls and seven *hun*-souls). The soul whose absence caused the weakly child, was a *hun*-soul. This seeming ‘impreciseness’ is an indication that in popular knowledge and religious practice not one standard for souls existed.

⁶¹¹ *Taiping guangji* 352: 3786 (*Wen qi lu*).

Women

Women were considered to be dangerous for the child, and men's writings are full of concern and distrust regarding female care for infants.⁶¹² General pollution of women as well as the sole control over children and access to them put a woman in charge of life and death. Her isolation or inaccessibility to men, who probably rarely had direct access to the women's sphere during the first few days after birth, might account for many narratives and beliefs that depicted her as endangering her own offspring. The basic needs of infants and their necessary care, cleaning the child, handling its clothes and feeding it were the salient tasks of mothers in narratives, and certain diseases of children were suspected to be caused by failure of basic care giving. Women's exclusive permission of approach to and influence on children already started before birth, "the final stages of pregnancy and the birth process itself were not a domain that male doctors intervened in, leaving the care of the mother in the hands of midwives and other expert females, including female shamans and older women of the household."⁶¹³ Literary male discourses thus depicted fathers to be without control over their offspring. This powerlessness might have caused anxiety for the male part. Male care-givers ideally were in charge of curing diseases or searching for and paying doctors. In order to do this, they had to be informed by their wives that something was wrong with the child. Consequently, men only gained control once the child was told to be in need of professional medical help, which then did not fall within the domain of women anymore. On these grounds, with a few exceptions and when there were no unanticipated physical problems, the mother and occasionally a wet nurse, were solely in charge of young children.

Because during the first days and months of a child's life the mother was one of the very few persons who had access to the child, a mother had certain power. The exclusiveness and secrecy, alongside the real danger of the birth process and its often dramatic and deadly result, were processed in narratives that depicted the mother as a monster and her newborn child as her victim. In the early 740s, a woman of Wude district,⁶¹⁴ for example, was reported to be

⁶¹² A woman's usual working space alone would be enough to point her out as a danger, because, for example as Yates points out, an exclusively female space was the toilet: "Toilets were considered to be sites of pollution, and locations where dangerous ghosts lay hidden, not only because that was where defecation and urination took place, in other words human excreta or waste ... were deposited, but also because toilets were where women raised silkworms, notorious for their waste production, and fed pigs. Thus toilets were the sites of Yin, pollution, and particularly under the control of women," (Yates 2000: 26, reminding of Mary Douglas' idea of pollution as 'matter out of space.'). Not to mention that those toilets smell badly.

⁶¹³ Yates 2000: 11.

⁶¹⁴ Henan at the River Mi 泌.

struck by an eating attack. When she was about to give birth, her mother in law and a mother of the neighbour tended to the food. After giving birth, the mother ate a lot – in the end even her child.⁶¹⁵

Undoubtedly, accounts about mothers killing their offspring did not necessarily derive from male fantasy only. Such cases nowadays fall under psychological supervision and are diagnosed mostly as a postnatal depression.⁶¹⁶ On this account, the narrative in the *Ji wen* (紀聞, by Niu Su, around 804) might present a case of social-psychological reality of giving birth, which means that the mother really killed her child. However, it could also provide an explanation of child-death by making the mother a scapegoat in lack of another explanation for sudden death of the child.

Peng Yan, whose testicles were bitten off twice by a dog and who accordingly became a eunuch when he was ten years of age, is a very good example of a victim of motherly neglect. The reason why the dog could attack the child was because: “when [the boy] was ca. one year old, [the mother] gave him a bath on a summer day and put him naked on the ground between the corridors.”⁶¹⁷ The mother made this fundamental mistake twice, putting her son to sleep on the front porch the second time.⁶¹⁸ Thus, she did not fulfil her duties in the right way and her son was exposed to the dangers of semi-wild animals. As a slave boy, he was not in a special secured and observed area, but outside the house, left alone by a busy mother without other female care.⁶¹⁹

With respect to the dangers of feeding overfeeding as well as not feeding enough, could in the worst cases have been followed by convulsions. If the child’s disease derived from breastfeeding, the treatment then also proceeded with the help of the breasts: “One must briefly interrupt breastfeeding and also administer medicine to the wet-nurse. That lets the blood and *qi* settle down and harmonize.”⁶²⁰ Concerning feeding the child, Sun Simiao described five common mistakes that were made by those that breastfeed:

[1.] When the mother [or wet nurse] feeds the child in the bride chamber, this will cause the child to be thin and weak, intertwine the shinbones and [the child]

⁶¹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 362: 2874 (*Ji wen*).

⁶¹⁶ See for example, Howard and Hannam 2003 on sudden infant death syndrome and the association with postnatal depression and schizophrenia of mothers in the twentieth century.

⁶¹⁷ This architectural liminality – *jian* 間 – may also represent a foretelling of his status as a eunuch.

⁶¹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 275: 2166 (*San shui xiao du*), see beginning of chapter III for a translation.

⁶¹⁹ The mother, however, is not directly blamed for the neglect. Mei Huangfu’s point of this narrative was not to show female inability in caring for children but to point out Pei Zhide’s (his master) extraordinary pill with which he could save the slave boy’s life (but not his manhood).

⁶²⁰ *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 2.

will not be able to walk. [2.] When the mother is hot and feeds the child, this will cause [the child] to turn yellow and it cannot eat. [3.] When the mother is angry and feeds the child, this will cause [the child] to be easily afraid and contract elevation of *qi*. It will furthermore lead to elevation of the upper *qi* as well as peak madness. [4.] When the mother has just vomited and feeds the child, this will cause weakness [of the child]. [5.] When the mother drank too much alcohol and feeds the child, this will cause [the child's] body to be hot and the tummy to be full.⁶²¹

This list is quoted in more medical works, which means that here we are dealing with common knowledge regarding breast-feeding that was enhanced by men. Like in so many cases with respect to child-care, we do not know about further advice that women might have given each other.

Chao Yuanfang and the other medical authors often warned that mothers and wet nurses should not dress children too warm, because they would sweat and easily get struck by winds. Chao Yuanfang gave the concern about clothes a prominent place at the beginning of the 'Children' chapters in his medical treatise. He wrote:

Usually, when children are newly born, the skin is not yet [readily] developed, and one cannot dress [the child] in warm clothes. Dressing it in warm clothes will cause the joints and bones to be feeble and weak. At times [the child] should be exposed to wind and sun. If it is not exposed to wind at all, then this will cause skin and flesh to be weak, then it is easily hurt. All the clothes should be coarse silk clothes. Do not use new silk clothes!⁶²²

This warning addressed spoiling and the fear of a mother that her offspring would catch a disease when not dressed in enough clothes. Lastly, doctors were also concerned that female care-givers might hold and carry the child in the wrong way, proving their unawareness of the child's fragility. They approved of mothers taking their children out to play, because that would strengthen an infant. Being outside and "exposed to sun and wind, then the blood will congeal and the *qi* will be hard, skin and flesh will be firm and dense, and [the child] is able to endure wind and cold and does not get diseases."⁶²³

Nevertheless, the medical authors warned against constantly carrying the child in and out, holding it too tight or leaving the child in bed, behind closed curtains and dressed too warm. If mothers did this, they exposed their children

⁶²¹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 5a. It can address the 'mother' as well as the 'wet nurse'.

⁶²² *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 1.

⁶²³ *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 1.

to a fate of “trees and grass of the dark earth that are not exposed to wind and sun,” in which case the child “will be feeble and weak and cannot bear wind and cold.”⁶²⁴ Chao Yuanfang additionally cautioned against physically spoiling the child: “You must endure seeing them being cold, then your appropriate acting will be auspicious. When you love them and [therefore] hold them warm, that will do harm.”⁶²⁵ All these handlings, feeding, clothing and providing access to the outside of the room were completely in the hands of women, who accordingly were suspected to overfeed, spoil or overprotect their offspring.⁶²⁶

The female dangers I have described here are mostly those expressed in medical writings, and are devoid of demonic belief and of social problems. In the following sections we will come across more female danger and violence, there in the form of female demons and stepmothers. All in all, female danger is presented to a suspiciously great amount.

Fatal accidents

Fatal accidents were sometimes caused by negligence of the care-giver. Most parents were helpless when, for example, their child was killed in a carriage-accident, by robbers or when it drowned in a well. The resulting death of a child through fatal accidents was not always accepted passively by the care-givers as a matter of circumstance, and some narratives presented it as a remarkably sad event in a parent’s life.⁶²⁷

One common group of accidents might have been road crashes. For example, several decades after the fall of the Han a car rode over a little boy by accident and killed him. The parents of the boy sued the driver and searched for the person who was in charge of it. As payment for the boy’s death the driver had to give away his ox-cart with which he drove over the boy. Furthermore, they presumably found the real culprit, Daoist teacher Cui Lian (崔鍊), who received a beating for it.⁶²⁸ The accidental murder of the child had deep consequences, and resulted in the punishment of an innocent woman, the religious specialist Cui Lian. Road accidents probably happened more often,

⁶²⁴ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 9: 2a.

⁶²⁵ *Zhubing yuanhou lun*: 45: 2.

⁶²⁶ With the exception of the carrying of children by men, which is never depicted as dangerous. On the contrary, fathers are shown as caring and loving when they carry their offspring on a journey or in the garden.

⁶²⁷ About the death of children see chapter VI.

⁶²⁸ *Taiping guangji* 314: 2489. Later the teacher but cleared by a relative who hold a job in the underworld administration. The boy actually suddenly returned to life again after several days.

since one of the favourite playgrounds of children was the side of the road.⁶²⁹ In fact, being run over by horse or oxen even had a special entry concerning children in the eighth century medical compendium *Waitai miyao* of Wang Tao.⁶³⁰

Next to road accidents, suffocation in bed, I assume, was another frequent fatal accident for children, all the more unavoidable, considering the custom of sharing one's bed with several people.

Pei Sheng (裴盛), who had a position in Yixing county, took a nap at dawn when he was pulled by a ghost. [He left his] body and his soul followed [the ghost]. The ghost said: "[You have to] hold a child." When they arrived at the child's house [Sheng saw the child] lying in between its sleeping parents. In front of them was a Buddhist sacra. The ghost said: "With this Buddhist [sacra] only living people can approach [other people]."⁶³¹ The ghost shook the parents once, but they were both asleep. He then ordered Sheng to carry the child out of the bed. While [Sheng] was holding the child, it uttered a noise from its throat. The parents woke up, startled, and the ghost pulled Sheng out [of the house]. [Sheng's] soul entered his body and he became conscious.⁶³²

Although this narrative does not discuss suffocation in bed directly, the image it calls up fits with such a tragedy. Other accidents that attracted the attention of authors include falling into wells,⁶³³ getting lost in the wilderness and falling prey to wild beasts or starvation.⁶³⁴

In none of the above-mentioned cases did the authors of the narratives suggest neglect of surveillance by the care-givers as reasons for the fatal accidents. Most of the cases are presented as unfortunate clashes of two events in which the child, regarded as naturally tender and unprotected, became the victim. In most of the cases, parents are described as terribly hurt by the loss of their child, regardless of whether it was a boy or a girl.

⁶²⁹ See chapter V 'Play'.

⁶³⁰ *Waitai miyao* 29: 779b-780a, "Recipes for falling off a carriage or horse".

⁶³¹ See Dudbridge 1998 on Buddhist images. He, however, focuses on larger statues and not on small ones.

⁶³² *Taiping guangji* 331: 2631 (*Guang yi ji*), see Dudbridge 1995 (no.103).

⁶³³ *Taiping guangji* 388: 3095 (*Ye ren xian hua*).

⁶³⁴ *Taiping guangji* 440: 3695-6 (*Xiao xiang lu*); *Taiping guangji* 455: 3717-8 (*Qi shi ji*), see chapter IV.

2. Supernatural and natural dangers

Children were likely to be the prey of demons because of their weak physical status. Medieval China hosted an abundant number of demons that would attack any person that came near them. There furthermore were numerous demons that were specialised in children. While in the previous section I have focused on dangers coming from within the child itself and the person that was physically closest to it, this section will focus on dangers that came from the outside of the household. This division was not inevitably done in medieval China, because demons entered households and even derived from within the household. Unsurprisingly, in that respect we find that especially mothers were demonized. Yet, for the sake of presentation, I have drawn a line between those two spheres of humans and non-human beings.

I have further divided the dangers in this section in demonic threats and perils from animals. However, these dangers to a child's health and life cannot always be segregated because the demonic world was interwoven with the non-human world of animals of prey. Yet, animals occasionally were presented as actual animals and only therefore I discuss them as such. The most common dangerous animal of prey was, next to certain birds, the tiger, which also had a strong position in demonic lore. The main target that protective measures focused on, thus, is the demonic and not the animal sphere, and I will discuss these measures at the end of this section.

Demons

In general terms, female demons stole children and fed them to death; male demons occasionally ate children but mostly they were used to scare children.⁶³⁵ In narratives we find mothers who devoured their own newborn children after birth. Moreover, beautiful women found alongside the street and taken home as concubines devoured the sons of their new husbands and their wives. Such narratives show that the perceived demarcation between demons and mothers or women in the reproductive age probably was narrow.

During the medieval age, starting around the fifth and sixth century, a locally known demonic bird started to make a career as a nationwide peril. Its presence was disseminated through writings as diverse as geographical accounts,

⁶³⁵ Occasionally children would scare themselves with them (Ter Haar 2006: 43-44). On the other hand, we have no evidence that children were warned against female demons.

medical treatises, collection of narratives and almanacs.⁶³⁶ The bird was female and one of her many names was Catching Auntie (*guniao* 姑鳥).⁶³⁷ In the medical compendium *Beiji qianjin yaofang*, the author Sun Simiao quoted her narrative from the *Xuanzhongji* (玄中記),⁶³⁸ which is the authoritative source concerning this demon. Sun integrated the demon into his discussions on child health and pointed her out as one cause for disease and death of children:

Under Heaven there is a female bird whose name is Catching Auntie. Another name is Daughter of the Heavenly Emperor, another name is Bird that Flies Hidden, and another name is Travelling Girl that Roams at Night. She is also called Demon Hooked Star. She loves to pass by crying on dark rainy nights and to fly above human settlements. It is something that comes when it is summoned. From this bird there are only females and no males. She is not reproductive. [She is] poison from dark life-energy that comes alive. She loves to drop feathers into the courtyards and put them into the clothes of children. In that case she lets the children get convulsions, and they will die. Then they transform into her children. This would happen from the birth of the child until the tenth year. The clothes cannot be left lying outside. During the seventh and eighth month one has to shun her.⁶³⁹

Catching Auntie afflicted children with an infectious disease that eventually killed them. She did that by dropping her feathers (dirt) onto clothes of children that were left lying outside. Her species consisted exclusively of females. Duan Chengshi in his *Youyang zazu* also featured this well-known narrative. To all her characteristics he additionally points out that Catching Auntie “is childless and

⁶³⁶ The oldest text that mentions Catching Auntie is the *Shuijingzhu* (Commentary to the Classic of Water, *Shuijingzhu* 水經注), a mythical geographical account written around the beginning of the sixth century. In the *Jing Chu suishi ji* (Almanac of Jing and Chu, *Jing Chu suishi ji* 荆楚歲時記) from Zong Lin, an almanac also written in the sixth century but slightly later than the *Shuijingzhu*, Catching Auntie is merged with another demonic bird, the sexless Demon Wagon (鬼車) or Nine Headed Bird (九頭鳥), which is still known in some areas in China today). The *Beiji qianjin yaofang* (Important Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Cash for Urgent Need, *Beiji qianjin yaofang*) is the first medical text, written about a century later than the *Jing Chu suishi ji*, around 652 in the beginning of the Tang dynasty that mentions the demon. The *Youyang zazu* from the ninth century introduces the last new descriptions of character and appearance of the demon. Thereafter nothing new is added to the story of the bird, but it is quoted in medical texts for the following centuries.

⁶³⁷ Or Auntie Snatcher, as Cullen translates her name (Cullen 2000: 44). I have chosen Catching Auntie due to her similarity to other, later, demonic auntie-figures.

⁶³⁸ The *Xuanzhongji* is attributed to Guo Pu (郭璞, 276-324), which is not likely to be the case (Campany 1996: 93).

⁶³⁹ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 11: 2b. *Xuanzhong ji* quotation.

loves to take the children of people. In front of her chest she has breasts." He further added in his version of the narrative that the demonic bird did not only drop her dirt and dust on clothes but marked them by leaving drops of her impure blood, which was menstrual blood.

Concerning her origin, Duan Chengshi wrote that "some say that women who die while giving birth change into [a Catching Auntie]." ⁶⁴⁰ Like him, also Zong Lin (ca. 500–563), the author of the sixth century almanac *Jing Chu suishi ji*, provided the detail that the bird has breasts. Zong Lin moreover stated that Catching Auntie was specialised in taking girls and that she fed them – what eventually leads to their death.

Catching Auntie was not the only female demon targetting children. We also find mention of a demon called 'Demon Mother' (*gui mu* 鬼母), another "motherly" demon as her name reveals. Demon Mother gave birth daily to ten demonic children of Heaven and Earth time and again, and ate them in the evening. ⁶⁴¹ She was a hybrid being with a tiger's head, dragon's feet, eyebrows of a python and eyes of a scaly dragon. She and Catching Auntie were not the same, but they belong to the same category of female demons that fed or gave birth to children, and destroyed them by making them their own.

A set of illustrations made in the ninth century and found in Dunhuang shows six from originally sixteen female demonic beings or spirits that were supposed to be child protectors. ⁶⁴² Wicks, who discusses these child protectors, describes: "the one feature that distinguishes each of the spirits is a pair of large breasts, which appear heavy with nourishment. Each figure is accompanied by a child, but that child is more often shown in a dangerous rather than a protected position." ⁶⁴³ Catching Auntie and these protective spirits or dangerous demons might all belong to the same group of animal-like demons, and all of them had milk to feed infants. Feeding in the case of Catching Auntie definitely led to convulsions and death, which might not necessarily have been the case with the other breasted spirits, but which I suspect nevertheless due to the emphasis on breasts. A further similarity between the demons of probably Indian origin and Catching Auntie, were the measures taken against their threats, usually in the form of taboos. Sun Simiao, with respect to Catching Auntie for example,

⁶⁴⁰ *Youyang zazu*, chapter 'Feathered Beings' (III.7b).

⁶⁴¹ Yuan Ke 1998: 66, quoting from Ren Fang's *Shuyiji*, (fifth century). The Demon Mother probably derives from the mythological complex about the ten suns. See also Liu Xiang (77(?)-6(?) BC), *Shuoyuan* 65.2: 23.

⁶⁴² See Wicks 2002: 152-3, where she shows the illustration of six child-protectors in black and white. See IDP Database, Stein Collection, OA 1919.1-1-077.

⁶⁴³ Wicks 2002: 151.

advised to take ritual actions, which he did not further specify, in order to keep her at a safe distance.

Demonic birds were not necessarily all female. Yet, when other demonic birds were mentioned they were mostly sexless rather than male. Niu Su tells of a scary being in the shape of a *chi*-owl (鴞),⁶⁴⁴ which caused the death of all the children of one family. No illness is named, but each of the children fell into a well, because it had become dull-minded. They did not recover and died after a few days:

The Secretary Wei Xuxin had three sons. None of them became adults, and they died [in childhood]. Just around the time of death of each of them, there was a big face, which stretched out its hands down towards the bed, with angry eyes and open mouth. It was shaped like a demon. [Each] child was scared and ran away. Then the face would change into a huge *chi*-owl. It would take the sight [of the child] with its wings and let it toss itself into the well. When the people in the house sensed something, they hurried to take [the child] out, [but the child] was already senseless. It could only tell what it saw and after several days it would pass away. It happened like this to all the three children. It is not known at all which demon this was.⁶⁴⁵

A possible origin of these flying female demons might be found in Indian mythology.⁶⁴⁶ One clearly foreign being in medieval China that flew during night, stole children, and did other mischief was the *yaksha* (夜叉), or rather its female version, the *yaksini*. *Yaksha*, in the course of their transmission, were worshipped as guardians. They could also be found as assistants, the fierce-looking generals in the army of the Buddhist god Vaisravana. During the Tang dynasty, Vaisravana, “the Buddhist manifestation of Hindu god of wealth, Kuvera,”⁶⁴⁷ became a child-bringer, especially a bringer of sons. *Yakshas* were as a result also brought into connection with the advent of a child. However, Strickmann

⁶⁴⁴ Owls have an evil or at least ambiguous character. One of the worst of this species is the *xiao*-owl 梟, which eats its mother. The *Lingbiao luyi* describes the custom of eating *xiao*-owl soup at the fifth day of the fifth month as a protection against its evil influence. The same source also mentions the *Xiuliu* owl, which collects the nails of fingers and toes of people and therewith knows the future of the person in question – people are horrified by that and bury their nails, see also *Beihulu* 3a (Duan Gonglu, ninth century). Catching Auntie is categorized under ‘Owls’ in the *Taiping guangji*.

⁶⁴⁵ *Taiping guangji* 362: 2873 (*Ji wen*), no temporal specification of the event is given.

⁶⁴⁶ Wicks 2002, ter Haar 2005, Sawada 1982, Bodde 1975 on the Death bird, the Heisheng and Wangliang spirits. Another explanation lies in Chinese star mythology, see Eberhard 1937, esp. pp. 55-59.

⁶⁴⁷ Wicks 2002: 137.

remarks that “the females of the species, the *yaksinis*, remained more unreconstructedly demonic and specialized in devouring children.”⁶⁴⁸

Several narratives, on the other hand, did not depict the *yaksini* – or *yaksas*, sometimes the sex is not clear – as child devourers. These night birds rather kidnapped children, and not infrequently taught them the art of becoming a flying demon themselves and instructed them in killing people. Nie Yinniang (聶隱娘), the loved ten-years-old daughter of a general, for example, was kidnapped by a begging Buddhist nun. The woman then instructed her first in reading sutras and incantations and fed the girl with drugs. Subsequently, the girl learnt to fly and was working under the command of the weird nun. When she was fifteen her education came to an end and she was sent home again.⁶⁴⁹ In one case of a *yaksha*-child encounter the reason for child theft is not clear,⁶⁵⁰ and in another case the child returned after several days without remembering much.⁶⁵¹

Although the female threat seemed to be more common than other threats, sexless and male demons were also part of the supernatural dangerous crowd with respect to children. During the medieval period, the male figures who were feared included dead generals of early imperial China, and especially those who had strong connections to older demonic beings which were exorcised during the great New Year exorcisms. Ter Haar finds five such demonic generals that he calls ‘bogeyman’ up until the Tang dynasty. These figures in fact were used to scare children who would otherwise cry without stopping. The frustrated parents would threaten the crying child with “Ma Hu is coming.” The generals were known for their extraordinary cruelty and their terrifying look. Due to their nature ter Haar relates them to “the telluric bogeys of the *wangliang*-complex,

⁶⁴⁸ Strickmann 2002: 64.

⁶⁴⁹ *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456-9 (*Zhuan qi*), for a translation see chapter V ‘Buddhist education’. Such drugs are at least known since the *Baopuzi*. See Robinet, who writes that “other procedures also clearly reveal magical practices. There is, for example, the strange recipe which instructs one to mix the blood of a white tiger killed on the third day of the third moon with the blood of a camel and sprinkle the mixture on a plant which should be replanted seven times. This plant will then yield a drug that enables the adepts to ‘change his form and transform his appearance, to soar and to sink at will,’” Robinet 1979: 47.

⁶⁵⁰ *Taiping guangji* 356: 2819-20. (*Yi shi zhi*). The *yaksha* in this narrative that steals a girl, tells her what it is afraid of, namely white clothes, because this is a sign for people who do not plow the earth, do not eat dog meat nor meat of domesticated animals, and who therefore are protected by the Upper God (*shangdi*).

⁶⁵¹ *Taiping guangji* 356: 2818 (*Shang shu gu shi*), see chapter III ‘Festivals’ for this narrative.

Han-period demons who loved to eat children and some of whom liked children's brains."⁶⁵²

Animals

Child snatchers did not have to be supernatural, although the categories easily overlap. Demonic birds, for example, were also reported to have been observed 'in nature.' Nature in these cases means outside of the human realm. In this sense, tigers, wolves, as well as demonic birds and other demons were not much different from each other.⁶⁵³ In fact, tigers dwelling in caves outside cultivated human spaces were demonized animals, and like nearly all other living beings they automatically inherited the ability of shape shifting.⁶⁵⁴ However, in narratives tigers were more mesmerizing, threatening and had more demonic powers than for instance a goat or even a fox that could also take on a human shape.⁶⁵⁵

Tigers were on the verge of extinction in Southern China during the Ming and especially the Qing dynasties.⁶⁵⁶ They were impressive predators to meet in the wild, and they were central to the fears of people living in the South during the medieval age. At that time, living conditions there were slightly more comfortable for humans than three hundred years earlier when the first large group of Northern migrants came to the South and took land from ethnic groups already living there.⁶⁵⁷ Much of the natural habitat of tigers decreased since it

⁶⁵² Ter Haar 2006: 41, Taiping guangji 267: 2092 (*Chao ye qian zai*), see also *Xiaoming lu* 2: 7b, where we can read an account of Liu Aohu (劉叻胡). According to this account crying children were scared with the saying: "Liu Hu is coming!" – that was supposed to stop their crying.

⁶⁵³ See ter Haar, who points out the importance of the implications regarding the shift of fearing demonic male creatures such as Ma Hu towards the fear of (mostly) female shape shifters (were animals). This shift made it possible for scared people to actually find victims, or rather the culprit, amongst themselves, or, as ter Haar shows, amongst those that came from outside of the community. Also during the Tang dynasty many male shape shifters exist who also eat children, (ter Haar 2006: 52-3). On shape shifters see also De Groot. On wolves, tigers, birds and other animals in early China see Sterckx 2002.

⁶⁵⁴ Or non-living beings that had been processed and 'civilized' by living beings.

⁶⁵⁵ Tigers were not only a threat, natural and supernatural, but also a convenient protection against supernatural hazards. The *Jing Chu suishi ji* reports that during the New Year celebrations not only images of the Two Door Gods, which are pasted on the door posts, but also images of tigers were used in order to expel evil influences. The commentary quotes in detail from the *Fengsu tongyi*, the source of the report of that practice, that tigers are yang-beasts and the leaders of the one hundred wild beasts. Demons hate them, *Jing Chu suishi ji* 24 and 30.

⁶⁵⁶ Ter Haar 2006: 53.

⁶⁵⁷ Marks 1998 shows that tiger attacks on humans probably only occur when the natural habitat of the tiger, large forests, is diminishing. His explanations for the seventeenth century are also

most probably overlapped with human living spaces. Narratives such as the one about Zhang Jun (張俊) whose family was attacked by a tiger during a work-related migration, might have been common during that time.⁶⁵⁸ However, narratives could also exaggerate the actual peril of tigers. Narratives on great dangers coming from beyond the borders of cultivation, and tiger-lore about threat and protection probably belonged to a common set of natural fears that were disseminated through story telling and rumour spreading.

The tiger was particularly feared as a shape-shifter, and many narratives reported of people who met with shape-shifting tigers.⁶⁵⁹ Auntie Old Tiger prevailed in later times as such a shape shifter, a tiger in human form who was specialized in devouring children.⁶⁶⁰ A narrative from Feicheng in Jining Prefecture in Shandong from the late fifteenth century talks about a woman who “guarded the basket and twisted hemp during daytime, but at night she transformed into a wild-cat.”⁶⁶¹ As such she would steal and eat children. This narrative shows a parallel structure to narratives and ideas about demonic birds which occurred more frequently in medieval times.⁶⁶²

A double life was salient for shape shifters. Above I have mentioned a narrative in which the bright daughter of a general was kidnapped and taught how to fly and behead people – as if she had learned a regular profession. Another narrative told about a woman who had a son with a trader but who constantly had to fly away to follow her nature as a demonic bird, and only returned to feed her son.⁶⁶³ A similar event happened in the life of the late eighth century scholar Cui Zhensi (崔慎思), who starved his infant son to death after he was left by his demonic bird-concubine.⁶⁶⁴ The general’s daughter was fated to live a double-faced life after she returned from her teacher, maybe similar to what the scholar and the trader’s wives both underwent.⁶⁶⁵

valid for the medieval era. During the Tang dynasty South China could still be home to many tigers, yet, where the forests were cleared, people created the possibility of tiger attacks. See Marks 1998, chapters 1 and 2, and page 323 ff.

⁶⁵⁸ *Taiping guangji* 433: 3510-11 (*Yuan hua ji*).

⁶⁵⁹ De Groot IV: 163.

⁶⁶⁰ Ter Haar 2006: 37 and 52 ff.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*: 55.

⁶⁶² See, for example, Dudbridge 1995: 223 (no. 225).

⁶⁶³ *Taiping guangji* 196: 1471-2 (*Ji yi ji*).

⁶⁶⁴ *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456 (*Yuan hua ji*), for the narrative see section below.

⁶⁶⁵ In the ninth century, the mother of Zhao Yannu (趙燕奴) gave birth first to a child that was considered to look like a tiger, then one that resembled a turtle and the one that she gave birth to before Zhao Yannu looked like a *yaksha*. All these monstrosities were killed immediately (*Taiping guangji* 86: 565 (*Lu yi ji*), see below for this narrative). Being a tiger shape shifter, like being a *yaksha*-like being, can be instructed. Shi Jingyai overhears another man disguised as a Daoist

Cases of female were-tigers marrying human men are similar to cases of demonic birds marrying men. No demonic woman was detected and expelled by her husband or his family; rather she left her young family on her own account. Some women were sad to leave their children behind, which they might fetch later, but mostly they were depicted as happy to leave the human realm.⁶⁶⁶ For example, when a man found a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl on the road during the Jin dynasty, he married her and she bore two children. Everything was fine, until someone in the village died. The woman was subsequently revealed as a tiger.⁶⁶⁷

Tigers were depicted as being attracted to children, perhaps as a result of the fears of adults for their vulnerable and curious young offspring to be attacked by wild animals or other animals, such as dogs or pigs. Additionally, tigers, furthermore, did not only eat children but also made use of them. Dai Fu's *Guangyi ji* contains several narratives on tigers, some of which also feature children:

A little boy lived close to the mountains. Every night that he went to sleep he saw a demon that attracted tigers to pursue him. He told his parents to be prepared that he would be killed by tigers soon and then told about the *chang*, tiger-demons, about which he had heard stories. He was sure that he would become a tiger-demon. So he did, but as such he helped the village to get rid of some tigers.⁶⁶⁸

priest instructing two disciples to disarm Shi, so that the priest can eat him. The priest turns out to be a tiger. When Shi manages to kill him, the tiger-priest's young disciples are very happy, *Taiping guangji* 432: 3507 (*Guang yi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 220 (no. 238). These examples show that animals and animal-like demons belonged to the same category. They furthermore show, at least in this case, that the demonic features of a tiger and *yaksha* were understood to be close to each other.

⁶⁶⁶ See for example *Taiping guangji* 429: 3486-8, (*He dong ji*). A young official stayed in a hut, where he fell in love with a fourteen or fifteen year old girl. They married and she gave birth to a boy and a girl. The family moved around because of the husband's job. When they once passed by her old hut again after years, she found a tiger skin. She laughed, put it on and left. The children stay with the sad husband. The narrative is similar to that of the swan maiden. The swan maiden was 'found' by a man at a lake and forced to marry him, because the man hid away her feather clothes with which she can turn into a swan. After several years the woman finds back her feather cloth with the help of one of her children, puts it on and leaves, see *Soushenji* 14: 175 (no. 354).

⁶⁶⁷ *Taiping guangji* 426: 3467 (*Guang gu jin wu xing ji*). Were-tigers are fairly often male as well, but they are usually not reported to father children. See Dudbridge 1995: 217ff.

⁶⁶⁸ *Taiping guangji* 428: 3482 (*Guang yi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 218 (no. 228); de Groot vol. 5: 556-7. I have slightly adopted Dudbridges translation.

The boy still felt responsible for his family and village. He knew from stories of the custom of tigers using their victims' souls as decoy, and used that knowledge against them. Instead of attracting people towards himself, so that men would come to him and would thus be eaten by the tigers, he warned his village people once he turned into such a tiger-ghost. What might have happened to him is shown by another narrative, also written down by Dai Fu. In a narrative taking place in the 730s or early 740s, Dai Fu describes how a tiger's trap was sprung by the soul of a tiger-victim which looked like a naked child. When reset, the trap caught a tiger. The child wept, and then entered the tiger's mouth. Next day a blue stone the size of an egg was found there."⁶⁶⁹

Children, tigers and stones frequently appeared in combination with each other. Thus, a tiger's body, frightening when alive, contained a whole drugstore when dead. Duan Chengshi reports that the immortal Zheng, who rides on a dragon, knew which drugs could be made from tigers. For instance, if a hunter shot a tiger, he should bury the tiger's light-giving eye in the earth,⁶⁷⁰ for this will change into a white stone, which was able to heal children's frights.⁶⁷¹

The realms of 'wild' nature and those of the 'civilized' nature were thought to be separated from each other, but the borders were understood to be permeable.⁶⁷² Things entering from the wild nature with a purpose to profit themselves at the expense of humans were seen everywhere. Children, like adults, moved between the marked-off areas of 'civilized' and 'wild' nature, but because they were more vulnerable as children they were easier to attack. Dai Fu, again, provides an interesting narrative in which a child was contaminated with a disease and therefore killed by a domesticated animal that he took care of beyond the borders of 'civilized' nature. His family subsequently was contaminated as well:

A herder boy was licked by a cow and the flesh where the cow licked the boy turned white. The boy was startled and died. His family buried the boy and killed the cow and ate it. All members of the households who ate from the flesh, totalling more than twenty people turned into tigers.⁶⁷³

⁶⁶⁹ *Taiping guanji* 427: 3476 (*Guangyi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 217-18; also de Groot, vol. 5: 563 with discussion: 554-63.

⁶⁷⁰ One eye of tigers gives light, the other sees.

⁶⁷¹ *Taiping guanji* 430: 3496 (*Youyang zazhi*).

⁶⁷² The 'wild nature' is the space outside human boundaries, which can be trees, stones, animals, dead people, spirits, ghosts. 'Civilized nature' is the inside space of these borders.

⁶⁷³ *Taiping guanji* 426: 3468 (*Guangyi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 216-17; also de Groot, vol. 4: 174.

One animal which was a crossing between 'wild' and 'civilized', as well as natural and supernatural was the dog.⁶⁷⁴ This animal was not only difficult to classify in the above-mentioned terms, but it was also shifting its character and function from being a protector and an aggressor. After the Tang the dog, in fact, was more often brought up in connection with children than tigers. However, already on the few fragments of Tang murals where children can be seen, we find a child depicted playing with a little dog, which might have been quite natural for a child to do. Children played with dogs; while dogs protected and revenged children by harming adult aggressors,⁶⁷⁵ but they also harmed children.⁶⁷⁶

Protection

While we have considerable knowledge about threatening beings, we do not know so much about protection against these hazards. Means of protection, however, must have been present as manifold as the threat. One narrative, for example, tells about little boys who wore belts in order to avoid frights and evil influences from the thunder lord.⁶⁷⁷ Further, small Buddhist statues were placed in houses for various protective reasons, for example, those that prevent children from being stolen by demons. Dai Fu wrote about a demon which explained that a living man was needed in order to collect a child for the underworld.⁶⁷⁸ The narrative thus shows a different picture than the medical treatises convey. The death of the child in this case then was not the result of the disease, but occurred because a demon had it taken away. If the child had died, it would have been because the demon, with the living man Peng Sheng's help, would have been successful in carrying him away without making a noise. Death could then have been explained by demonic intervention and not by suffocation by the parents during their sleep in their common bed or by any other unexplainable reason for sudden death.

Danger, violence and protection were often intertwined. In the later Tang (923-936) a god was worshipped, who guaranteed childbirth without losing blood and *qi*. He was born from a girl who was raped by bamboo during the Han dynasty.⁶⁷⁹ The young girl thus experienced violence and gave birth to an

⁶⁷⁴ See ter Haar 2006: 109. See also the entries in Eberhard 1942 and 1968 about dogs.

⁶⁷⁵ *Taiping guangji* 119: 837-8 (*Gu jin ji*).

⁶⁷⁶ *Taiping guangji* 275: 2166 (*San shui xiao du*).

⁶⁷⁷ *Taiping guangji* 384: 3149 (*Ling biao lu yi*).

⁶⁷⁸ *Taiping guangji* 331: 2631 (*Guangyi ji*); Dudbridge 1995: 194 (no. 103).

⁶⁷⁹ *Taiping guangji* 291: 2318-9 (*Shui jing zhu*).

illegitimate child. No more information is given about this cult, but its protective intention was built upon a violent act.

Another way of protection was done by regulating the danger and tying it to fixed days in the annual schedule of festivals. Thus, for example, according to the sixth century almanac *Jing Chu suishi ji* (荆楚歲時記) a demonic bird called Demonic Cart, associated with Catching Auntie, came on each Man Day (*ren ri* 人日), which was the fifth day of the first month. On the evening of Man Day, then, “many demonic birds pass by. People hammer on their beds and beat doors. They twist the ears of dogs [to make them bark] and put out candle lights in order to avoid them.”⁶⁸⁰

Some time during the eleventh month a black bean paste had to be eaten by all members of the household “down to children in swaddling clothes and also slaves,” as a sort of inoculation against epidemic diseases.⁶⁸¹ On the night before the eighth day of the twelfth month, Sacrifice Day, great noise had to be made as well by beating drums in order to expel epidemic diseases.⁶⁸² That day was associated with the mythological sovereign Zhuanxu, whose three sons died prematurely and became juvenile plague gods, who were also specialized in frightening little children.⁶⁸³

To sum up, we find a great variety of supernatural beings and influences that chased after children. The images that show the child-protecting spirits with hanging breast appear as both protectors and threats. Of the *yaksas* and *yaksinis*, the males protected, the females threatened. Demons that were threatening had to be worshipped in order to satisfy their hunger so that they subsequently left the children alone.⁶⁸⁴ Although most child snatchers were female, a few others that devoured parts of children or scared them with their appearance were male or sexless.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁰ *Jing Chu suishi ji*: 94 (seventh century commentary).

⁶⁸¹ *Jing Chu suishi ji*: 252.

⁶⁸² *Jing Chu suishi ji*: 230.

⁶⁸³ See Bodde 1965. On the day of Winter Solstice (冬至日) there is a ritual of eating bean paste from small red beans. The reason herefore is that the unfilial son of Gongong 共工 had died on that day and turned into a plague god. Because he is afraid of little red beans, one has to prepare a paste of it to exorcise him (*Jing Chu suishi ji*: 226).

⁶⁸⁴ Yates 2000 also mentions the existence of “the wandering fetus-killer that came according to a strict cycle of days based on the Earthly Branches (Earth was correlated with Yin and the Female), the spirits of the four directions, like the White Tiger, powerful astral gods, and the spirits of various days that could do her and her baby harm,” Yates 2000: 39.

⁶⁸⁵ Of course, as I have pointed out in chapter II ‘Diseases’, scaring children can cause the disease ‘fright,’ which can further cause convulsions possibly leading to death. Thus when it is mentioned that a child is frightened this usually points out a very alarming fact.

3. Violence against children

Children were the least powerful members of a community. The only individual mention they got in the *Tang Code* (唐律, from 624) accredited them with the 'right' to be loved until a certain age. In fact, as a norm we find that many narratives emphasised that a child was lovely or loved under the age of five. That does not necessarily prove that the law was accepted but rather that it was written on the basis of the already formed opinion that children until a certain age should be cherished. But although the *Tang Code* considered cases of domestic violence, children were not presented as victims.⁶⁸⁶ Still, narratives pass evidences of violence against children down to us. Among those we find that especially children who lost their biological father lived in great danger.⁶⁸⁷

In this section, I will discuss the tragic cases of children that I identify as 'stereotypical victims'. This is because we can find a pattern in what kind of children were attacked. I will also present cases of stereotypical aggressors who were blood-related care-givers, like fathers and uncles,⁶⁸⁸ and non-blood-related family, among whom especially the stepmother stood out in her menace.

One kind of violence against children was abortion. I classify this action as violence because in the medieval Chinese point of view the child could receive instructions from the third month of conception onward and it was therefore approached as a person already. I will analyse the few cases that discussed abortion and a few other cases that talked about infanticide, however, material on these topics is scarce for reasons that I will propose in the same part as well.

The family hosted some dangers to a child, but even more fatal for its survival was migration, whether the child itself left home or whether one of its its parents left the child behind. In the last part I will discuss those examples of children who meet with disaster due to war and general instability of the social environment, which mostly caused migration.

⁶⁸⁶ See Li Shuyuan 2005: 145-196, focuses on domestic violence between mostly adult men and women during the Tang dynasty, as it is considered in the Tang Code. Measures by law only apply between adults. Children, offspring of any age, have no rights only rules to follow, and they are theoretically punished for not being filial.

⁶⁸⁷ See also Wu Hung's remark about children's vulnerability before and after death, Wu Hung 1995: 82.

⁶⁸⁸ Mothers are not consciously violent, they are neglecting. A biological mother is not presented killing her own child. If she does so, as Wu Hung shows, if she sacrifices her own child for the sake of another, this is a sign of highest piety. Wu Hung 1995. A stepmother encourages violence against the children of her antecessor, or a wife might kill or order to kill the offspring of a concubine, however, in these cases the women is not the biological mother. Unlike fathers, mothers thus are spared to be intentionally cruel in most cases. Even demonic mothers are depicted caring and full of pity for her half-human children.

Stereotypically dangerous

Dangerous maternal uncles

One social institution that existed as a place of refuge for a mother with her offspring was the family of her brother. Although family bonds could be strong, and brothers took over the care of their sisters together with her off-spring, the maternal uncle often was charged with being the no.1 villain in narratives about domestic violence.⁶⁸⁹

Shi Mou (史牟) was a salt-tax official in the district Jie [around 797].⁶⁹⁰ This was at the beginning of a change of taxation law. A nephew in his teens was accompanying Mou to examine the field [sizes]. He picked up a kernel or one *ke* of salt and returned home. When Mou recognized this he immediately beat him to death. [Mou's] sister cried and went out searching [for her son] – but she was too late.⁶⁹¹

The maternal uncle in this case was a strict statesman who stuck mercilessly to the rules of salt-taxing.⁶⁹² He could not tolerate the theft of salt by his nephew, no matter the amount, and beat him to death rather than ignoring a minor transgression.

This narrative is similar to the narrative of the father in the Maoshan area who nearly drowned his son because he suspected him of theft.⁶⁹³ Narratives about theft and punishment are not confined to any specific moralistic system, since theft was strictly forbidden in any community. In this event, the punishing father became aware that his son was not guilty, while Shi Mou's strictness was shown in a cruel light by depicting his crying sister, who was looking for her son in vain. In these cases, although it could be understood as an educative measure, violence against the boys was an action that its agents were condemned for.

Li Ningdao, whose violent actions I had discussed above already, was also not punished for biting his seven-year-old nephew in breast and back until the

⁶⁸⁹ Actually, it is usually sons that are attacked by uncles, not daughters.

⁶⁹⁰ In *Jiu Tangshu* 48: 2107 and 2109.

⁶⁹¹ *Taiping guangji* 269: 2110-1 (*Guo shi bu*).

⁶⁹² Shi Mou's reaction seen in the light of the salt tax situation of the eight century seems even more outrageous, because the system did not work very well any more and salt value fell very low (Twitchett 1963: 55-6). However, the salt monopoly was in disorder, which again could stress out taxation officers.

⁶⁹³ *Taiping guangji* 395: 3160 (*Ji shen lu*), see chapter V 'Failed education'.

child was bleeding.⁶⁹⁴ Yet, the man was known for his ridiculous and choleric behaviour. From this we can conclude that although no official or legal punishment was sanctioned for such behaviour, it was not socially accepted.

In one case, the murder of a child by his maternal uncle in the village Gaoan was punished by law. A boy had been murdered in the fields for unknown reasons. During the festivities for the one-year-memorial day a possessed child pointed at the maternal uncle who came to pay his respect to the parents and charged him as the murderer.⁶⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the resolving of the murder case took an entire year and the murder was only found by supernatural intervention.

Dangerous fathers

Uncles were not the only close family members that were in charge of domestic violence. Fathers could be equally dangerous to their offspring. Above I have shown examples of mothers who were responsible for the sufferings of her children because they did not handle them correctly. However, when fathers were left alone in charge of their offspring, survival was not a guarantee either. For example, Huang Pu notes a narrative about Cui Zhensi, whom I have briefly mentioned in relation to a *yaksha*. In the period between 785 and 805, Cui Zhensi lived together with a concubine who gave birth to a son. She turned out to be a demonic bird, but she always returned on time to feed her child until at one point she bid farewell forever to Zhensi and her son, and she asked him to take care of the boy. Zhensi could not manage to do this, and, being depressed, he let his son starve to death in the bed-room.⁶⁹⁶

Although this narrative contains some fantastic elements, the core is that a man deliberately let his son die because the mother of the child had left him. The narrative about Cui Zhensi's sorrow and the starvation of his son focused on a repeatedly depicted theme: the relative worthlessness of a concubine's offspring. Frequently, the children of a concubine – often also together with their mother – had to die due to family dynamics. In 738, for example, the wife of Dou Ning (竇凝) found out that, prior to their marriage her husband used to have a concubine who gave birth to two girls. Because Dou Ning had been afraid that this concubine and the baby girls stood in the way of his plan to accept a wife from

⁶⁹⁴ *Taiping guangji* 244: 1886-7 (*Chao ye qian zai*).

⁶⁹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 124: 878 (*Ji shen lu*), see chapter VI 'Child death and the community' for a translation.

⁶⁹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456 (*Yuan hua ji*).

the prestigious Boling Cui clan, he had his concubine and their offspring drowned.⁶⁹⁷

Even if Dou Ning had not drowned his children and his concubine before his marriage, his new wife might still have taken care of the elimination of concubine and daughters herself. This is what happened to another concubine whose story was told to the unmarried, seventeen-year-old daughter of Lu Siyan (魯思鄴 lived around 904). The girl suddenly saw a woman with an infant in a mirror she was looking in. The woman turned out to be the ghost of a concubine of an office manager in Jianchang. She and her newly born son had been tossed in a well by the man's wife.⁶⁹⁸

The seven-year-old Zengzeng died because he caught a cold while playing. However, years before this happened, his father had left him and his mother, a concubine, behind, taken on a different identity in the South of the country and married another woman. Although he did not purposely kill his son like Cui Zhensi did, his absence probably caused many difficulties in the survival of mother and son.⁶⁹⁹

Stepmothers

A woman's preference for her own offspring over another woman's offspring was no surprising behaviour.⁷⁰⁰ A son would be bound to feel more responsible for the woman, who had managed to raise him during the first critical three years of intensive care, including breast feeding.⁷⁰¹ Women who preferred the son of another woman above her own were praised as extraordinary because this act of sacrificing her own child for the child of another woman rendered them into heroines.⁷⁰²

Nonetheless, although highly praised, this cultural display of affection towards a 'strange' child was rarely reported, and authors rather wrote about

⁶⁹⁷ *Taiping guangji* 130: 919-20 (*Tong you ji*), about the Boling Cui, an important medieval family, see Ebrey 1978 and chapter V.

⁶⁹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 130: 923-4 (*Ji shen lu*).

⁶⁹⁹ *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075-6 (*Qianding lu*).

⁷⁰⁰ This is apart from the fact that it is also based on preconceptions, and the labeling of a certain group of people.

⁷⁰¹ The victims of stepmothers are often sons. However, we also find stepmothers harassing their stepdaughters, see Barrett 2000, especially pp 96 ff, where he discusses a narrative by Duan Chengshi that closely resembles the Cinderella story of the Grimm brothers. This narrative by Duan, as Barrett suggests, probably has a non-Han background.

⁷⁰² See Wu Hung 1995. The definition of what is cultural and what is natural is made by educated male authors. We know nothing really about the motives of women described by women.

stepmothers that maltreat the offspring of a previous wife. In such events, the dead biological mother was often involved in the protection of her attacked children through supernatural communication via the maltreated children, by calling in the help from her former husband. This theme of the evil stepmother, facing the dead former wife and mother, who still was trying to protect her own offspring, is interesting because it is processed by male authors. The five dynasties' author Xu Xuan, for example, records a narrative that he heard from a clerk:

In the *Dingyou* year (877 or 937) the wife of a Jianwei soldier who was stationed in Wuyuan passed away and the soldier remarried. The new wife mistreated the children terribly, and the husband was not able to restrain her. One day he suddenly saw his former wife entering through the gates. Very angrily [the ghost] told the wife: "Is there anyone, who does not die!? Who does not have the emotions of a mother to her children? Why, then, are you mistreating my sons and daughters like this!? I talked to an officer of the underworld, and he has granted me ten days to admonish you. If you then do not change, your husband will be killed!" Husband and wife were terrified and repeatedly paid their respect to [the former wife's ghost]. Then they prepared food and alcohol for everybody and called together all their relatives from neighbouring hamlets. [All those people] had conversations as they used to have [with the deceased wife], and although other people heard her voice, only her [former] husband could see her. At night, [her former husband] set up a bed in another chamber, and the husband wanted to stay there with [his former wife], but he was not permitted to do so. After the ten days were fulfilled, and [the former wife] was about to leave, she again reprimanded her former husband's new wife, and her words were very earnest. All her relatives were accompanying her to her grave. When they were several hundreds of steps away from it, she said: "All of you people can stop here." Again she said farewell and left. When she reached the cedar copse everybody could see her. Her clothes and her complexion were as usual. When she reached her tomb, she vanished. The Jianwei army-clerk Wang Yanchang told it to me like that.⁷⁰³

Although we do not know the actual result of the haunting, we can assume that the dead mother, via her living husband, was able to exert some power over her successor. For a comparison, late Tang scholar Meng Qi wrote down a narrative in which the dead mother composed a poem in order to point out the mistreatment of her children by the new wife of her husband. Her children, who came crying at her tomb, carried the poem to their father who then took

⁷⁰³ *Taiping guangji* 353: 2799-2800 (*Ji shen lu*).

measures against the evil stepmother.⁷⁰⁴ Both narratives are representative of a division in power and household structure, pointing out once more the nearly exclusive access women had to children.

Ninth and tenth century male authors worked with a well established theme, which also became part of the *Twenty-four Stories about Filial Piety* (二十四小説).⁷⁰⁵ Moreover, they revealed the powerlessness of men over their wives with respect to child treatment. Likewise, medieval authors put in writing widespread oral narratives about second wives mistreating the children of their predecessors. To some extent, these narratives about filiality can reveal some realities of how members of a household dealt with each other in the last centuries of the first millennium.⁷⁰⁶

The combination of filial piety and violence that features strongly in the *Twenty-four Stories about Filial Piety*, is also used in other narratives. It seems odd that male authors found writing about the evil stepmother so interesting. Odd, because it seems to point out the flaws of a system that put children in a pitiful situation where they could easily be maltreated by a second wife without male intervention. Men usually did not appear prominently in accounts concerning the theme of the brutal stepmother because they did not interfere when their first born children were maltreated, and mostly relied on the help of their deceased wife. Xu Xuan writes that it was only the soldier who was able to see his former wife; everybody else merely heard her voice and remembered it. We do not know how the voice was perceived, and no spirit possession was mentioned. In this event, the former wife stayed in order to admonish the new wife for ten days, and the husband even proposed to sleep in the same room with his former wife, and thus would have abandoned his new wife temporarily. Common to such narratives, the whole community witnessed the reproof.

Similarly, the wife in Meng Qi's narrative was only admonished by her husband once he received a letter from the other world telling him what was happening to his first-born children. Apparently, the husbands did not know what happened to their offspring, although these men lived in the same household. Additionally, they could not act against mistreatment unless there was an accusation, which did not come from the children themselves or anyone else from within the household. This throws light on the ways of handling social pressure and control.

⁷⁰⁴ *Taiping guangji* 330: 2620 (*Ben shi shi*), for a translation see de Meyer 2006.

⁷⁰⁵ See for example the narratives in the *Ershisi xiao* no. 4 (Mi Sun) and no. 12 (Wang Xiang).

⁷⁰⁶ Compare with Knapp 2005, who suggests that the majority of filial piety stories derive from 'oral storytelling that took place within elite households,' Knapp 2005: 27-28.

The evil stepmother, in fact, is a globally well-known obstacle in the life of children. The theme of the murderous stepmother, like the theme of the violent maternal uncle or the theme of the weak concubine and her children, often displayed stereotypical personalities. A typical stepmother narrative is that of Iron Pestle and Iron Mortar. In it Mrs Xu gave birth to a son, called him Iron Mortar (鐵臼) and died. The second wife, Mrs Chen was very cruel and jealous and wanted to kill this son. She also gave birth to a son whom she called Iron Pestle (鐵杵) and whom she told that he wouldn't be her son anymore if he did not kill the boy. Iron Mortar was about ten years old at that time. Mrs Chen did not give him warm clothes and starved him and beat him to death. The ghost (*gui*) of Iron Mortar came back and haunted Mrs Chen and Iron Pestle, who was six years old then. Iron Pestle was beaten up by the ghost and died thereafter.⁷⁰⁷

The stepmother, Mrs Chen, used her own son as a weapon against the older boy of her dead rival. A salient fact in this narrative, as in most others, is the absence of the father. A woman was able to maltreat his oldest son and therewith kill him, but the father not only did not intervene, he did not appear to recognize the vulnerable position of his son.

This narrative is not about filial piety, but about injustice. According to the exemplary stories of the *Twenty-four Stories on Filial Piety*, the typical filial piety theme would be that, although the boy is abused and killed, he would still serve his stepmother and her son. Iron Mortar, however, killed his younger half-brother. In the case that Meng Qi has recorded, the father only came into action once he was told by his deceased former wife. Before that, the 'evil stepmother' was able to continue the abuse of his children.

Knapp shows that stepmothers can be seen as killing machines, or at least as persons full of cruel intentions against their predecessor's children. The archetypical stepmother is the stepmother of sage Shun, who tried to kill her stepson again and again, although Shun was as good a son as he could be. "Even after repeated demonstrations of his benevolence, she fails to recognize that Shun is her benefactor."⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, Knapp concludes with respect to this narrative, "this tale celebrates the father-son relationship, which would normally be an emotionally rewarding one, if it were not for the machinations of evil women."⁷⁰⁹

The best overview on the different existing stereotypes of stepmothers and their cruelties, is offered by the *Twenty-Four Stories on Filial Piety*. Chen Dengwu has analysed the relation between stepmother and child in the stories on filial

⁷⁰⁷ *Taiping guangji* 120: 842-3 (*Huan yuan ji*).

⁷⁰⁸ Knapp 2005: 134.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

piety that were compiled from the Tang dynasty until the Yuan dynasty.⁷¹⁰ She finds that although birth mother and stepmother theoretically hold the same position, the position of the stepmother was elevated during the Tang dynasty.⁷¹¹ Furthermore, if a boy's mother was divorced and left her husband's house, the child became the stepmother's son. If the mother died, on the other hand, the half-orphan remained the dead mother's child and therefore carried no responsibility towards the stepmother.⁷¹² This custom would explain the theme in narratives of dead mothers protecting their offspring against stepmothers, because the former still had the legal and emotional bond with her children.

Stereotypical victims

A large group of victims of violence were illegitimate children. In fact, the illegitimate child of a married or an un-married woman probably had a small chance to survive gestation anyway, because the pregnant woman was likely to take medicine or request assistance to abort her child.⁷¹³ The illegitimate children that we can read about were often special, in a sense that they were considered to have powers of communication and abilities that other humans did not have.

Hu Xi (胡熙) found a husband for his daughter called Zhong (中). Just around the time that she was sent out she became pregnant. She herself did not recognize it. Xi's father Xin (信) found it out and sent Xi's wife, Ding (丁氏), to kill the girl. Suddenly there was a demonic voice from within the womb which said: "Why are you killing my mother? I shall be born on that day, that month." The servants all were startled and found it strange. They told this to Xin. Xin went to listen personally [to Zhong's womb]. He then spared her life. Later she gave birth to a boy. However, no one would see the child's body, just hear its voice, and it grew up among the servants. The wife of Xi separated him [from the others] with a curtain. At one time she said to herself: "I want to see the body." And she sent an old lady to look at it. When she learned that it was clad in robes and had golden hairpins, that it had nice hands and a nice back and was good at making music she became jealous that Zhong had such a nice boy and tried to attack them as a consequence. She became afflicted with a disease.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁰ Chen Dengwu 2005.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*: 313.

⁷¹² *Ibid*: 314. Her sources are different Tang works, such as the *Tang Code*, the *Tang Huiyao* (a tenth century history book about the period before 846), several Dunhuang manuscripts, versions of the *Twenty-four Stories on Filial Piety*, Yan Zhitui's *Family Instructions* and others.

⁷¹³ However, abortions in most cases probably went wrong. Whether the action would kill the mother alongside the child or it would just not work.

⁷¹⁴ *Taiping guangji* 317: 2513 (*Lu yi ji*).

Zhong's grandfather was embarrassed by the fact that his son could not marry out his pregnant granddaughter as he had already promised, and he tried to kill the young woman and the unborn child. He could not do it himself, but needed the help of the wife of his son. The girl's mother, then, must be a deceased wife or a concubine – and so her value might even be less than a daughter of Xi and a living wife. Later the wife attacked the child because she was jealous of its filial piety towards his mother. The intention of the grandfather to have the source of this contamination on his family reputation killed would be an understandable act in medieval times.

Finally, some bizarre narratives that feature violence against children focused on predestined marriages. In these cases the victims of violence were very young girls,⁷¹⁵ and the aggressors were future husbands who were still unknown to the family. The usual plot is that a man looked for a wife, managed to find her and have a look at her. It then occasionally happened that this future wife was still a little girl. In 629, for example, Wei Gu (韋固) from Duling who was orphaned when young, thought about marrying early. He was looking for a wife wherever he went. In a matchmaker's shop in Qinghe he received the prophecy that his wife to be was about three years of age at that time. Gu inquired to see her, and found the girl carried by a one-eyed wet nurse. Fearing that the child was of humble birth, he wanted to kill the child and asked the wet nurse to assist him. The wet-nurse promised to do so, but in fact she kept the child alive. The girl, actually, was the only daughter of a prefect, who had died young in office. Her mother and the mother's younger brother died as well when she was in swaddling clothes, which was why she stayed with her wet nurse. Gu married her eventually and they had one son.⁷¹⁶

Wei Gu had no scruples to bribe the poor and ugly wet nurse to kill her protégé, a little girl. Another man, a fairly young anonymous scholar was also not happy with the fortune-teller's prognostication about his future wife, because his wife-to-be was the very young daughter of gardeners. He managed to get access to the girl because eventhough the girl was only two years old, her parents

⁷¹⁵ See Hsiung 2005, where she explains that in late imperial China girls (at least from well-off families) are rather spoiled and treated less physically violent than their brothers, because of their parents' awareness and sadness about the difficult live they face after marriage. Therefore narratives on girls that are beaten are rare in late imperial China. Also in medieval China girls are not beaten in narratives. Still, because a girl might marry rather early, the question arises if there were no cases of rape within marriage – although this probably did not count as rape within medieval categories. Additionally, if a girl has scars from maltreating it might be more difficult to marry her out.

⁷¹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 159: 1142-3 (*Xu You guai lu*).

let her play alone, and the scholar could approach the house and could easily entice the girl to come to him. He then put a nail in her forehead and left, thinking that he had killed her. Yet the girl stayed alive. When she was five or six years old, she lost both her parents and was adopted by an Investigation Commissioner, who made her a member of the elite by adopting her. Consequently, she became an eligible wife for a scholar. In the end the scholar and the girl were married.⁷¹⁷

Not violence against girls, of course, but the absolute truth of prophecies was the central issue in these narratives. However, these latter two cases belong to a small group of narratives that contain physical violence against girls. Both girls were thought not to belong to the same social circle as the man searching for a wife. Trying to murder the young children – raised by an ugly woman or coming from a gardener's family – thus did not appear to be a big issue.

Shi Mou killed his nephew because the boy had stolen state property of which his uncle was in charge. Li Ningdao mistreated his nephew because his character was cruel. The maternal uncle of the murdered boy in Gaoan might have been the murderer, but as we saw, maternal uncles were stereotypical violators against their sister's sons. On these grounds, the uncle in this case might also have been a convenient scapegoat in an unsolved murder-case. The infant in the arms of the woman who appeared in a mirror was a son, which could be dangerous to a wife, at least if she did not have a son of her own. The story line also suggests that the concubine was murdered out of jealousy. The reason for Dou Ning to kill his concubine and the children they had together was because of a promising marriage. Cui Zhensi killed his son probably because he was depressed. Zengzeng might have died because of economic difficulties that he and his mother faced after his father left the family. The cow-herder at Maoshan was punished unjustly by his father and saved by supernatural power.

Most violent acts against children that were deemed noteworthy by our record-keepers were acts of exceptional cruelty, not practiced in the sense of education but unprovoked. Stereotypical violent groups were maternal uncles and stepmothers. Fathers were mostly dangerous to the offspring they had with a concubine. From the view point of the elite illegitimate children, children of concubines and children that belonged to a social community of a lower rank and that somehow clashed with the elite, were therefore in a dangerous position and were more prone to experience involuntary violence than those under the protection of their biological parents. Interestingly, boys more often than girls were victims of violence.

⁷¹⁷ *Taiping guangji* 160: 1151-2 (*Yu tang xian hua*).

Abortion⁷¹⁸

Regarding child-death, apart from accidents, death due to disease, and murder of older children, we have until now mostly come across examples of infanticide. The child in the arms of the ghost woman that appeared in the mirror, and the two daughters of Dou Ning's concubine were several months old when they were killed. The mothers thus went through pregnancy, gave birth to the children, but finally the children were abandoned along with their mothers. Dou Ning drowned his concubine and infants right after birth, while the mother was still weak from the birth-process.⁷¹⁹ In 742, the wife of Zhang bore twins, but the second child was born without a head. It was trampled at the side of the house but returned again and again as a ghostly apparition.⁷²⁰

Another way to get rid of unwanted children, while attempting to keep the mother alive, was abortion. Abortion, however, was not as frequently discussed in narratives as abandoning. Perhaps it did not occur as often, or it was only done secretly. On the other hand, perhaps it occurred very often, and for that reason was not considered noteworthy anymore.⁷²¹

One expression for discussing abortion was the same as for miscarriage. Miscarriage (*duotai* 墮胎, 'drop the foetus'), was part of medical practice and was discussed in several cases concerning women's health and difficulties during pregnancy.⁷²² Yet, *duotai*, with the meaning of abortion, was also mentioned in the medical classics.⁷²³ The *Isshinpo*, a tenth-century Japanese medical classic

⁷¹⁸ See also James Lee and Osamu Saito 2001 in *Asian Population History* for comparison.

⁷¹⁹ In the case of Hu Xi's daughter who became pregnant before marriage, for example, her grandfather would rather want to kill her than consider an abortion; see *Taiping guangji* 317: 2513 (*Lu yi ji*).

⁷²⁰ *Taiping guangji* 361: 2869 (*Ji wen*), see below for a discussion of this narrative.

⁷²¹ Liu Jingzhen suggests that the reasons for killing infants and for abortion seen in the light of an economic background are rather similar, Liu Jingzhen 1998: 52. Kinney 2004: 97ff, discussing infant abandonment in early China, does not talk about abortion, but only about the decision not to raise a child, i.e. abandoning it after birth. She states that "Han attitudes toward sexuality and what appears to be a general absence of reliable methods of contraception must have also promoted the toleration of infant abandonment. There are few clear references to birth control practices in Han texts, and even with these, it is difficult to determine the extend to which they were used by the general populace in early China," Kinney 2004: 114. The sex of the aborted child cannot be determined, therefore abortion probably has been done when desperation was great and when it was already clear that neither boys nor girls could be raised. Hsiung Ping-chen 2005 says that for infanticide the sex of the child only started to play a part when economic problems became too great a pressure.

⁷²² See for example *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 41: Lower back pain during pregnancy 任娠腰痛.

⁷²³ Furth 1995 remarks for the Ming-Qing dynasties that "it is clear that husbands could, without loss of face, try to procure abortifacients for wives thought to be sickly. This private matter was

copied from numerous medieval Chinese medical works, quoted the *Xiaopinfang* discussing women who used certain plants in order to bring about a miscarriage on purpose.⁷²⁴ Wang Tao in the *Waitai miyao* also discussed several methods of abortion. Apparently, the only legitimate reason for abortion in the medical treatises was illness of the pregnant woman. Under the entry on abortion Wang Tao did not provide many reasons but mainly prescriptions for causing abortion.⁷²⁵ Men were advised to use certain plants and manipulate them mostly with alcohol or boiling water and to give this drink to their wives or concubines in case of a complicated pregnancy.⁷²⁶

Another reason for abortion, except to keep a woman alive, might have been to regulate the number of members in a household, for example in times of scarcity. Liu Jingzhen has collected numerous narratives that mention abortion for economic reasons in the Song dynasty. Reasons were, for instance, because the harvest was not sufficient, taxation was too high, or former wealth had diminished.⁷²⁷

A further reason for abortion is given in a narrative that features a woman called Mrs Zhang (鄭氏), wife of the Runzhou governor Zheng's older brother, during emperor Su's troubled reign period (756-762). When the woman recognized that she herself was pregnant again, while her daughter, called Cainiang (采娘), appeared to be dying, she was quite desperate and ready to abort. Mrs Zhang sighed and said: "I have lost five sons and daughters prematurely and now I am pregnant again. What shall I do!?" Thereupon she wanted to take medicine for abortion.

At that moment Cainiang called out: "You are killing a person!" the mother was startled and asked her about this. [Cainiang] said: "I am going to die and will become a boy. I am the one you are pregnant with now. When I heard that you

not so taboo as to be kept out of the pages of a public document like a printed casebook, and it was something a son might mention in writing of his mother's life and sufferings," Furth 1995: 170.

⁷²⁴ *Isshinpo* 23: 517a.

⁷²⁵ *Waitai miyao* 33 (esp. 921b-923b).

⁷²⁶ See Liu Jingzhen 1998, where she lists several recipes for abortion in pre-Tang, Tang and Song medical treatises, Liu Jingzhen 1998: 70-72. In his *Shennong bencao jing* Tao Hongjing writes about the curative powers of mercury. Among its divergent purposes is also abortion. Also, "if it is melted, it becomes elixir again. If one takes it for a long time, one can become immortal and cannot die," (Yoshinobu Sakade 1991: 102 (translation from *Shennong bencao jing*)).

⁷²⁷ For abortion during the Song dynasty in general see Liu Jingzhen 1998.

want to take the medicine I called out.” The mother found it strange, but did not take the medicine.⁷²⁸

Withal, abortion was not a greatly discussed theme in medieval narratives. We mostly know about it through narratives such as these, in which an abortion was not carried out due to strange events. “Infanticide,” on the other hand, as Ebrey suggests, “was undoubtedly much more common than abortion.”⁷²⁹

Abortion resulting from violence against the mother was in fact punishable, as recorded in the *Tang Code*. Chapter XXI of the *Code*, which is concerned with ‘Assaults and Accusations’, also includes abortion in its considerations. The section in general deals with “slashing at or shooting at a person with a military weapon; if a sharp implement wounds a person, or if a person’s ribs are broken, or if the sight of both eyes is damaged, or a miscarriage is caused, the punishment is two years of penal servitude.”⁷³⁰

This section has a long sub-commentary, explaining in detail different possible cases of abortion. “Causing a miscarriage,” the sub-commentary explains, “refers to the child being in the womb and not yet born. If an abortion is caused by a blow, the punishment is two years of penal servitude in each case.”⁷³¹ The punishment of two years of penal servitude was only carried out if the foetus died within ten to fifty days, depending on the way that the miscarriage was caused, which means, if the pregnant woman was beaten or kicked, or if a ‘sharp implement, boiling liquid, or fire’⁷³² was used. Causing a miscarriage was put on the same level as ‘blinding an eye, or damaging the sexual organs.’⁷³³

That others than mothers caused a miscarriage was perhaps a frequent case, given the detailed discussion in the *Code*. One narrative tells of a case in 819 in which the new wife of Li You (李祐) was attacked by robbers, and her womb was cut open, while she was pregnant in the fifth month. Her husband came home and found her on the ground with the open womb. He bound her tightly

⁷²⁸ *Taiping guangji* 387: 3088 (*Shi yi*); The girl died, and the mother gave birth to a son, as foretold. The little boy cried whenever somebody moved the dead girl’s toys, which the mother had locked away after her death, and he also cried whenever the mother cried about the loss of her daughter. Wang Tao in the *Waitai miyao*, for example, talks about a ‘Seventh day of the seventh month’- method to abort (七月七日法), see Liu Jingzhen 1998: 70 (*Waitai miyao* 33: 923).

⁷²⁹ Ebrey 1993: 181.

⁷³⁰ *Tang Code* article 304, Johnson (trsl.) 1997: 328.

⁷³¹ *Ibid*: 329.

⁷³² *Tang Code* article 307, Johnson (trsl.) 1997: 333.

⁷³³ *Ibid*: 334.

into some clothes and she revived after one night; after the usual ten months she gives birth to a son.⁷³⁴

Within a Buddhist view of life, abortion was a sin, punished severely in hell, because the one who aborts, kills life. The person held responsible for abortion was generally the mother. The female culprits would then find themselves in hells like described in the *Maitrisimit*.⁷³⁵ Although it is not a Chinese text but a manuscript written in old-turkic, the hell-descriptions in the *Maitrisimit* were found around Turfan where Chinese settlers also dwelled. The text let the mothers speak in hell, and they describe how they had tried to abort their foetus: they had crushed their own bodies, they had beaten their bodies and jumped from high places, and knowingly they had eaten abortive food and drank abortive drinks. They claim that they had eaten herbs, while saying: 'The foetus shall go.' In this hell were also women who tried to abort the foetuses of other women by squeezing the pregnant woman's body.⁷³⁶

This suspicious and hostile attitude towards the mother who lost her child or who aborted it for reasons often not known to the male authors, was also put forward with respect to post-natal abortion. Ebrey observes that "despite the evidence that infanticide was practiced by their peers, most literati treated it as an act of ignorance, selfishness, and wickedness, most likely done by ordinary commoners, not educated families like themselves."⁷³⁷ This, of course, was the attitude of the elite only and does not inform us in any way on how abortion was done, understood and handled among the Tang population at large.

While medical advice was probably in most cases aimed at aiding women with difficult pregnancies, Buddhist hell descriptions suggest that women aborted due to petty and minor motives. The aggressor in the Tang law was not made clear. The person who caused abortion with the help of a knife would not very likely be the mother herself. She would probably rather have tried to abort with the help of herbs and drinks. That means that some persons would be interested in either harming and exterminating unborn children of other women – the jealous women in Buddhist hells, for example – or foetuses were retrieved for other purposes, which was generally discussed as foetus-theft.

⁷³⁴ *Taiping guangji* 219: 1676 (*Du yi zhi*). The incident happened in Huaixi, part of the autonomous province Weipo, that was an area of great political conflict from 815-817 and beyond, Peterson 1979: 531ff.

⁷³⁵ Shimin, Klimkeit, Laut 1998.

⁷³⁶ Shimin, Klimkeit, Laut 1998: 82. However, I cannot make any statement about the dissemination of this text, and how much its ideas were spread in Chinese texts and culture in that period.

⁷³⁷ Ebrey 1993: 182 (fn. 28).

To believe in foetus-theft was not an astonishing practice, and it probably was already known and feared in the medieval period, which would be a good explanation for the entry in the *Tang Code*. A foetus was needed in order to extract its life-force *qi*. This life-force was necessary for different life-giving and life-prolonging practices. Although the life force of a person could also be found in inner organs, finger-nails, toe-nails and hair, there was “a preference for children and foetuses in this kind of theft, since they were supposed to contain the purest life-force.”⁷³⁸

Lastly, not only to abort but also in order to bear children, mothers were likely to take medicine. When the son of Zhang Qiqiu was not born at the expected moment, the mother was about to take medicine in order to give birth at term. But a nun urged her to stop doing so and told her that her son would become a guard later.⁷³⁹ The narrative suggests the danger of birth-inducing medicine, which might be similar to abortive medicine and might cause danger to the child.

Migration

Within the range of narratives that address children, we have come across those that focus on households in which a child stayed at one place, but also those that deal with children who migrated. Narratives tell about children who accompanied their care-givers and move across the country. The reasons for migration were manifold and often they were not disclosed. Our sources roughly provide five reasons for migrations: 1) migrating due to social unrest;⁷⁴⁰ 2) economic insecurity or job change of the male care-giver;⁷⁴¹ 3) slavery and kidnapping; 4) in the case of becoming orphaned, new care-givers have to be found;⁷⁴² 5) migration for education.⁷⁴³

⁷³⁸ Ter Haar 2006: 92.

⁷³⁹ *Taiping guangji* 147: 1062 (*Ding ming lu*); see also Bray 1997.

⁷⁴⁰ Uprisings, war or other feelings of danger, and actual danger through social insecurity.

⁷⁴¹ In both cases children move together with their families or are left behind by at least one of their biological parents or their relatives. Especially during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, paintings were made of families that are moving because the male head of the family changes office, Wicks 2002 (b): 167ff.

⁷⁴² In chapter III I have discussed the maternal and paternal family as the most common social institution that come into action when help is needed in finding care for an orphaned child. Other care can be found among institutions that can be outside of the blood-related family and that might consist of people with a lower social status or of a higher status or institutions that are considered as outside of society, like Buddhist communities for example.

⁷⁴³ This reason for migration mostly involves teenagers, who go to an institution where they study in order to participate at state examinations many years later, or where they learn a

These five reasons frequently merged. Social unrest and war could often have been causes for economic insecurity, death, slavery and kidnapping. Education could have been suspended because of social unrest and economic insecurity. Moreover, education and kidnapping sometimes went hand in hand with each other. In the section above I have already discussed what happened to orphans: they moved together with their female care-giver or alone, and they were handed from one family to another or sent back and forth between family members in different places. In the following chapter I will discuss education and its implications, such as being taken away from home to undergo teaching. Therefore, in this section I will focus only on the first three categories and discuss the impact of social unrest, economic insecurity and job change, and slavery and kidnapping on the childhood of a person.

Uprisings, wars and the associated phenomena were almost always present in the roughly five centuries that make up the time frame of my research. Generally fathers went to borders of the Tang empire even though they had wives, concubines and young offspring. Mothers of young children died either because of famine, because they met with severe violence, or at childbirth. Han Yü's (Han Yü 韓愈, 768–824) mother, for example, died two months after Han Yü's birth. Han Yü was lucky that he did not die as well, because a two month old infant did not have much chance of survival unless he or she has a wet nurse. Subsequently, his father died two years later, and Han Yü was sent to his brother Han Hui, who was nearly thirty years older than him.⁷⁴⁴ Again he was lucky, because he was raised very well by his sister-in-law.⁷⁴⁵ This is remarkable, because narratives often tell of the dangers concerning fatherless children who were mistreated by their relatives, as we saw.⁷⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Han Hui could not offer a peaceful life to his younger brother, because exile forced him to assume a post in Shaozhou when Han Yü was eleven years old.⁷⁴⁷ When Han Yü was around twelve or thirteen years old, Han Hui died – which again left the boy without a male care-giver, but this time under the good care of his sister-in-law.⁷⁴⁸

profession. Yet, Buddhist and Daoist monks and nuns, for example, also approach parents in order to recruit their offspring for religious service. That means, children are either sent away or taken away for the purpose of education.

⁷⁴⁴ Hartman 1986: 20.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴⁶ Still, people who raise infants of relatives were so common that there were probably more children that were treated well.

⁷⁴⁷ Hartman 1986: 22.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 23.

Families moved and merged constantly. Liu Zongyuan's (Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, 773–819) father, for example, moved his entire family away from Chang'an into the far South, at the beginning of the An Lushan rebellion in 756.⁷⁴⁹ His father, together with his immediate family, moved back to Chang'an after the rebellion was over.⁷⁵⁰ Uprisings, banditry, war and the constant moving of their parents and family surely influenced the shaping of intelligence, emotions, imagination and character of children. Very often, these circumstances were the cause of a child's death, as is dramatically shown in the case of the unnamed aristocrat of Jiangling, in which a member of the army died because he caused the death of a child and the child's bereft father.⁷⁵¹

Some exceptional narratives exist of boys who survived the hazards of violent times and even manage to take government exams.⁷⁵² Similarly, according to a record already mentioned, a foetus could also survive the dangers of war, even when its mother is attacked.⁷⁵³

Interestingly, there are very few reports of child soldiers, although the Tang army was vast, and military service probably held high. From the second century A.D. we know of the teenager Lü Meng (吕蒙, 178 - 219), who accompanied the husband of his older sister in combat and proceeded to fight while cursing.⁷⁵⁴ Another teenager, the thirteen-year-old son of Du Shenyang (杜審言, died ca. 705), Du Fu's grandfather, spontaneously revenged the execution of his father during a party. He stabbed the murderer of his father and was subsequently killed by this person's servants.⁷⁵⁵ The boy, although not a member of the army but the son of a respected poet, already knew how to handle a knife and kill with it.

Girls could also be heroes in times of war. When towards the end of the Sui dynasty, the city Fenzhou was under siege, a twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl told her family that only with her help would the city manage to endure the siege. She foretold that she would die soon and requested to be buried under the city wall. The city would then be safe.⁷⁵⁶ The burying of children under buildings was, in fact, a well-known idea.⁷⁵⁷ The *Old History of the Tang* reports of one case from 739, when "it was rumoured that in the capital Chang'an, and elsewhere,

⁷⁴⁹Jo-shui Chen 1993: 41. Liu Zongyuan (773–819) was a famous writer.

⁷⁵⁰*Ibid*: 42.

⁷⁵¹*Taiping guangji* 120: 841-2 (*Huan yuan ji*).

⁷⁵²*Taiping guangji* 121: 854-5 (*Yuan hua ji*).

⁷⁵³*Taiping guangji* 219: 1676 (*Du yi zhi*); see section on abortion.

⁷⁵⁴*Taiping guangji* 1428-9 (*Du yi zhi*).

⁷⁵⁵*Taiping guangji* 265: 2073, see *Xin Tangshu* 201: 5735, on Du Shenyang.

⁷⁵⁶*Taiping guangji* 374: 2970-1 (*Guang gu jin wu xing ji*).

⁷⁵⁷Or a well-known rumour about carpenters' magic. See ter Haar 2006.

children were necessary for laying the foundations of the Hall of Brightness (*mingtang*) [...] The rumour led to widespread panic and people hiding their children in far-away valleys.”⁷⁵⁸

Very often, killing, kidnapping or wounding a child remained unpunished by official measures.⁷⁵⁹ Especially in restless and violent times, when violence was used against anyone, a crime committed against a child was often overlooked and not addressed. Notwithstanding that, the demand for punishing a violator of a child still existed. Narratives therefore often deal with supernatural punishment. Children also died as a result of actual migration, as did Mr Bei's daughter. During the Huang Chao rebellion (874-884) the sixteen-year-old girl was fleeing with her parents, when she fell ill and died.⁷⁶⁰

In another case from 889, Wang Biao, the mayor of a district, had no chance against the head of the district who had a higher position in the hierarchy and who took the son of Wang Biao away by force. The single father tried to appeal to the empathy of the official by making him aware that the little boy already had to grow up without his biological mother.⁷⁶¹ Hedong in 889, five years after the Huang Chao rebellion and eighteen years before the Tang collapse, however, was not a place where law was applied, and the official who abducted his son would probably have gotten away with his misdeed – unless, of course, he would not have been punished by supernatural powers, as it happened in this case. In this narrative, the father was worth less than the child. The official in such desperate need of a son even killed an adult man to get his way. The official appears not to have feared legal consequences for his act. For him, to have a son and heir, probably to fulfil the filial duties towards him when he died, was of utmost importance. Other cases speak of kidnapping, most probably because of a common need for labourers.⁷⁶²

Two centuries earlier, the ‘female emperor’ of the short Zhou dynasty, Wu Zetian (ca. 690-705), was known for having caused the death of many people. Narratives exist that report the existence of children that she has orphaned.

The family of later Chan master Yiguang (儀光禪師) was killed because of a ‘political fault’ of his father; Yiguang was still in swaddling clothes and his wet nurse escaped with him. When he was about eight years old, the wet nurse heard that the empress, who was in charge of the execution of his family, was still

⁷⁵⁸ Ter Haar 2006: 110-111; *Jiu Tangshu* 37: 1358.

⁷⁵⁹ Only if the child is hurt in the womb of its mother punishment is applied.

⁷⁶⁰ *Taiping guangji* 312: 2470 (*Bei men suo yan*).

⁷⁶¹ *Taiping guangji* 123: 871-2 (*San shui xiao du*). The importance of the biological parents is stressed here again.

⁷⁶² See for example *Taiping guangji* 219: 1676 (*Du yi zhi*).

angry and determined to kill Yiguang as well. The wet nurse was afraid to lose her life and told the young child that he was a big boy now and could live on his own. She gave him some clothes and money and went away. Yiguang then played with some children in a village, where the master of one house recognized his strange appearance. Yiguang was lying about his identity. On his way away from the village he was picked up by a monk who addressed him as 'little boy' (*xiaoer*). He cut off his hair and dressed him differently and sent him to a nearby monastery.⁷⁶³

The wet nurse often comes into the picture as the last responsible care-giver of the child when its entire family was wiped out and other social institutions did not dare to bear the risk of caring for the child. At the age of eight, Yiguang's wet nurse considered the boy capable enough to live on his own. Yiguang then did what children tend to do and played with other children. He grew up with the knowledge about the danger of his family name and was able to lie about his identity. In the end he was picked up by an 'outsider', a Buddhist monk.

According to the reaction of Yiguang's wet nurse who was too afraid to continue her care of Yiguang after facing the possibility of being murdered for doing so, these children were dangerous to be associated with and they therefore had hardly any chance of survival. This is clearly shown in a narrative regarding a fifth century incident in which Yuan Can and his whole family fell victim to such a family killing.⁷⁶⁴ The wet nurse tried to save Yuan Can's little son and handed him over to a follower of Can, afraid or unable to keep him herself. Yet, this person, together with his mother, killed the boy.⁷⁶⁵ Yuan Can's son, unlike Yiguang, died because people did not dare to keep him – probably Yuan Can's follower and his mother calculated that the child would bring more problems than benefits.

There are also several accounts of young children, usually around the age of seven or eight, who survived clan-executions. Military officer Yan Zhiwei's son, for example, escaped his executioner and ran to people of his class, who fed him with sweets and played with him. He was not killed in the end, because the executioner did not have the heart to fulfil his duty on a playing child, stuffed with cake.⁷⁶⁶

In the case of family execution, the whole family was decimated because of a crime or political miscalculation of the father. A good example is the prosecution of the Li family under the female emperor Wu Zetian. When Wu

⁷⁶³ *Taiping guangji* 94: 627-9 (*Ji wen*).

⁷⁶⁴ *Song Shu*: 2229.

⁷⁶⁵ *Taiping guangji* 119: 837-8 (*Gu jin ji*).

⁷⁶⁶ *Taiping guangji* 163: 1181 (*Chao ye qian zai*).

Zetian from the Zhao family seized power and became emperor of China, several princes of the Tang imperial Li family planned a rebellion, which failed. "The rising constituted the last internal resistance to the empress Wu, and though it was scarcely a genuine threat, punishments, horrifying in their disproportion, continued well into 691. Until that time, the Li family, guilty and innocent alike, was systematically decimated. Only a few children, exiles in the far South, survived."⁷⁶⁷ The period towards the end of the Tang dynasty, from the ninth century onward, were, as we have seen above, times in which justice could not easily be carried out, because due to the weakness of the state, violence and autonomy were wide-spread. Children suffered considerably from economic scarcity and the danger and violence caused by it.

⁷⁶⁷ Guisso 1979: 303. See also *Taiping guangji* 270: 2122 (*Guang de shen yi lu*).

VI. Education

In medieval China the practical interest of parents in the education of their offspring primarily served one purpose, which was achieved by several means. This purpose was the perpetuation of the ancestral cult. Through education care-givers wanted to ensure that their children, biological or not, would be able to take care of the family rituals. For this purpose offspring was instructed in ritual practices, additionally they received behavioural training so that they would act appropriate in certain official circumstances and not embarrass their family. Children ought to be instructed moral lessons through literature in order to internalize the idea of filial piety, and to develop a strong sense of responsibility towards those who were higher up in the hierarchical structure of a family. Teaching literacy played a large role in family instruction.

This chapter focuses on elite and literary education, and only deals briefly with other kinds of instruction. This is due mainly to a lack of sources about any type of training for children of non-elite people. I first discuss the general ideas about the child's education that were prominent during the Tang dynasty. This discussion includes examining the goal of education and the connection between literacy and the education of children. I further analyse certain character traits, abilities and disabilities in children, such as precocity or a handicap, that made it easier – or more difficult – to receive education. At the end of the first section, I analyse narratives which deal with imponderables in education, which are mostly cases that tell of children that became something completely different than what the parents had intended for them.

The first section provides the basis for the following two sections in which I focus on family education and professional education. Family education, as I will show, enhanced the efforts by adults to integrate their offspring into the

immediate social environment and to instruct it in the right behaviour according to their sex and age. These efforts already started before birth and were continued with important rituals after birth.

While family education before all addressed children below the age of ten, professional education was concerned with children above ten years of age in most cases. In the last section, then, I focus on education that was not done by care-givers but by others, most probably non-kin, away from home in more or less official schools, with individual masters, in study-halls and monasteries. In that section I will also discuss the professional education of religious specialists and healers, and I will show what was believed could happen to a child under the guidance of a stranger to the family and away from home. At the end I analyse those cases that reveal practices such as apprenticeship and slavery with regard to children.

1. General ideas about the child's education in medieval China

For elite families outside the inner circle of the imperial palace it was very important to educate their sons in order to create a reputation built on morality, as well as to provide access to the imperial bureaucracy and therewith access to power and wealth. As a result, numerous authors put their private ideas about education into writing or wrote down stories or accounts about the ups and downs, and success and failure of education within their own social circles or that of their acquaintances, or they repeatedly reverted to famous cases of history. Literary practice was a shared, ongoing endeavour, and it therefore features overwhelmingly in all kinds of writings. Hence, it is not surprising that we know so much about the ideas and ideals of literary education because the information about education solely derives from the literary elite. Sadly we know next to nothing about the instruction in education and training of other skills.

Medieval education in elite families was based mainly on practical instruction in behavioural rules, morality and excellent skills in language and rhetoric. Morality instructions for children were believed to be best transmittable with texts, some of which dated back to the early imperial era. In addition, other moralistic texts were particularly composed for children. These were largely based on oral texts which thematised morality and anecdotes from any era but, again chiefly from the early imperial times. Some of those texts enhanced the targeted moral values, but they were largely generated to teach basic literacy.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁸ What these ancient texts are, especially how they have to be understood and how their original form is

Parents also resorted to those texts that were simply available, such as texts that were in their vicinity and which they could read or knew by heart themselves.

Aside from discussing the goal and value of literary instructions which parents had in mind for their offspring, I will also analyse the prerequisites of education. By prerequisite of education I mean those character traits that children needed, in order to gain a successful education. The main requirements for this goal were intelligence as well as a certain kind of behaviour that made an adult want to put effort in their education. I also raise the question whether we can speak of a child's own choice of education. I will then discuss cases of education in which parents did not achieve their goal to awaken that morality in their offspring that will bring success, an official career and benefit the family. These cases to the greatest extent can be found in biographies of Daoists or immortals, which means that the children in fact had success in achieving a great personal goal. Additionally, I will present some cases of failed education in which the children did not even turn out to be immortal.

Start of education in Medieval China

Several ideals existed in medieval China about the age at which children should start education. The first educational efforts a child had to undergo came from its parents. With respect to early education at home, the medical author Sun Simiao was especially concerned about the fragility of the child's body and therefore asked for a mild education, a mostly non-violent one, until about the age of ten:

The *Discussions* says: 'The parents of King Wen employed a method for foetus instruction. This is the way of the saints, [with which one] could not yet reach the middle way (中庸). That is, if you raise children with the middle way, rely on etiquette and [the teaching of] basic characters when it is at the age of ten years and below. You should not overtly exert themselves in their tasks because that would confuse the child's heart and cause it to be afraid. Moreover, do not unduly carry out punishment with the stick because that would also lead to convulsions. This kind of approach can cause great wounds and misery. On the other hand, it should also not be treated with too great laxness and confusion because that would cause its intentions to become chaotic. Also do not praise its cleverness, but even more so you cannot scold your children. With eleven years and above you can gradually increase strict instructions.

supposed to be, is a matter of ongoing debate throughout the dynasties, see McMullen 1988 about the changes of the official canon during the Tang dynasty. Before all, however, texts have been chosen individually by parents, and availability played an important role in their choice, as I will discuss below.

These are the big lines of raising children. If one does not rely upon that method, that will cause harm and damage to the child, and it would mean that the parents kill their child. [In the case that your child would die because you did not pay attention in your method of education] you cannot have a grudge against Heaven and surely not against other people.⁷⁶⁹

This very outspoken advice by Sun Simiao is the last entry in his chapters about children in the medical treatise *Qianjing yifang*. In chapter III I have already explained that medical treatises about children did not solely deal with questions that we would call medical. This advice is pedagogical, but still linked to the body of the child. Here we find expressed one of the greatest fears of caregivers concerning their children, namely that the latter would contract fright-disorders or convulsions, which could be caused by wrong education whether by harsh punishment or too much pressure on the child.

Despite the fact that Sun Simiao's advice was not the only source that provided a guide for educational know-how, it offers a quite detailed idea regarding educational praxis and the consequences of educational methods. The quote from the *Revised Prescriptions* contains several well-known preconceptions: 1) the assumption that foetus education existed but that non-aristocratic people should not be bothered with it; 2) instructions of good manners and basic literacy were the foundation of later education; 3) the fear of spoiled children; 4) the beginning of the end of childhood around the age of eleven.⁷⁷⁰ In the following we will come to a better understanding of these preconceptions.

Literate men who tried to maintain or establish their cultural and social influence during the Tang, resorted to a set of texts that emphasised education. One of these chosen works was the *Rites*. This Han dynasty work advised that professional education, which by and large meant instruction by a master, should start at the age of nine.⁷⁷¹ Before that age, the *Rites* divided education into several steps. First, education did not depend on age but on physical ability: "As soon as a child is taking solid food it should be instructed in telling its right hand [from the left]. When it can talk, it should be taught the *wei* sound from a man and the *yu* sound from a woman, and that men wear leather, whereas women

⁷⁶⁹ *Qianjin yifang* 11: 328.

⁷⁷⁰ Usually, age ten is given as the starting point for education. Reasons for this difference could be that the exact age of a person is rather uninteresting, what counts are the categories as I have discussed in chapter I; it can also be that the text disagrees with the usual notion from a start of professional education at age ten and prefers a slightly later age for medical reasons.

⁷⁷¹ For basic information on *Liji* (*Book of Rites*) see Riegel 1993: 293-297. For a discussion about the educational ideas put forward in the *Liji* see Lee 1984: 159-60.

wear silk.”⁷⁷² After these first lessons were learned, children’s primary education continued according to age:

At the age of six, instructions ought to be given on numbers and directions. At seven, boys and girls may no longer eat at the same table. At eight, on entering or leaving a house or when receiving meals, children must be made to follow after their elders. Also, at this time, they need to begin acting with courtesy. At nine, they proceed to receive instructions from a master, at which point they will live away from home and learn to write.⁷⁷³

The later part of education, Hsiung Ping-chen remarks, “consisted primarily of practical subjects such as numbers, directions, and the calendar. Nothing is mentioned about literary skills at this stage. Nor were disciplinary measures suggested for the execution of this ideal.”⁷⁷⁴ However, although venerated throughout the Tang, and, although people might have involved its authority by quoting it, the *Rites* were probably not much more than a set of guidelines.⁷⁷⁵ Hence it cannot be used as a reliable account on medieval educational practice.

A third authoritative source that displayed consideration about education is Yan Zhitui’s *Family Instruction*. This text can be taken as a good example for educational ideas cherished by the head of an aspiring elite family. Yan Zhitui brings forward examples of failed education concerning persons from the recent past in order to underline his point of view that education should start fairly soon after birth and involve physical punishment from an early age onward.⁷⁷⁶ He advises that

as soon as a baby can recognize facial expressions [i.e. about sixty days after birth]⁷⁷⁷ and understand approval and disapproval, training should be begun in

⁷⁷² Liji Neizi, translation from Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 106. The reason therefore is the understanding that children take solid food not at the exact same age. Also language acquisition is given a broader range of time to start.

⁷⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷⁴ Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 106.

⁷⁷⁵ The *Rites* was one of the five texts that have been singled out to form the official canon on which the state’s rituals relied upon. The *Rites* was thus a well-known text and it was used for state rituals.

⁷⁷⁶ Although not too early – he is not specific about the age.

⁷⁷⁷ See the table in chapter II, where the process Changing and Steaming and the motoric development are listed. The development on day sixty is mentioned by Sun Simiao, in the *Huangdi neijing* and the *Shuoyuan* – all works that were probably well-known to Yan Zhitui and his contemporary literate men.

doing what he is told and stopping when so ordered. For several years punishment with the bamboo rod should be avoided.⁷⁷⁸

The three texts that I have quoted belong to very different literary genres: The *Revised Prescriptions* is a medical treatise, written with the aim to enlighten adults about the physical processes concerning their offspring; with the further aim that they use that knowledge in order to guarantee the good health of their children. The *Rites* is one of the venerated ancient classics that many elite families relied upon to build their careers as well as their moral equipment. The *Family Instructions*, lastly, is a private work, intended for use within the household. Yet, in the course of the centuries following its compilation, the *Family Instructions* was used as primary teaching material, and for this reason probably had considerable impact on those who were learning how to read and write. The three quotations I have used, thus, provide an idea about the background and variability against which educational theory and practice was imagined, especially concerning ideas on from which age children should or could be educated. The examples further show the important place that was given to the education of children from an early age onward. The quotes also show that men have assigned particular learning abilities to certain age-groups. That means, a child was expected to master a certain set of knowledge and skills by a certain age. If it was not able to conform to the standards or if it was premature in walking or talking, it is judged either as inauspicious or precocious.

Goals of education

Concerning the general question about the purpose of education in imperial China, Lee explains that it was sought to serve creating “a unity between the individual’s purpose for moral perfection and the state’s need for stability and uniformity.”⁷⁷⁹ This goal explains the *raison d’être* of the state’s institutional education system. For the *shi* (士), the main community that backed the state and that was interested in playing an active and influential role in its politics, moral perfection was to be attained through examples from the histories.⁷⁸⁰ Other groups that produced texts and which were concerned with ideas about the state, aside from the literate *shi* elite, were religious communities.⁷⁸¹ In the communities of the celestial masters, for instance, the idea of perfection and stability of the

⁷⁷⁸ Yan Zhitui II, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 3.

⁷⁷⁹ Lee 2000: 171.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 242.

⁷⁸¹ Religious communities also included members of the *shi* among others.

state, played an important role, which based its focus on the individual body and the state within.

A religious activity that we have some evidence from and that bears significant information about the ideal of education, is praying. From Dunhuang we have several model prayers that were composed for the birth of a child. These prayers were probably confined to the ideas and wishes of parents living in this oasis in a northern zone of the Tang empire, and they should therefore not be used to represent conditions for the whole area of the Tang. Nonetheless, I assume that the prayers reveal certain aspects of what was deemed to be important among marginal groups, and what kind of influence the Tang dynasty had on their wishes for the future of their children.

When [the child] is a little boy, may the five gods protect him,⁷⁸² and may he uphold the six arts⁷⁸³ at the Dragon gate.⁷⁸⁴

When it is a little girl, may the eight arms grasp and support her, and may she pass on the Four Virtues⁷⁸⁵ at the Phoenix Pavilion.⁷⁸⁶

When it is a boy, may he be like gold and jade, and may he bring honour on country (*guo* 國) and family (*jia* 家).

When it is a girl, may she be like a fragrant orchid, and may she have a humane behaviour and be humane in her instructions.⁷⁸⁷

May So-and-so have a healthy life and a high age, and may he or she live as long as the *chun*-tree and the crane.⁷⁸⁸

[In case of a boy] may he fulfil the duties of a position, take reputation (*ming* 名) important and may he be as famous as the Tripod of the Platform.⁷⁸⁹ May the Ten Thousand Gods protect him and the One Thousand Saints provide

⁷⁸² The five gods are probably the gods of the five directions, they are protective beings, also for children.

⁷⁸³ The six arts are ritual (*li*), music, archery, chariotriding, writing and calculating. They are a pre-imperial concept of aristocratic education. As we will see below, by the Tang most of these arts are considered minor to writing. As a practice for many elite parents and their sons, however, this combination still had a powerful connotation. Probably even more so in the Northern regions, where this prayer comes from.

⁷⁸⁴ Dragon Gate is where men are transformed from ordinary men to literary officials who serve the government.

⁷⁸⁵ The four virtues are female virtue character, female speech, female appearance, and female work.

⁷⁸⁶ The Phoenix Pavilion probably has to be read parallel to the above-mentioned Dragon Gate and, with regard to girls might mean the transformation from a girl to a wife who serves her family.

⁷⁸⁷ This passage could also be read: May she have a submissive behaviour and may she be submissive in her instructions.

⁷⁸⁸ *Chun*-tree and crane are longevity symbols.

⁷⁸⁹ Tripod of the Platform is an allegory for 'highest official'.

posthumous capital. May merit increase day by day and knowledge be accumulated year by year.

[If it is a girl] may she be cute and clever. May her ritual forms be straight and solemn. May she eat *faxi*-food (法喜) and be without worries.⁷⁹⁰

The wishes for the baby boy or baby girl are ancient virtues, divine protection and hopes for happiness, wealth and knowledge. Interestingly, boys and girls here are regarded equally. Alternating wishes are expressed for both, a prospective daughter or a prospective son. A boy should be protected by the five gods of direction and a girl by the eight arms. A girl had to internalize the four virtues, and a boy should excel in the six arts. Concerning their character, boys were associated with hard material, such as metal and stone, and girls with flowers. Boys were expected to work for the dynasty, family and reputation, while girls should work on their behaviour and character. Another prayer, directed only to boys, focuses especially on the child's intellectual abilities and learning.

May the principles of teaching be relied upon in the same way that the *lian*-water-lily opens and becomes a *handan*-waterlily.

May [our son] be fluent in the language of the Tang when he is playing *zhangxing* (長行).⁷⁹¹

May he be competent in reciting Siddham when he meets dharani-spells.

May he already have finished reading sentences and hymns by the time his math teaching is completed.

First, may the method of the Benevolent Teacher be capable.

Second, when a young boy, may he be respectful and may he have a kind heart.

May he hold up the names of Zhong You (仲由) and Yanzi (顏子) from Lu;⁷⁹² may he value Shi Shi (釋氏 Siddharta, i.e. Buddha) and Sheng Yu (生蝸?) from Qin (秦).⁷⁹³

This prayer starts with showing the importance of *jiao* (教), instruction. Instruction is assigned transformative power and compared with the growth and transformation of plants like water-lilies. The prayer also reveals that for social

⁷⁹⁰ S 343 in *Dunhuang yuanwen ji* 1995: 19. The last seven characters do not seem to make sense in the transcription.

⁷⁹¹ 長行. This game is also known as *shuanglu* (雙陸) and is played with dice and pieces.

⁷⁹² Zhong You, whose style names was Zi Lu (子路), and Yan Zi, Yan Hui (顏回) were two exemplary disciples of Confucius, Yan Hui was said to be his favourite.

⁷⁹³ P 2044 in *Dunhuang yuanwen ji* 1995: 162.

activities ‘Tang language’ might have been required,⁷⁹⁴ while for spiritual purposes mantras should be known, quoted in Siddham; which means that quoting Buddhist texts was deemed convenient. The prayer proceeds with wishing for basic character-traits such as being respectful to the traditions, having a kind heart, and being obedient. It ends with the hope that the boy would follow the footsteps of historical personalities who were praised for their high moral standards. The general, and most ideal goals of education, as we can see from this prayer, were the internalisation of medieval morality and the creation of a kind character, as well as instruction in special sacred languages and the basic instruction in calculation and literacy.

Education and literacy

In research on traditional China, education is usually only discussed in connection with the advanced training of young men for the exam system, which means the mastery of literacy. The initial stages of education are commonly ignored. Usually these early stages are not referred to as ‘studying’ (*xue* 學), but as ‘instruction’ (*jiao* 教). The few information we have about that is then usually brought into connection with ‘Confuciansim’.

The focus on literacy in education was related to the slow but steady growing importance of working for the government, especially from the eighth century onward. Breeding of successors for the administrative elite was of immense importance but education was nonetheless considered to be done for moral reasons only. In that respect, Zürcher points out that “from the beginning that elitist aim was combined with the much more comprehensive ideal of moral training and ideological manipulation of the mass of the people. Thus, Confucianism tended and overtly claimed to monopolize ‘education’ at all levels.”⁷⁹⁵

Furthermore, formal social relations among the members of the *shi* rested for a large part on profound textual knowledge. Mather has shown that in the fifth and sixth centuries “younger generations should be an adornment to the family reputation, like fragrant plants in the courtyard. But this in itself was something of an innovation in light of the traditional concept that the male

⁷⁹⁴ Chen, for example, supposes that Liu Zongyuan felt isolated when he was exiled in 805 to the South of China and when, after a short while all the children of his household started talking in the local language which Liu did not understand, (Chen 1992: 82). Teaching the official Tang language, then, must have involved some efforts and in most parts of China, I suspect, it was dealt with as a second language.

⁷⁹⁵ Zürcher 1989: 19.

members of the family, at least, should bring honour to the family by serving as officials.”⁷⁹⁶

Learning was such a relevant matter in the life of a Tang member of the *shi*-class, that early education, given in the context of the family was considered to be of great importance.⁷⁹⁷ The kind of education that I discuss in the following sections is instruction (*jiao* 教) that ideally already started before birth when it was referred to as prenatal education, foetus instruction or nourishing the foetus (*tai jiao* 胎教, *tai yang* 胎養). After birth, sources speak of family instruction (*jia jiao* 家教), which took place until a boy took up professional education with external teachers. Girls were probably taught by older female family members up to the age in their teens when they were married into another family. However, a clear definition and age division was not given in connection to actual practice. Cui Yuan, the daughter of Jian, for example,

when she was three years old, she knew what was allowed and at the age of five, she knew what was forbidden. When seven years old, she was able to do female tasks (女事), and she was very good with brush and letter writing. She could read texts (書) and quote from old and new literature. In her spare time she would sing to the *qin* (絃桐). Chanting (諷) the [*Book of*] *Poems* and [Qu Yuan’s] *Elegies* (詩騷) gave her pleasure.”⁷⁹⁸

Cui Yuan thus learned typical female tasks, but also tasks that were similar for boys and girls, namely reading, writing and making music.⁷⁹⁹ If she really could use the brush at the age of seven, she was rather exceptional not even for her sex but also compared with boys, since usually children would not learn writing with a brush before they are ten years old, as we will see below. Therefore we can conclude that the above quote contains some exaggerations, in order to praise Jian’s daughter and Jian alike.

Handling texts, however, was not only an activity confined to *ru*-scholars. Daoist and Buddhist clergy were also well versed in textual knowledge and provided their own written material in order to participate in the competition of the three literary traditions at court, to secure their communities. People who acquired knowledge of the texts of those ‘three teachings’ (三教), then, made some important contributions to the formation of intellectual debates and exerted

⁷⁹⁶ Mather 1995: 116.

⁷⁹⁷ Zürcher prefers to use the French term ‘formation’ instead of education when talking about the Confucian activity of raising children morally and for the purpose to be members of their communities.

⁷⁹⁸ Gao Mingshi 2005: 461-2 (*Fan chuan wen ji* 樊川文集 6 (*Bin lie nü zhuan*)).

⁷⁹⁹ Skills that children would actually partly pick up freely when young, see below.

considerable impact on politics. Politics, on the other hand, likewise influenced the three teachings. Literary production and digestion of the three teachings thus were a major task for men engaged in politics.⁸⁰⁰

Yet, the *ru*-scholars were the ones that put most the emphasis on literary education. Very often the ideas of *ru*-scholars (儒) were adopted by the *shi*, because “the aristocratic members [...] dominated the educational system that was created to serve as well as to educate them.”⁸⁰¹ In fact the continuity of the gentry’s status depended on education and studying because “office holding, pedigree and learning were the components of the corporate identity of the *shi*.”⁸⁰² Learning, then, was of utmost importance because it “was something *shi* did as part of their shared identity; the values articulated and debated through learning were related to the political and social aspects of *shi*-life.”⁸⁰³ It would however be misleading to connect the *shi* solely with *ru*-teachings, because they were also engaged with Daoist and Buddhist teachings.⁸⁰⁴ Literary skills had to be acquired by children whose parents were affiliated with government jobs, or had the ambition to be affiliated to the imperial environment. Literary skills were necessary to obtain success and to be approved of one’s peers in the *shi* community, because one ought above all be eloquent in ethical conduct, speech, affairs of government, and cultural learning.⁸⁰⁵

The existence of etiquette regarding letter writing for all occasions (*shuyi* 書儀) during the Tang serves as a good example of the importance of being able to handle elaborate literary compositions. Ebrey argues that “*shuyi* were widely used and regularly rewritten during the Tang period because ritualized communication helped to maintain social relations. [...] The purpose of these letters was to replace face-to-face courtesies and they employed standardized verbal formulae in much the same way that everyday salutations did.”⁸⁰⁶

As another example of how important the acquirement of literacy through education became during the medieval period we can use Liu Zongyuan’s biography. Liu Zongyuan’s ancestors were known to have followed a military family tradition until the sixth century. “But it is unmistakable that from the

⁸⁰⁰ “One of the grounds for intellectual exchange was the existence of three discrete, accumulative textual traditions. The reading, interpretation, and writing of texts required training and expert knowledge,” Bol 1992: 20. Literacy was also essential for courtesans and other artists.

⁸⁰¹ Lee 2000: 224.

⁸⁰² Bol 1992: 4.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid*: 4.

⁸⁰⁴ Bol 1992 gives several reasons why *shi* scholars were not troubled by the coexistence of the three teachings. The most important reason is because “each tradition claimed responsibility for different areas of human experience,” Bol 1992: 21.

⁸⁰⁵ Bol 1992: 15.

⁸⁰⁶ Ebrey 1985: 584 and 585.

early sixth century on the *Hsi-chüan* Lius by and large distinguished themselves by cultural rather than martial achievements."⁸⁰⁷ Chen attributes this inclination towards literacy to the country's peace and unification in the early sixth century. He sees the focus on literary achievements, moreover, "in accordance with southern ethos."⁸⁰⁸ Liu Zongyuan's childhood took place in the later half of the eighth century, and his life "was clearly occupied by education. [...] By the time he was three years old, his mother had already begun to teach him poetry."⁸⁰⁹ When he was a bit older he probably studied in the family school, which was the usual thing to do for families of his standing.⁸¹⁰

One more example of a well-known personality is Han Yü, who moved many times as a child and was raised by his brother Han Hui, who was nearly thirty years older than Yü. Han Yü "began to read and memorize the classics at the age of six."⁸¹¹ As a teenager in Shaozhou, where his older brother had a post as a prefect, he "began to compose serious compositions and participated in adult literati society."⁸¹²

The literary education of children, thus, was generally associated with a Confucian (*ru*) life style. The reason lies in the assumption by medieval heads of families that Confucian values and rituals would strengthen the family order.⁸¹³ In that sense, we get the impression that "the family provided a stable context for the transmission of culture."⁸¹⁴ *Ru* education was therefore applied more and more as a family strategy for survival. Ebrey shows that the self-representation of the old Tang families rested on "the perfect combination of the cultivated *shidafu* (士大夫) and the virtuous family man." "Fulfilling the norms of family life" was a remnant value from the Northern Wei, and "claims to superiority by pointing to their cultural refinement and traditional literati skills" were also part of this self-representation that had developed from the late Han onward⁸¹⁵

Yan Zhitui pointed out, that in the education of children care-givers ought to pay attention to the behaviour of their children as well as to their body movements. He himself, for example, regretted the fact that his own education became less strict from the age of nine onward, because at that age his father died and he came under the care of his elder brothers:

⁸⁰⁷ Jo-shui Chen 1992: 39.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 48.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹¹ Hartmann 1992: 22.

⁸¹² *Ibid*: 22.

⁸¹³ Ebrey 1978: 39; Knapp 2005:24ff.

⁸¹⁴ Ebrey 1978: 40.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid*: 96.

When I was just nine years old, my father died. The family members were divided and scattered, every one of us living in poverty. I was brought up by my loving brothers, who went through hardships and difficulties. They were kind but not exacting; their guidance and advice to me were not strict. Though I read the *Book of Decorum* and its commentaries and was somewhat fond of composition, I was greatly influenced by vulgar practices, uncontrolled in feelings, careless in speech and slovenly in dress.⁸¹⁶

Yan here provides a very interesting and vivid account of the memory about his own education and upbringing: his father died when Yan was in the age when elementary education usually started. In his short autobiography, Yan does not boast about his capacities in composing literary pieces, he only says that he was 'somewhat fond of composition' – yet, on another occasion he was told to recite a *fu*-poem at the age of seven, which indicated his precocious brightness.⁸¹⁷ Additionally, Yan complains about the soft education style of his brothers, who must have let him loose and do as he pleased. As a child, Yan did not rebel against this freedom and he probably conversed with many people who engaged in 'vulgar practices' and whose speech was not as eloquent as that employed by his family with its elite ambitions.⁸¹⁸

About the time when he was eighteen or nineteen years old, Yan decided that he had learned to refine his conduct a little, however, "as these bad habits had become second nature, it was difficult to get rid of them entirely."⁸¹⁹ At this time, he was probably busy starting his scholarly career and understood that he would not only need the knowledge of the classics that he and his family were famous for, but also the right conduct, behaviour and body movements. This practical knowledge, he admits, could only be learned during childhood and was difficult to acquire in later years. According to his opinion, the best teachers of conduct are the parents, because they are strict.⁸²⁰

Yan Zhitui praises his parents because "they gave us [Yan and his brothers] good advice, asked about our particular interests, criticized our defects

⁸¹⁶ Yan Zhitui I, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 2.

⁸¹⁷ Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: XVIII.

⁸¹⁸ These people could have been neighbours from different prestigious background and servants or family-neighbours with fewer ambitions, and others crossing his path in a way described in chapter III 'Interaction with others'.

⁸¹⁹ Yan Zhitui I, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 2.

⁸²⁰ The implied reason for parents being strict is that this behaviour shows that they care. Brothers, uncles and other further removed family members are not strict in a benevolent sense, because being strict means to work with a child without gaining benefits and therefore it is supposedly not done with non-biological sons and daughters.

and encouraged our good points – always zealous and sincere.”⁸²¹ Parents thus or at least fathers,⁸²² were important for the transmission of manners and speech.⁸²³

The worst failure in education, in Yan’s opinion, was spoiling one’s offspring. Yan Zhitui did not so much address those mothers who spoiled their children by dressing them too warm or by not allowing them to go outside, out of fear that they would be harmed, as was mentioned in the medical writings. According to Yan’s focus on the social body, spoiled children were usually children who were allowed to do anything they wanted and who received too much love from their care-givers. Yan obviously remained loyal to these theories about education and made sure that his children were seriously engaged with learning: “In his own home, no one gave the pronunciation for a graph without first consulting a dictionary. This could not fail to make a strong impression on his children and helped to explain the similar interests they were to show in their careers.”⁸²⁴

Dien furthermore points out that Yan’s education appeared to have been so strict that “his eldest son, Silu, complained that there seemed to be no hope of reward in study and that his obligations to his parents compelled them to seek some way of supporting them. Yan replied that more important than the son’s filial duties were the responsibilities of the father to provide his children with a good education.”⁸²⁵ Education in this sense appears to have been even more important than merely filial piety. This is one of the few examples in which the responsibilities of adults were seen as graver than the responsibilities of children towards their parents.⁸²⁶

In addition to family instruction and education within the family, we also have some knowledge about children’s practical training in the form of apprenticeship from their teenage years onward.⁸²⁷ For instance, we know about apprenticeship in offices as clerks, which possibly was part of the training within

⁸²¹ Yan Zhitui I, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 2.

⁸²² Although they are not the right people in teaching the classics, which are full of dangerous thoughts that should not be said by a parent to a son, Yan Zhitui VIII, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968: 52ff.

⁸²³ See for example *Taiping guangji* 153: 1097 (*Yi shi*).

⁸²⁴ Dien 1962: 54.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid*: 47.

⁸²⁶ Examples of spoiled children are also found in numerous anthologies, e.g. in Tang Lin’s *Baoyingji*, which reports of the case of Yan Gong of Yangzhou, whose family was “very wealthy and since he had no brothers his father and mother doted on him, allowing him to do anything he suggested,” Gjertson 1975: Tale 11.

⁸²⁷ Apprenticeships were probably also done within (the larger) family, including the family of the mother.

elite communities. We also have some information about apprentices of doctors and certain Daoist communities, as well as the integration of children in agricultural work. Training in practical skills, such as trading, rural work or craftsmanship, however, remains rather obscure. Ideally, and in many cases probably also in reality, training of professional skills started around the age of ten. Boys were then taken along with adult men, such as father, uncles or private teachers, to serve them as apprentices and thereby gain the required skill for this job. This apprenticeship, when in an office, went hand in hand with learning literary skills. For girls, apprenticeship took place within the household.⁸²⁸ Before that, boys and girls often shared the training of skills at home, frequently taught by a member of the household. Much of the education at home was most likely not planned or supervised by parents. It consisted of aspects of knowledge that children learned among themselves in their games or when they joined their parents and other members of the community in gatherings and festivals.

Education in general, and also for the medieval period in China has much to do with the expectations of adults regarding their children. What is more, the adults' cultural and economic background and their parental ambitions, were influential regarding the kind of education they could offer their offspring. Due to the limitations of medieval Chinese sources, however, it is difficult to work out the basic expectations of Tang Chinese parents from their children, which beside the demand for filial behaviour also included the need to ensure the welfare of the parents during their lifetime and thereafter. Johnson points out that "a familiar cliché in Standard history biographies is the elderly relative who announces that the youthful subject of the biography is the "unicorn" or "thousand *li* child" of the family, and that the child will grow up and make the clan prosperous – even if the clan in question is already among the most powerful in the country."⁸²⁹ Another problem that prevents us from going beyond a generalization of parents' expectations for their children and parents' practices to raise their children in a way that they will meet their expectations, is that we cannot make statements about regional and cultural differences concerning child raising methods and parents' expectations.⁸³⁰

⁸²⁸ Often emphasis was put on the fact that their education also involves literacy, which meant not only learning with special female 'classics,' see for example Zhu Fengyu 2005.

⁸²⁹ Johnson 1979: 119 (*Jinshu* 83.1a.9-10).

⁸³⁰ We only get a hint that differences exist from Yan Zhitui's remark about the differences in conduct between the North and South.

Prerequisites for education

Character, looks and intelligence were three main resources that are ascribed to children as shared ‘individual’ traits in medieval biographies and narratives, and parents were believed to not have much influence on them in the end. Thus, we will see in the examples I give below that a minister could have a rude son who, despite rigorous punishment and education on behalf of the minister, stole a donkey and ran away from home. A common gardener could have a cute and intelligent daughter who married into an elite family, because she was loved due to her behaviour, looks and intelligence. Therefore I assume that character, looks and intelligence were prerequisites for education – if they were deemed capable by elite adults, children would be supported and trained to become members of elite communities.

Character and looks of the child and responses of adults

Yan Zhitui acknowledged that the reason for the unequal distribution of parental love amongst their offspring lied in the character of the children:

Only in rare cases can parental love be equally distributed. From ancient to modern times, this fault has been frequent. Those who are wise and talented are naturally loved; while those who are mischievous and stupid should be pitied. When love is one-sided, even though well-intentioned, it generally causes the beloved more harm than good.⁸³¹

We thus find two clear stereotypes: Wise and talented children are loved and the mischievous and stupid ones are pitied. Even so, too much love, which would be understood as spoiling a child, was not recommended because it would harm the child’s development.

Not only clever children elicit positive reactions from adults but also those that look lovely.⁸³² A frequent opening to describe a girl in anecdotes is ‘she had a lovely appearance’.⁸³³ This stereotypical description did not only predict the future good character of this girl, but also pointed at the fact that because the girl was beautiful, she was treated in a way that she was able to develop into a person who was liked by others. Of course, it could also be the other way around:

⁸³¹ Yan Zhitui II, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl) 1968: 7.

⁸³² There is no definition about what a lovely appearance actually looks like, see chapter I ‘Appearance’.

⁸³³ In Song paintings, “painters portrayed children as significant beings in their own right, worthy of cuddling, and sources of pleasure to their parents,” Wicks 2002: 162.

because she was loved, the biography states that she had a lovely appearance. A narrative in the *Yutang xianhua* tells of a gardener's daughter who had the great fortune to be adopted and educated by the magistrate's family, just because she was cute and clever.⁸³⁴

When Xueyun's daughter, who was married to the medical professional Du Xiuji (杜修己), committed adultery with a white dog, her illegitimate son was described as ugly and full of white hair all over his body. As a consequence he received hatred and fear from his mother's marital family. His mother loved him nonetheless because he was her son.⁸³⁵ In this event the description of the seven-year-old child as ugly could arise from the fact that he was the offspring of an illegitimate relationship, possibly even with an aborigine from this area.⁸³⁶ Hence he could have a different appearance which would not fit into the norm of 'beautiful child' among Han Chinese, which probably was the ethnic group of Mrs Xie's in-laws.

Intelligence

Intelligence in children received a disproportionately large amount of attention in biographies and narratives. A person was frequently referred to as a smart child in biographies and in tomb inscriptions, especially in those of praised officials. This was before all a rhetorical topos, no matter how much it might have been true in many cases. The most frequent constructions were: "Person X was clever as a teenager;"⁸³⁷ "person X studied the ABC-text when ten years

⁸³⁴ *Taiping guangji* 160: 1151-2 (*Yu tang xian hua*).

⁸³⁵ *Taiping guangji* 438: 3569-70 (*Xie xiang lu*).

⁸³⁶ A dog also the ancestor of the Yao, an ethnicity that today dwells in Southern China, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. The dog solved the problem of a king and followingly married the promised princess. The king did not want to give away his daughter but the daughter did not seem to mind and followingly gave birth to many sons. This narrative in connection to the Yao myth is attested at least from the Song dynasty onwards (see Alberts 2007). Marrying a dog, thus, could also mean to marry a member of a Southern ethnic group which of course would be scandalous in any rate, but surely from a daughter of a wealthy household who was married to a medical professional (which means, a man who had received thorough literary training and went to a medical school). The fact that her son later becomes a gang leader would also argue for these assumptions, because it would go in accordance with Tang/Han Chinese preconceptions that 'these kind of people' would be bandits.

⁸³⁷ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 92: 606 (*Wu zhi* and *Tang xin yu*).

old;”⁸³⁸ “person X was good at composing texts when thirteen;”⁸³⁹ “when person X was a teenager he loved studying;”⁸⁴⁰ and “person X was a smart child.”⁸⁴¹

In some cases we got further explanations about how intelligence manifested itself. Often, then, intelligence was displayed by a very young child who created literary pieces: “When Liu Xiaochuo was young, he was very clever. When he was seven, he could compose literature;”⁸⁴² “Liu was an ardent student in his teens and was able to compose texts;”⁸⁴³ “Yang Ronghua could compose literary works as a teenager;”⁸⁴⁴ “The grandson of Tang Zhuwang became famous for composing songs and poetry.”⁸⁴⁵ “Jian, the prince of Qi was orphaned when he was still young. He had a jade tally (珪璋) when he was a teenager, but was different from other children at the age of four or five, and he could compose astonishing poems.”⁸⁴⁶

People who were accredited with intelligence during their childhood mostly had a glorious career as statesmen or monks. This means that in their adult life they were mostly engaged with texts or actions that, in a way, made them exceptional. And so, praising them as ‘literate’ from early childhood onward was to express great honour. What was more, these people excelled in an environment that put great emphasis on textual learning. This means that it would come as no surprise for their contemporaries if they had already shown exceptional intelligence during childhood. Additionally, in a community in which everybody dealt with texts since childhood, they must have been engaged with literacy at an exceptionally early age.

In the Tang dynasty the phenomenon of precociously intelligent children performing as entertainers was common: children in the chapter on precocity in the *Taiping guangji* are before all introduced as performers in front of their parents’ guests at banquets or other occasions for private gatherings.⁸⁴⁷ These

⁸³⁸ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 97: 649 (*Yi shi zhi*); *Jiu Tangshu* 147: 3977.

⁸³⁹ E.g. *Xin Tangshu* 184: 5392.

⁸⁴⁰ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 166: 1214 (*Ji wen*).

⁸⁴¹ E.g. *Taiping guangji* 200:1502-3 (*Zhi yan*).

⁸⁴² E.g. *Taiping guangji* 265: 2070 (*Jia hua lu*).

⁸⁴³ *Taiping guangji* 199:1497-8 (from his stele).

⁸⁴⁴ *Taiping guangji* 271: 2132 (*Chao ye qian zai*).

⁸⁴⁵ *Taiping guangji* 265: 2075 (*Tan shi chu yin ben fu lu*).

⁸⁴⁶ *Taiping guangji* 173: 1278 (*Tan sou*).

⁸⁴⁷ *Taiping guangji* 175: 1298-9 (Li Baiyao), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1299 (Wang Bo), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1301-2 (Lin Jie), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1300 (Mao Junnan), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1302 (Gao Ding).

gatherings were often the occasions when guests of the father ‘discovered’ the son’s intelligence and marvelled at it.⁸⁴⁸

Children as entertainers also featured in contexts outside the household. We have one example from the Sui dynasty in which a three-year-old child was a Buddhist master of Tartar appearance who won every debate. During a festival to honour the Buddha’s birthday he held a public debate in front of thousands of onlookers. Although his adult disputants were “famous Buddhist monks” and “delegates of the court,” he had answers to any question they proposed. The author Hou Bai (侯白, Sui dynasty) did not put those questions into his writing. He, however, noted the questions asked by a thirteen-year-old boy, whose arguing skills even surpassed the three-year-old master.⁸⁴⁹ The appearance and debate of both children thus provided great entertainment for the visitors of the temple. Many of the onlookers probably came to the temple to see the three-year-old child in debate with adults. In this event, the boy was marvelled at for its precocious behaviour. Nonetheless, he was presented more as an exotic toy for this occasion rather than somebody to already be taken serious at his young age.

The *Taiping guangji* contains a whole chapter featuring sixteen cases of very intelligent children, titled “precocious wit” (幼敏).⁸⁵⁰ The accounts from above however, do not derive from this chapter, but from other chapters in the *Taiping guangji*. Apparently, thus, there was a difference between a child that could be included in the chapters “precocious wit”, and other types of precocious children, who could compose literary works as a young teenager, and went on to be successful.

Precocity as a character trait had already been ascribed to ancient heroes. Two persons from the realm of mythology and folklore have been singled out as the prototypes of nearly all accounts on precocious children in the following centuries: the god Hou Ji (后稷), ‘Prince of Millet’, and the mysterious seven-year-old Xiang Tuo (項託), who was known to have had several arguments with Confucius and was also referred to as ‘the Teacher of Confucius’.⁸⁵¹ Xiang Tuo’s story is noteworthy, because several copies of it have been found in the Dunhuang library, where it apparently has been used as a primer to teach literacy.⁸⁵²

⁸⁴⁸ Children as entertainers can be found in different functions: see e.g. Teiser 1994, for examples, describes how Hang Kuo is holding a drinking contest with a teenage boy in court, Teiser 1994: 72.

⁸⁴⁹ *Taiping guangji* 248: 1923-4 (*Qi yan lu*).

⁸⁵⁰ *Taiping guangji* 175.

⁸⁵¹ For their stories see Kinney 1995 (b).

⁸⁵² Stein 395, 1392, 2941, 5529, 5530, 5674; Pelliot 3255, 3754, 3826, 3833, 3882; see Lei Qiaoyun 1990: 165-178; for a translation of some of the Dunhuang texts see Waley 1960: 89-96. Also, on Xiang

Generally, precocity in early China meant “the expression of an unconditional respect and love for parents, and the absence of almost all childish traits.”⁸⁵³ This absence of childish traits stood for a refrain from play, but also filial piety at an early age.⁸⁵⁴ Although not an absolute requirement for precocity in medieval China any more, this theme of the child-that-despises-play still occurred here and there. For example the boy Zhang Ding, was marked by his discipline in studying the art of prolonging life as well as his filial piety behaviour in his early teens.⁸⁵⁵ But Zhang Ding lived a double life, because he studied secretly with a Daoist master, leaving his parents unknowing about this fact. His hagiography says that “Ding was respectful, slow of speech and careful. At home he was very filial. Summoning demons and spirits, transforming men and objects, there was nothing he could not do.” Above I have mentioned his case in connection with the disability of enjoying a theatre play, which, in precocious terms, set him apart as exceptional and admirable, promising a great future.⁸⁵⁶

Filial piety as well as distaste for playing were features of noteworthy childhoods during the Tang, even though they were not given a priority position in the narratives of the *Taiping guangji*. They appear more prominently in the biographies of the official *Histories*. The theme of the precocious child, who could recite what it had heard in great quantity and speed, on the other hand, became more elaborate and was widely used to express the intelligence and precocity of a person during his or her childhood.⁸⁵⁷

Tuo and different medieval editions of the narrative, see Soymié 1954. See also Gao Mingshi 2005: 524-530 and Altenburger 2008.

⁸⁵³ Kinney 1995 (b): 2; Hou Ji, as Kinney notes, however, is not deprived of infant traits.

⁸⁵⁴ Kinney 1995 (b): 22; Kinney observes that “the tendency to discount all childish tendencies, a fondness for play in particular, becomes most extreme in Han times, when biographers repeatedly make the claim that specific historical figures passed through childhood with a distinct dislike of play or that these individuals only engaged in play of a very specialized variety.”

⁸⁵⁵ When Wu Hung discusses depictions of children on Han funerary monuments, he finds “real children and ‘ageless children’.” The former are mostly nameless creatures shown under the protection of virtuous mothers, stepmothers, relatives and servants; the latter are famous paragons who are portrayed nourishing and protecting their parents. Furthermore, when a child was labeled ‘filial,’ even if he was only five years old, he had in a certain sense gained adulthood (Wu Hung 1995: 101).

⁸⁵⁶ *Taiping guangji* 74: 464-5 (*Xian chuan shi yi*).

⁸⁵⁷ See Kinney 1995 (b) and Mather 1995. Kinney sees a shift from focusing on precocious children that “bear socially disruptive features” in early periods to pictures of precocity that “came to be linked with mastering an established canon and institutionalised methods of official advancement...,” Kinney 1995 (b): 13. In the period between the Han and the Tang dynasties children, for example, also participated in the ‘sport of insulting each other,’ “it is not surprising

Summarizing the finds among the sixteen biographies of precocious medieval children in the *Taiping guangji* we find that one famous poet, namely Bai Juyi, was precocious during his childhood;⁸⁵⁸ one boy died prematurely at seventeen. The reason for his death was that he was actually an immortal and instead of having died, went back to the other immortals.⁸⁵⁹ Of one child it is explicitly said that nothing is known about his later fate, and of yet another we are informed that he became older than eighty years. The later fates of the other children are not referred to in those narratives. Still, nearly all of those precocious children also have biographies in the official *Histories*. Not all of them have their own biographical entry,⁸⁶⁰ but at least they are mentioned and they were part of the elite and power-holders. Several of them were scholars during the Tang dynasty.⁸⁶¹ All of those children were male. Merely one intelligent girl is mentioned in this chapter, and that was only because she was the intelligent older sister of a precocious boy.

One theme is recurrent in biographies of eminent medieval people: a child who learned silently and secretly, unknown to its care-givers, observed adults and listened to those who recited texts, mostly to other students. Then, unexpectedly the silent observer's intelligence was revealed to adults who reacted with astonishment to the sudden display of precocious intelligence.⁸⁶² Interestingly, the adult that pointed out the precocity was usually not the father but a third person, often just a passer-by, a guest, who was not reported to have been involved with the daily educational process within that family.

Display of premature childhood intelligence of persons not mentioned in the chapter on premature wisdom of the *Taiping guangji*, was mostly used in order to flesh out descriptions of the exceptional character and biography of the persons in question. Among other good traits and deeds, a person was also intelligent from an early age onward. Often, when a person was attributed with

that bright children might also play this game, but at the same time one cannot escape the feeling that such behaviour would have never been tolerated in an earlier age," Mather 1995: 120-1. This openly accepted and encouraged social disruptiveness is occasionally still at order in medieval times.

⁸⁵⁸ Also Liu Zongyuan, for example, was known to be extraordinarily clever but he was not included in the chapters on precocious children.

⁸⁵⁹ *Taiping guangji* 175: 1301-2 (*Min chuan (ming) shi zhuan*).

⁸⁶⁰ 白居易, 李德裕, 劉晏, 王勃, 李百藥.

⁸⁶¹ The *Taiping guangji* therewith shows its character of a supplementary history.

⁸⁶² *Taiping guangji* 175: 1298 (Gu Kui; *Wang zi nian shi yi ji*), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1300 (Su Ting; *Kai tian zhuan xin ji*), *Taiping guangji* 175: 1303-4 (Cui Xuan; *Nan chu xin wen*), and *Taiping guangji* 271: 2135-6 (Ji Wen). *Taiping guangji* 271: 2126-7 (*Shen yi yun*).

high intelligence at an early age, it was meant as an explanation for events and deeds in his later life.⁸⁶³

Related to the exhibition of precocious abilities of one's child, was the usage of intelligent children as entertainers for guests. Liu Yiqing was fascinated by children that attract attention through their parrot-like behaviour, in that they were able to quote poems and other texts by heart, winning the admiration of their fathers' guests. Mather then cautions that "it is well to remember that most episodes [in Yiqing's *Shishuo xinyu*] involved children who were only regurgitating verbatim what they have just heard and were not actually coming up with arguments of their own. There were also cases, however, where the children's answers were indeed original."⁸⁶⁴

Despite exaggerated praise there were thus also voices of ironic and even critical dissent concerning the intelligence of precocious children. Dien, for example, points out Yan Zhitui's suspicion of children that were praised as precocious: "Deploring the tendency to memorize by rote without the saving grace of intelligence, Yan complained that modern students but 'vapidly preserve the letter of the text and simply intone the words of their master...'"⁸⁶⁵

To be precocious was hard work, and it was probably more often than not done with the conscious moulding of their offspring by the parents. Teaching children, or making them learn, was done by rewarding them. In the above-mentioned cases the reward would be the positive attention of adult men. In the case of Yang Shou, for example, we are told that he rarely laughed, and when he lost his father at the age of seven he was behaving like an adult during the funeral. Accordingly, the people of Wu called him 'Divine Boy.' His mother was devoted to Buddha and so was Shou, and both were vegetarian. Yet, we read that his mother said: "If you get the *jinshi* degree, you can eat meat!"⁸⁶⁶ This sounds as if she was luring him with the prospect of indulging his true appetite in order for

⁸⁶³ Frankel asks if "some of these allegations of precocious literary ability [should] be discounted as exaggerations? This is hard to determine. We should note the historic fact that two of our literati, Yang Chiung (b. 650, d. between 692 and 705) and Wu Tongxuan (fl. 779-94), actually passed the state examinations for 'divine youths' (*shentong*)," (Frankel 1962: 81, about Wu Tongxuan, see also below). Frankel 1962 furthermore annotates that "I am proud to point out that my own son has learned to recognize more than 1500 Chinese characters before reaching the age of four (five sui)," 335: n.51.

⁸⁶⁴ Mather 1995: 119.

⁸⁶⁵ Dien 1962: 48, see also Dien 1968: 50 and note 41.

⁸⁶⁶ *Jiu Tangshu* 177: 4597-8.

him to be able to bear the pains of studying, and achieve the success that might otherwise elude him.⁸⁶⁷

Finally, in order to contrast the points made, there were also some children that were pointed out as not intelligent. Similar to the children whose education failed, they were associated with Daoist arts. About Luo Gongyuan (羅公遠) from the Tang, for example, the author Zhang Zhuo (張鷟, ca. 660-740) stated in a straightforward manner that the late Daoist master and immortal was not clever when young (幼時不慧), which clearly opposes the numerous biographies in which persons are pointed out as clever when young.⁸⁶⁸

Handicapped children

Physically and mentally handicapped children that managed to survive infancy despite their handicap did not fare very well, according to our sources. Severely handicapped children were judged according to their human resemblance: if they resembled rather animalistic or demonic features, they would be killed right away – the criteria were probably set by the parents and the close family members that were around for the birth process.

Zhao Yannu (趙燕奴) was a person from Shijing in Hezhou, who lived on the grounds of the Great Cloud Temple. When his mother was pregnant for the first time, she gave birth to a tiger after several months and it was thrown into the river. When she was pregnant again, she gave birth to a giant turtle after several months and threw this away as well. When she was pregnant again, she gave birth to a *yaksha* after several months, which was larger than one *chi* and she threw it away. Then she was pregnant again and after several months gave birth to Yannu. He had eyebrows, eyes, ears, nose and a mouth [just as it has to be]. From the neck to the bottom his body was bent. His arms and legs were several *cun* long and he had no hand-palms – at the end of two flesh-balls were six fingers each of only a little longer than one *cun*. His feet were one or two *cun* long and they also had six toes each. When he was born [the mother] did not dare to throw him away. When he was an adult, he had only grown until he was a little more than two *chi* long. He was good at diving and could navigate boats. His character was cunning and clever and he made his living by fishing, and butchering pigs. Always when he was on the boat, he sang the *Bamboo branches*-

⁸⁶⁷ Chiu-Duke interpretes this more positive, saying that the mother was encouraging her son by promising meat after he achieved his goal, namely entering the world of official posts. Chiu-Duke 2006: 94-5.

⁸⁶⁸ *Taiping guangji* 285: 2272 (*Chao ye qian zai*); *Taiping guangji* 712-3 (*You yang za zu*).

song (竹枝詞) and he wore a hat. Because he always shaved his head and wore black clothes, he was called 'Master Zhao' by the people. He was bold until old age and only then he changed his black gown into a white gown [as an indicator of old age]. Sometimes people would ask him to dance, he would then take off his clothes completely and everybody would laugh. He had two concubines and one daughter, and sufficient clothes and food. His daughter had no index finger at her right hand and was seven or eight *cun* long. She was also more bizarre than other people⁸⁶⁹

This narrative contains an important detail, namely that the handicapped child was born on sacred ground. Often, children whose birth was brought into relation with a god or goddess were not completely normal. Either they were extraordinarily special or intelligent with respect to religious services or they were handicapped.⁸⁷⁰ Zhao Yannu's mother had a history of giving birth to what the author Du Guangting describes as monstrosities. Yannu's features resembled human forms too much and therefore the mother did not dare to kill him like the previous three newborn babies. Nonetheless, he must have resembled a human being even more because he was able to have two concubines and a daughter when he was older. The description of Yannu reminds us of a village idiot. His only daughter, apart from having only four fingers on one hand, also had been considered stranger than other people.

From several medieval sources we get the idea of a vague connection between gods, pregnancy and extraordinary handicap. The grotesque dancing, for which Yannu took off his clothes, might have resembled the dancing of a spirit medium. However, Du Guangting does not mention if Zhao Yannu was actually used as a spirit medium, which would have placed his odd dancing into a more 'cultivated' and divine context.

Zhao Yannu was lucky, because apparently he could lead a normal life, equipped with concubines and a daughter. Still, we do not know how he was treated as a child. We get an idea of what his childhood years might have been like by looking at the early biography of Teacher Wan Hui (萬迴) who was

⁸⁶⁹ *Taiping guangji* 86: 565 (*Lu yi ji*).

⁸⁷⁰ See for example: *Taiping guangji* 110: 751 (*Bian zheng lun*): A woman gives birth to a son after praying to Guanyin. An old monk tells her, he will become her child. Right after birth it can talk and understand all the sixteen countries' Sanskrit languages. See also Gjertson 1975: a mother becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child after praying to Guanyin. The boy is a very intelligent child, who studied broadly in the sutras and learned the treatises 論 surpassing others in his understandings, Gjertson 1975: 157. "When he sat in meditation or discoursed on the Dharma, he would often see four blue-clad youths who would hold flowers and stand in attendance," *Ibid*: 158. For the problems that occur when asking too much of a statue regarding the wish to become pregnant, see *Taiping guangji* 388: 3094 (*Hui chang jie yi lu*).

conceived after his mother had prayed to a statue of Guanyin (觀音) in order to become pregnant.⁸⁷¹ When Hui was born he was rather stupid. He could not talk before he was eight or nine years old, and his parents raised (畜) him like a pig or dog.⁸⁷² However, during his adult life his Buddhist inclination and powers were revealed. One episode of Wan Hui's life tells how his father had ordered him to work the field. This points out one possible reason for keeping a handicapped child, because crippled and disabled male adults receive fourty *mou* of land.⁸⁷³ Moreover, handicapped people were not "liable to tax and labour service while they were classed as adult (*ding*) in their household register."⁸⁷⁴

Imponderables of educational efforts

A child in its teens was supposed to be self-responsible and to know what is good and bad behaviour. It was further required to act accordingly, otherwise it had to bear the consequences. However, some children were ascribed with much self confidence. These children appear as headstrong and even naughty. They knew exactly what they wanted to learn, and they actually acted against their parents' expectations and will in order to pursue their own goals.⁸⁷⁵

This behaviour started to become more and more visible in the fifth and sixth century. Mather observes that during that time in the place of classical values, "especially the authority of the Confucian classics and the traditional hierarchic social relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife [...] emerged a stronger awareness of individuals as persons in their own right, apart from their status in the social web."⁸⁷⁶ Children were

⁸⁷¹ I did not find many narratives dating from the Tang that features Guanyin as a special help for pregnancies. Yet, several narratives deal with a connection of pregnancies and praying at a Buddhist temple. For Guanyin as a child-giving deity see Yü Chün-fang 2001. Yü discusses dharani sutras which have the function of bestowing powers to give birth. See for example the narrative on Yü Chün-fang 2001: 130-1, in which the reading of the sutras helped a childless couple to get three sons (who were not handicapped). The seventh century commentary of the *Jing Chu suishi ji* records that in the area of the city Changsha on the eighth day of the fourth month people from that area, who have not given birth to a son yet, would sacrifice food in the temple of the goddess called Mother of Nine Sons (九子母神), *Jing Chu suishi ji*: 151. I assume that more such customs existed, and that they differ from region to region, and that several divine beings were involved.

⁸⁷² *Taiping guangji* 92: 606-7 (*Tan bin lu*).

⁸⁷³ Twitchett 1970: 125.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 25-26.

⁸⁷⁵ Their characters are nearly naughty, and they remind of supernatural boys, see the article 'The other child' (Pissin, not yet published).

⁸⁷⁶ Mather 1995: 112, see also the Introduction, where I partly discuss this proposition.

required by their care-givers to study certain texts or gain certain knowledge, regardless whether they were texts and behaviour from a Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist background or from another religious institution. In narratives, but also in official biographies, we are confronted with people who took a different course in their childhood and who actively followed their own ideas when they were a child, which means that they opposed their care-givers' will or intellectual background. The awareness of individuality that Mather points out, then, was often pre-poned to childhood. Especially in the context of religious vocation a person invoked a childhood incident in order to explain why he finally did become a Buddhist instead of an elite literati man.

A curriculum vitae that was driven by the pursuit of literary studies, and probably not very uncommon during the Tang dynasty is that of Wei Jumou (749-801), of the Jingzhao Wannian Wei clan. Jumou was a *shi* who 'resumed the official garb.' He studied the *Classics* and *Histories* in his youth, became a Daoist master, then a Buddhist monk, and finally acquired civil rank by serving as a military governor in 784. He ended up at court, where he served as one of the most eloquent and literary representatives of the *ru* position in the Three Teachings debate of 796.⁸⁷⁷ Some years later, the young teen-boy Wu Tongxuan (吳通玄), the son of the Daoist Daoguan (道瓘), passed the Divine Youth exams and worked in the imperial library.⁸⁷⁸ These are examples which speak of literary pursuits and careers based on texts. Yet, in the context of the own choice of a child, we occasionally find those that present failures of the educational efforts they endured.

Family instruction meant that care-givers trained their offspring to gradually become members of the community of which their parents intended them to be part of. This instruction was not confined to teaching literacy but above all included teaching conduct and certain use of language and body movements. Children themselves also contributed to their own future, not least through genetic heritage as well as the circumstances in which they grow up. The unpredictability of a child's future career was thought to be influenced and controlled by the help of education.

Education could fail or rather could not show the expected results due to several reasons: the child might not have the intellectual capacity to study, or it might use its intellectual capacity for some purpose other than what its parents intended or what was expected according to its family background. Even under

⁸⁷⁷ Bol 1992: 19-20.

⁸⁷⁸ Jiu *Tangshu* 190.2: 5057. Ten year old boys could take the Divine Youth 神童 exams, for which they had to memorize and recite the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Lunyu*. They also had to answer ten questions (see Rotours 1932: 151).

these conditions, it might still pursue a goal that its parents could not complain about. Furthermore, a child could use its intellectual capacity in order to intentionally harm the community it lives in, much to the regret of its parents. Lastly, education could be considered as failed when the educator failed to educate the child. Reasons were manifold, but in most cases, failed education was not pictured as the failure of the educator, but usually as a failure of the child him- or herself or caused by exterior circumstances.⁸⁷⁹ We can find examples of all these possibilities in Tang anecdotal sources.

While we have many examples of the successful education of children, unsuccessful education, or the fear of it, was hardly discussed in sources. We have a set of well-known cases of history that were employed in texts to frighten parents, but we do not have many accounts of this in minor narratives. In the tenth century Xu Xuan records an incident at Maoshan, during which an angry father punishes his son because he accuses him of having committed a serious crime, namely theft.

In the Gengyin year⁸⁸⁰ a village boy of Maoshan was tending to a buffalo next to a stream. He washed his clothes which were soaked in sweat, spread them on the grass to dry and took a rest. When he woke up, [his clothes] were gone. Only the son of a neighbour was standing next to him. [The cow-herder] suspected him to have clandestinely removed his clothes and they got into a fight. When the father of the neighbour boy saw this, he said angrily: "My own son is a thief! How am I supposed to handle this!?" Then he tossed [his son] into the water. The neighbour's son crawled out of the water and was calling out four times to Heaven to escape [this punishment]. [But his father] tossed him into the water again and again. Suddenly, thunder and rain struck with force, and a lightening flash killed the ox. The clothes were spit out of the buffalo's mouth. This is how the boy escaped [his punishment].⁸⁸¹

The father of the accused boy punished his son severely and thus displayed his frustration about the failed social and moral education of his son. According to the ideal of filial piety and the general idea of hierarchy, the son would have had to accept this punishment, despite knowing about his own innocence. Instead, he rebelled against the punishment of his father, and accordingly he was helped out by supernatural powers. The intervention of the thunder god pointed out to the

⁸⁷⁹ Yan Zhitui's Family Instruction, however, is an exceptional work full of cases of education that went wrong, often through spoiling the offspring.

⁸⁸⁰ Probably 870 or 930, because several narratives from *Ji shen lu* date from around that time.

⁸⁸¹ *Taiping guangji* 395: 3160 (*Ji shen lu*).

father – in front of his son and the neighbour's boy – that he had acted incorrectly.

In the later tradition of the *Twenty-four Stories of Filial Piety* supernatural help for the main personage, whose filial piety was central in each story, was not infrequent. There, the filial heroes, in the beginning seemingly powerless persons, namely children, were bound in the hopeless order of a strict and seemingly inflexible hierarchy. Yet they were friendly, polite and helpful, and even ready to face death at the hand of those who maltreated them and misused their powerful position higher up in the hierarchy.⁸⁸² The boy of Maoshan who was accused of theft by his own father, on the other hand, did not excel in filial behaviour nor had he committed any great deeds. On the contrary, by screaming out loud for help he even acts severely against the idea of filial piety (*xiao* 孝). In this narrative, therefore, not filial piety but justice is central; justice that worked contrary to the hierarchical idea of filial piety. Regarding the question of family education we see that here the father had a concrete fear of his son behaving contrary to social expectations and was ready to punish his son physically. We further see that the child did not agree with the treatment and tried to help himself against the father. We have no information about the family background of the two boys and thus cannot judge whether they were educated by influential families or commoner families. Nonetheless, the reaction of the father points out that education was considered important – and failed education was an unbearable result.

Moral education was ideally done through live examples. A member of the Boling Cui clan, for example, “ate and drank simply and had a humble house and plain clothes to set an example for others.”⁸⁸³ Ebrey states that such behaviour “was assumed to be the product of strict family rules and training.”⁸⁸⁴

An example of lack of intellectual capacity is Ran Sui, the son of a district magistrate. He was known to have an infantile character and, despite his family background, he could not write. This description of his character was then used to justify the action of his wife who committed adultery with a man described as morally impeccable. Although the childish man wanted to kill his wife's son whom he believed to be demonic due to his red hair and blue-green face, his wife outwitted him and raised the boy in seclusion.⁸⁸⁵ As the son of an official, the narrative implies, Ran Sui should have learned how to write, but he was incapable to do so. His childish character and the fact that he was not very clever

⁸⁸² For a discussion of the narratives on the *Twenty-four Stories of Filial Piety*, and their appearance during the Tang dynasty see Chen Dengwu 2005, see also the part ‘The child's responsibilities’ further below in this chapter.

⁸⁸³ Ebrey 1978: 99.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid*: 99.

⁸⁸⁵ *Taiping guangji* 306: 2423 (*Qi shi ji*), for a translation see chapter chapter III ‘Care-givers’.

were already signs of a personality that embodied failure. Still, the fact that he could not write was underlined as outrageous by the author of the narrative. Hence the story shows no sympathy for him being cheated by his wife. Lee points out that a strong idea prevailed in the Period of Disunion that a child was “born with his prescribed ability and potential. The task of education is to bring the potential into complete realization. If the potential is not fully realized, then the person remains a ‘child’.”⁸⁸⁶ This describes the case of Ran Sui well.

Another son of an official,⁸⁸⁷ Zhang Zhongduan (張仲殷), in contrast, was intelligent. Sometime during the late eighth century he went into the Southern Mountains to study books together with three or four other pupils. Eventually, he did not make any effort in writing and reading, but at least he was good at shooting and horse riding.⁸⁸⁸ Thus, although Zhongduan was sent to a private school in the Southern Mountains, he did not succeed in learning how to write. He did, however, manage to develop skills suitable for the military profession, an outcome that was eventually not depicted as a failure.

Shooting and horse-riding in fact, were part of the six skills that aristocratic members of pre- and early imperial China held high. All these six skills were still held high in the Tang dynasty during which martial skills were required, as we have read in the prayer that asked for the perfect child. However, shooting, horse riding, charioteering, and knowledge of music became rather obsolete in the opinion of those who concentrated on jobs within the bureaucracy, and who created medieval literature. Although it appears that since the mid eighth century the old aristocracy turned more and more towards civil values and away from martial ideals, this is not entirely accurate, because martial qualities did remain important, as we can also see in Zhongduan’s case.⁸⁸⁹

Another case from around 713 tells of the son of the official Qi Wangfan (岐王範). Wangfan, whose original fate was to be childless, received a son after he had asked a Daoist master several times to help him. His wife subsequently became pregnant with a former Buddhist monk from a nearby monastery, Jingai (敬愛寺). By the age of six or seven, the boy showed inclinations to go to the

⁸⁸⁶ Lee 2000: 226.

⁸⁸⁷ Zhang Pang was a Director of a census Bureau.

⁸⁸⁸ *Taiping guangji* 307: 2434-5 (*Yuan hua ji*).

⁸⁸⁹ See also ter Haar 2000. He shows that private political violence by the elite during the Tang dynasty and before was still existant. Yan Zhitui, for example, advises the mastery of self-defence with bow and arrow, ter Haar 2000: 127. However, narratives by and large emphasise ‘refinement’ (*wen*) over ‘martial violence’ (*wu*) and are not very approving of martial violence. Yet, the narratives were written by those who probably preferred *wen* over *wu* and therefore their point of view survived. See McMullen 1989 for how the writing elite insist on furthering an anti-military viewpoint during the Tang dynasty.

monastery. By the age of ten he did not behave well, but he liked to make music.⁸⁹⁰ The preference of music over morality on behalf of the son who “was much given to wine and women,”⁸⁹¹ appears rather naughty. Still, music was also part of the old aristocratic core values.

Zhao Cao (趙操), who was the son of the late eighth century minister Zhao Jing (趙憬) and a concubine, proved difficult to educate, and, ultimately, the education by his father failed completely: His character was rude and he disregarded etiquette. The minister consequently felt compelled to increase his efforts in instructions and injunctions (*jiao xing* 教戒). However, the boy Zhao Cao did not show any regret when he committed a mistake, but only feared punishment. He later stole a donkey from a clerk and found his way to the aforementioned Southern Mountains and to two old men whose seniority he accepted. In the end he became a Daoist master.⁸⁹² This narrative starts with presenting failed education and ends with describing the successful career of a hermit. Nevertheless, Zhao Cao’s story is an exemplary story of an education that did not work out the way it was intended by his care-giver. Yan Zhitui writes about such cases as follows:

Instead of needed prohibitions they [children] receive praise; instead of urgent reprimands they receive smiles. Even when children are old enough to learn, such treatment is still regarded as the proper method. After the child has formed proud and arrogant habits, they begin to control him. But whipping the child even to death will not lead him to repentance, while the growing anger of the parents only increases his resentment. After he grows up such a child becomes at last nothing but a scoundrel.⁸⁹³

Yan Zhitui stresses that it was the fault of the parents when their children behaved badly. Because parents spoiled their offspring in their early years, the children turned out to be scoundrels. In the last narrative, however, the emphasis was strongly on the character of Zhao Cao. Yet, his recalcitrant behaviour did not cause problems with those two old men who lived in a lonely mountain hut. They let Cao live with them and made him do errands for them and he obeyed.

The reasons for a failed education in all four examples lay in the children’s intelligence, interests, birth and character. Ran Sui was stupid and could not be

⁸⁹⁰ *Taiping guangji* 387: 3087 (Fan, prince of Qi 岐王範, *Guang yi ji*, 713; Dudbridge 1995: 213 (no. 198), The story is probably about Jin, his only known son).

⁸⁹¹ Dudbridge 1995: 213.

⁸⁹² *Taiping guangji* 73: 459-60 (*Ji yi ji*); in his case, mastering the arts of the Dao meant to be able to do fancy transformations, such as changing objects into gold.

⁸⁹³ Yan Zhitui II, Teng Ssu-yü, (trsl.) 1968: 3.

taught how to write. Zhongduan, although he was clever, had martial, aristocratic inclinations that were not approved of, and valued less than literary pursuits. The son of Wangfan lived out the inclinations of his former life in which he was a monk. Zhao Cao had a rude character, and even was two days late for his father's funeral,⁸⁹⁴ yet he became a practitioner of Daoist arts and lived far away from home. These examples, then, do not only focus on the failure of education but link it to events that lie outside of *ru*-life, in which sons were supposed to be successful in creating fame for their family and in procreating.

Other reasons for failed education were caused by financial problems. In that sense, failed education means education that should have taken place according to the cultural and social background of the father, but that did not take place as a consequence of financial reasons.⁸⁹⁵ One such example is Zengzeng whose father left him and his mother when he was an infant due to financial reasons.⁸⁹⁶ Perhaps Zengzeng would have enjoyed an education had his father not abandoned him. Sadly, he died at the age of seven because he had caught a bad cold. Another example is Cui Zhensi, a scholar, who could have educated his son. However, when Cui was left by the boy's mother, his concubine, he starved his son to death instead of educating him.⁸⁹⁷

One common, and indeed global, childhood offence that was mentioned frequently is stealing. Zhao Cao stole a donkey from a minor clerk. A daughter of an official stole money from her parents in order to buy cosmetics and is punished with death.⁸⁹⁸ The author of this narrative, however, does not imply that it was due to bad education that the daughter stole the money. Similarly, a boy of Jizhou who stole an egg from the neighbours when he was thirteen was punished by supernatural powers.⁸⁹⁹ His parents were not accused of bad education either. The children had to carry full responsibility for their misdeeds.

Tang Lin also tells of a certain Chang Fayi of Zhengxian in Huazhou who "was poor and rustic, and [who] as a youth [...] did not cultivate proper manner."⁹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, Fayi turned out to live a long life, because he accepted the teachings of a monk. The last case, similar to Zhao Cao's, shows the 'healing'

⁸⁹⁴ However, at that point of his life he was able to show that he had learned some appropriate social behaviour, for he stayed at his family's household until the death-ceremony one year after the burial was held. Just then he returned to the mountains. Later he went to Jianghu where he attracted big crowds of students.

⁸⁹⁵ Education costs money, see Gao Mingshi 2005 and above.

⁸⁹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075-6 (*Qian ding lu*).

⁸⁹⁷ *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456 (*Yuan hua ji*). In both cases, the children do not have a great value because the mother does not have a great value.

⁸⁹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 134: 954-5 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

⁸⁹⁹ *Taiping guangji* 131: 934 (*Ming bao ji*).

⁹⁰⁰ Gjertson 1975: 257 (no. 52).

powers of education, which was able to transform an originally ill-disciplined child into a good person, an enjoyer of long life. Another interpretation would be that the young person was only able to learn what he was supposed to know by fate.

With a few exceptions most of the cases I have presented in this part describe the lives of people who in the end were able to come up for their own life. Parental instructions and efforts in raising their children as moral members of their own community failed because the children by fate had to follow other walks of life than their parents intended for them. What was failed education for the parents sometimes was a successful start of a life other than that of a literate.

2. Family education

For elite families education was of utmost importance, as I have shown in the previous section. This section will focus on the instruction that a child received in his family. The possibility to instruct a child was already thought doable when it was still a foetus. Therefore my discussion on family education starts with foetus instruction. If foetus instruction was practiced in medieval China it especially focused on the nourishment of the mother. However, although mentioned in many texts, I will demonstrate that it might not have been put into practice at all or on rare occasions only.

After birth, infants underwent several rituals. I analyse these rituals within the framework of family education because they aimed at the integration of the child into its family and the family's social environment. The aim of family education in general was to make the child suitable for its role in the community that would bring benefit to its family and itself. I will demonstrate that early rituals done for the infant belong to the same idea.

Although the child received some behaviour instructions earlier, family instruction was usually understood to start from the age of five or six. I will discuss the instruction in literacy together with the training of moral behaviour and the training of the right body movements. Concerning family education, a considerable much amount is known about girls as I will be able to show as well. At the end of this section I concentrate on one special feature of moral instructions, namely filial piety.

Foetus education

According to early imperial Chinese theories, degree of morality and physical health aspects of the future life of a person depended on the sensual influences that a mother had received during pregnancy.⁹⁰¹ These theories were called 'foetus education (or instruction)' (*taijiao* 胎教) or 'nourishing the foetus' (*yangtai* 養胎). The theories imply that through foetus instruction the mother's habits and emotions were regulated.⁹⁰² The theories and practices of foetus instructions in general point out the great importance that was ascribed to education as a transformative means and the importance of the first impressions on children.⁹⁰³

Other medieval writings, however, confer the impression that prenatal education was not of great importance and that it did not form a major part in the general education activities. In that respect often the antiquity (and implicitly the impracticability as well) of the idea had been pointed out. In the *Revised Prescriptions*, section II of the part on medicine for reproductive women, Sun Simiao quotes the most well-known ideas on foetus education of his time:

In old times it is said that usually in the third month of pregnancy things successively undergo transformations and changes, and the sex and looks are not yet determined. Therefore, in the third months [the pregnant woman] wants to observe rhinos, elephants, wild beasts, jade and treasures; she wants to meet sages, lords and great teachers of utmost power; she wants to observe rituals, [righteous] music, and [beautiful] gongs, drums, dishes and platters; she burns the best incense; she cites from the *Odes*, and the *Documents* and from ancient and contemporary *Instructions*; her living space is simple and quiet; she does not eat what was not prepared according to the correct [rules]; she does not sit down on seats that are not placed according to the correct [rules]. She plays the *pipa* and fine-tunes her heart and mind, and pacifies her feelings and nature; she limits her desires and she has all things clear and clean. When all these matters are clear, then her child will be very good and will have a long life. It will be loyal, filial, humane, righteous and smart and will not suffer from diseases. This is 'King Wen's Foetus Instructions.' When the child is an foetus, and the first month is not yet over, *yin* and *yang* are not yet harmonized, and the organs, intestines, bones and joints are not yet completed. Therefore, from the time of conception onward until birth, food, beverages and the living space have taboos. [The state of] pregnancy in the third month is called *Beginning Foetus*. When [the pregnant

⁹⁰¹ The term *taijiao* first appeared in a ritual context written down by Jia Yi (201-169 B.C.), see Despeux 2003: 71 ff (also for an enumeration of the most important texts that make statements on prenatal instruction). See also Sabbatini on Jia yi.

⁹⁰² Dietary restrictions for pregnant women show direct influence from Daoist practices of *yangsheng* – nourishing life, Yates 2000: 30.

⁹⁰³ Gernet 2003: 12 ff.

woman] is at that point, [the foetus] does not yet have a fixed [gender] pattern, and it will transform according to the things [the woman] sees. If one wants to give birth to a male child, [the pregnant woman] should hold a bow and arrow in her hands. If one wants to give birth to a female child, she should hold a pearl. If one wants the child to be beautiful, [the pregnant woman] should often look at disks and jades. If one wants the child to be sagely and good, she should sit upright in quiet places. This is called: the exterior image and the interior feeling.⁹⁰⁴

The content of this quote has been handed down since at least the former Han dynasty.⁹⁰⁵ King Wen of the Zhou (周文王), supposedly the founder of the Zhou dynasty, whose mother allegedly has lived by the ideal of foetus instructions, is the standard reference for the practice of foetus instructions.⁹⁰⁶ *King Wen's Foetus Instructions* stressed in particular the connection between the visual senses and the development of the foetus. Consequences of acting in accordance with these suggestions were visible in general character traits, health, good looks and long life. The process of sensual reception through the mother and physical conversion of the child was very important, especially concerning the formation of the foetus' sex, because he "will transform according to the things [the woman] sees."⁹⁰⁷ Despeux discusses this possibility of influencing the foetus with objects and emblems with the help of the idea of resonance (*ganying* 感應).⁹⁰⁸

The medical author Sun Simiao further focused on the pregnant mother's nourishment. Sun listed several prohibitions concerning food and the possible results for the child if the mother would eat certain meals. Eating chicken and glutinous rice, for example, would cause several *cun* long worms growing in the child.⁹⁰⁹ This insistence on regulating nourishment during pregnancy was based on another famous example of foetus instruction, namely Mencius' mother, written down in Han Ying's (韓嬰) *Hanshi waizhuan* (韓詩外傳) in the second century B.C. The theme, nourishment of pregnant women and its influence on the unborn child, had been further deepened only four hundred years later in Zhang Hua's *Bowuzhi* (博物志) in the third century A.D.⁹¹⁰ This idea that the kind

⁹⁰⁴ Sun quotes the Northern and Southern Dynasty doctor Xu Zhicai (492-572). See Yates 2000: 31 (fn 59) for a translation of dietary restrictions of pregnant women.

⁹⁰⁵ Jia Yi has the first long discussion on embryo instructions, see Sabattini 2009.

⁹⁰⁶ The mother of King Cheng is also mentioned as an example by Jia Yi (201 BC-169 BC), the author of the first writing on embryo education. Despeux 2003: 73.

⁹⁰⁷ See Sun Simiao's quote above.

⁹⁰⁸ See also Despeux 2003: 90ff.

⁹⁰⁹ See Yates 2000: 31.

⁹¹⁰ Despeux 2003: 75; see Sun Simiao in the beginning of this part and Yates 2000: 30-35. Zhang Hua (張華 232-300 AD).

of food a pregnant woman ate influenced her child, was thus further developed during a time in which foetal development and alchemy received much attention. Therefore the theory is also referred to as 'nourishing the foetus' (*yangtai*).

The more applicable part of foetus-instruction-theory thus appears to be a nourishment advice for the pregnant woman. If at all, the whole program of prenatal education might have been carried out in the imperial palace and in very noble or wealthy families. Still, the *Old* and *New History of the Tang* report only one case of prenatal education.⁹¹¹ The fact that a prince or princess might have enjoyed prenatal education was either not noteworthy because good conditions for prenatal education were given anyway, or the precautions taken by pregnant women were not known to the male authors of the sources of the *Histories*. Another possibility is that prenatal education might not have been practiced at all. A typical example of the opinion about prenatal education can be found in Yan Zhitui's *Family Instructions*:

The ancient sage-kings had rules for pre-natal training. Women when pregnant for three months moved from their living quarters to a detached palace where shy glances would not be seen nor disturbing sounds heard, and where the tone of music and the flavour of food were controlled by the rules of decorum. These rules were written on jade tablets and kept in a golden box.⁹¹²

For Yan, prenatal education was not an important part of the moral development of the child, which he focused on. According to him the practice of "foetus instructions" was linked to financial resources and not many people could afford it, because it would require special space, food and musicians. Yan consequently did not further elaborate on this topic in his *Family Instructions*, but proceeded to discuss children that are several months old, because post-natal education was easier to conduct.

Although foetus instruction might not often have been practiced in medieval China, it was at least known and mentioned in medieval writings, and some people considered it as possible but not as necessary. Despeux has shown the Confucian background of this idea and she points out the importance of the concept of rectification (*zheng* 正) of the origin.⁹¹³ Therefore, if the very beginning of that prenatal development had been 'rectified', if it had been influenced by the right prenatal educational methods, then the base of a person was strong and he or she could adopt Confucian virtues.

⁹¹¹ *Xin Tangshu* 81: 3586.

⁹¹² Yan Zhitui II, Teng Ssu-yü (trsl.) 1968:3.

⁹¹³ Despeux 2003: 76.

For the rectification of the child's character the mother not only had to pay attention to her nourishment, but also to what she saw and heard, as the texts on prenatal education indicate. Only 'right' music should come to her ears, and she should see only 'right' objects and animals, as can be read in the quote of Sun Simiao. Additionally, the mother should only employ the correct movements. This reveals how much the idea of prenatal instruction is Confucian in character. According to Jia Yi, three positions were forbidden for pregnant women: sitting with crossed legs; lying on the side and standing on one foot. These position, in fact, were used by magicians in order to expel demons, and were despised by Confucians, hence they had to be avoided in order to keep the unborn child away from their possible bad influence.⁹¹⁴

Foetus instruction, thus, cannot be understood as a method to fill the child with knowledge, but rather to form it in such a way that the fundamentals were created to fill the child with correct behaviour and knowledge later in its life after birth. By applying physical practices the mother supposedly formed the physical body of the child, allowing the possibility of success in the subsequent formation of the social body.

Besides, if an foetus would display knowledge by talking, it is thought to belong to the demonic realm, as a narrative of the tenth century shows:

Emperor Ming from the Late Tang [後唐明宗 926-933] went to the borders, and stayed in a lodge. Before he arrived, a woman at the lodge who was pregnant, heard her child in the womb saying to her that she should prepare food for the emperor would arrive soon. Upon hearing that, the emperor understands that [a mother obeying to the words of her unborn baby] as a sign that he will be disgraced, and he killed the foetus in the womb....⁹¹⁵

Surely, the emperor whose reign ended three years before the end of the thirteen-year long existence of the Late Tang, was predictably cruel anyway, according to the standards of imperial history writing.⁹¹⁶ In this context, a talking foetus was not normal and therefore exercised quite some influence on its environment. The obedience of the mother to the words of a yet unborn child probably was a sign for the disorder of the emperor's reign.

Although being identified as considerably demonic, a talking foetus also could save its own and its mothers' life. This was the case in the narrative about

⁹¹⁴ Despeux 2003: 82-83.

⁹¹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 136: 979 (*Bei meng suo*).

⁹¹⁶ In that view, usually the first emperor of each dynasty is good and then succeedinglly the quality of the rulers declines, and the last one is just bad and weak.

Hu Zhao. An engaged but not yet married daughter became pregnant, and her grandfather wanted to kill her, because she had disgraced the family. The foetus then spoke from the girl's womb, and therewith mesmerized and scared the grandfather so that he had to give up his plan to kill his pregnant granddaughter.⁹¹⁷ The child messed up the hierarchical and correct order of the household because it was illegitimate. It turned out to be a demonic child that would terrorise the mother and her family if it was kept from doing what it wanted to.

One last group of stereotypical foetuses are those who later became Buddhist monks. Before conceiving an eminent Buddhist monk, mothers dreamed of their impregnation or they had a significant dream during their pregnancy. The mother of Fayun (法雲), 'Dharma Cloud', for example, dreamt that the *qi* of clouds (*yunqi* 雲氣) was filling her room – therefore she gave her child that name.⁹¹⁸ The mother of monk Huiyue (慧約) dreamt that an elder lifted a golden statue and made her swallow it. Thereupon she became pregnant.⁹¹⁹ The dream of Huiyong's (慧勇) mother also contained golden statues. In her case she dreamt that she would climb a pagoda with two golden *pusa*-figures in her hands which then suddenly turned into two babies.⁹²⁰

Earliest integration into family and community

The fundamentals for a virtuous person could be laid by foetus education during pregnancy, although according to Yan Zhitui this was not a pressing necessity. If education of one's offspring was strict and started as soon as the child was able to recognize faces – according to the *Book of Rites* around day sixty after birth – the child could still grow up and become a respected person.

Wet nurses were asked to carefully observe their protégées from the age two months onward until they were one year old. Two months, thus, seemed to be a crucial age as earliest start of the activities of a child and its education. Yet the integration into the immediate social environment, aside from the mother and the female obstetrician started earlier already: at first, the child was introduced to his father on day three after birth. With the ritual bath on that day,

⁹¹⁷ *Taiping guangji* 317: 2513 (*Lu yi ji*).

⁹¹⁸ *Xu Gao seng zhuan*: "Fa Yun," T50 2060: 463c14- c15.

⁹¹⁹ *Xu Gao seng zhuan*: "Huiyue," T50 2060: 0468b23-b25.

⁹²⁰ *Xu Gao seng zhuan*: "Huiyong," T50 2060: 478a24-a25. See also the biographies in the *Xu Gao seng zhuan* of Master Falang (釋法朗), Master Huiyong (釋慧勇), Master Zhiyan (釋智琰), Master Lingrui (釋靈睿), Master Fajing (釋法京), Master Xinhang (釋信行), Master Zhiyi (釋智顗), Master Zhikuang (釋智曠), whose mothers all had at least one significant dream during or before their pregnancies.

the acceptance of the child by its genitor or the head of the household it belongs to, was definite.⁹²¹ The future emperor Dai, for example, was brought out on his third day after birth and received his bath in a golden basin, when he was presented to the emperor.⁹²² Until that specific day the child was fully under the control of his mother and other women.⁹²³

After the first introduction to the father, mother and child again retired into isolation. Subsequently, if the child survived the first month in seclusion, it was introduced to the social circle of its parents in which it would grow up. Although the medical treatises on children gave a precise prescription about the required actions concerning the body of the new-born infant, they did not mention the one month of seclusion of mother and child. This period might primarily have been an important social event and not so much of medical interest. The date, however, almost fell together with the beginning of the process of Changing and Steaming, which started on day thirty-two after birth. It divided the first one and a half years of a child's life in periods of thirty-two days, at which it was in need of special protection and had to be approached with special care.⁹²⁴

Narratives show that the birthday after the first month was significant and that it was celebrated with all possible means. Serving meat to the numerous guests was a requirement as in most religious feasts. This custom brought the official Zhang De (張德), who was working under the female emperor Wu, into great troubles at court after the emperor heard about the excesses of De's son's first month birthday-party.⁹²⁵

One month after the wife of Zhang De gave birth to a son, her husband threw a party and invited many guests. As part of the festivities he killed a goat. One of

⁹²¹ We do not know whether this custom is an elite-custom only or whether it is practiced commonly in the Tang realm, among non-elite Han people and other ethnic groups.

⁹²² *Taiping guangji* 136: 975-6 (*Liu shi shi*).

⁹²³ During these few days of seclusion, the mother is in a powerful position and apparently access to her and the child is restricted and depends on her good will, see also chapter VI. Kinney 2004 states that during the Han dynasty apparently "a child's existence was not formally recognized until the third day of life, by which time parents had to decide whether to raise it or eliminate it," Kinney 2004: 108. She furthermore points out that "the first rite in which arrangements were made for the reception of a child outside of the room where it was born occurred on the third day of life, suggesting that the existence of the child as a member of the family was formally recognized only after this period of time had elapsed," Kinney 2004: 109.

⁹²⁴ See chapter III 'Developments'.

⁹²⁵ *Jiu Tangshu* 94: 2992.

the guests, the Buddhist monk Du Su also ate meat. When the female Emperor Wu heard about it, she got very angry at Zhang De.⁹²⁶

Sacrificing and preparing an animal for the one-month birthday celebration was a common custom. This must have been a thorn in the Buddhists' flesh because they were strictly against eating meat. Therefore, narratives from Buddhists circles pointed out that to kill life when celebrating life could cost the life of the celebrated:

During the Xianqing reign period (656-661), the new wife of an inn-keeper gave birth to a son. When the first month was over the close relatives came for the [first month birthday-] party and a goat was about to be killed. The goat turned towards the butcher and [appeared] to beg [to not be killed]. The butcher reported this to the people of the gathering, but none of them, adults and children alike, considered this as a sign for something, and [the goat] was eventually killed. They then wanted to put the meat into the pot, and because everybody else was busy preparing the other food, they asked the young mother to take care of the meat. Holding her child in her arms she was standing next to the boiling meat. Suddenly the pot broke all by itself [without any explainable reason] and the hot water and fire shot at the mother and her child. Both were killed. All the guests of the inn-keeper who saw this happen or heard about it never ate meat again thereafter.⁹²⁷

Narratives reveal that one element was crucial, or at least became crucial, during the medieval age – namely the participation of Buddhist monks during the one-month birthday celebration. The family of the newborn child would specially invite a group of monks and serve them food. This display of the infant to the broader public, and even to strangers was probably in order to receive blessings from the religious experts. Thus the natal household of the later influential governor of Jiannan West, Wei Gao (韋皋, d. 806), for example, invited a group of monks for the event of his first month birthday. The family expected blessings from the monks.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁶ *Taiping guangji* 263: 2060 (*Shang shu gu shi* or *Chao ye qian zai*).

⁹²⁷ *Taiping guangji* 132: 940 (*Fa yuan zhu lin*).

⁹²⁸ *Taiping guangji* 96: 641 (*Ji wen*). One monk came who was not invited. The servants were quite angry and placed him in the courtyard. This uninvited guest then greeted the one month old infant with the words: "Long time no see. How are you doing?" He then explained to the surprised parents that their son is the reborn marquise Wu from the times of the Three Kingdoms, who was going to be head of Sichuan (Wu) once again. The parents therefore gave him the name 'Marquise Wu' Wei Gao. Similarly to speaking fetuses, we also find an incidence with a strangely communicative one-month-old infant. It reports of a child that displayed power of communication around one month after birth. In the narrative, a pregnant mother dreams that a

Education at home

[...] as soon as a baby can recognize facial expressions and understand approval and disapproval, training should be begun in doing what he is told and stopping when so ordered. For several years punishment with the bamboo rod should be avoided. Parental strictness and dignity mingled with tenderness will usually lead boys and girls to a feeling of respect and carefulness and so arouse filial piety. I have noticed in this generation that where there is merely love without training this result is never achieved. Children eat, drink, speak and act as they please. Instead of needed prohibitions they receive praise; instead of urgent reprimands they receive smiles. Even when children are old enough to learn, such treatment is still regarded as the proper method. After the child has formed proud and arrogant habits, they begin to control him. But whipping the child even to death will not lead him to repentance, while the growing anger of the parents only increases his resentment. After he grows up such a child becomes at last nothing but a scoundrel. Confucius was right in saying, "what is acquired in babyhood is like original nature; what has been formed into habits is equal to instinct." A common proverb says, "train a wife from her first arrival; teach a son in his babyhood." How true such sayings are!⁹²⁹

This quotation from Yan Zhitui is very outspoken and contains several clues on what his generation thought about ideal education. Children were supposed to recognize facial expression from day sixty after birth onward.⁹³⁰ This then was the starting point for education, which in the beginning consisted of listening to orders. The other basic behavioural rules that children should preferably learn, treated filial piety and table manners. These necessary behavioural rules were instructed within the family context. In fact, the emphasis of education during the first years lied on different forms of memorizing – visual or audible and on gestures.⁹³¹

Offspring at any age also had to learn ceremonial behaviour for special circumstances, including, for example, how to behave at the death of one's parents. Above we have come across Wang Kui, who came to know that he would die after five days. One task he deemed important was teaching his sons

divine person gives her a weighing device and tells her: "with this you can estimate the world". When her son is born, after one month she plays with him and says: "you are not the one who estimates the world, are you?" The child answers in a whimpering manner: "yes", Taiping guangji 271: 2132-3 (Jing long wen guan ji). However, speaking foetuses appear much more frequently.

⁹²⁹ Yan Zhitui II, Teng Ssu-yü, (trsl.) 1968: 3.

⁹³⁰ See chapter III where I have given a table regarding the developments from birth until the first year after birth.

⁹³¹ Gernet 2003: 38.

‘the rhythmic verses of crying and jumping around in grief’.⁹³² Wang’s sons were still young, in an age in which they were not yet supposed to know the ceremonial behaviour of ‘crying and jumping in grief’, which meant displaying correct mourning behaviour. In order to keep up one’s family reputation, correct behaviour, especially in relation to social and public events such as a parents’ funeral, was necessary, because a family would be judged by others on the basis of the correct observance.⁹³³

Another important aspect children learned at home was the mastery of language. Yet, usually, oral communication did not receive much attention in narratives.⁹³⁴ The manner in which adults and children were reported to talk was literary, which is not surprising considering our sources. However, occasionally a child is depicted as talking in a blunt way, but this was only in connection with supernatural influence.⁹³⁵ Young children’s speech was often used to confer messages from ‘the other world,’ for example the world of the dead to the world of the living.⁹³⁶

Girls, at least from the age of ten onward, were introduced to the many tasks of a housewife. Several of such housekeeping tasks were already learned at a young age taught by participating and helping the older women of the household. Still, we only have one example, which is not very representative. The scholar Li Zonghui had a slave girl who was seven or eight, who would ask him: “Why don’t you let me manage the household affairs.” Thereafter he would let her cook.⁹³⁷ Before marriage, girls were expected to have mastered the basic skills of embroidering silk. Thus we read about the admiration Liu Zongyuan

⁹³² *Taiping guangji* 279: 2227-8 (*Ji shen lu*), see also chapter IV.

⁹³³ See also Gernet 2003 who discusses the significance of learning by doing of rites in the Song dynasty and later. Although the exercise of the rites (which involved the knowledge of body techniques) did not contain much of a physical exercise, they exerted an undeniable influence on the psyche, Gernet 2003: 27ff.

⁹³⁴ We do not know how a children’s language was composed, and whether a special children’s language existed. I suspect, that children of at least elite communities were encouraged from an early age onward to talk as elaborate as possible.

⁹³⁵ *Taiping guangji* 125: 885-6 (*Yi shi*), the girl who is opposing her mother in front of strangers and who shouts at them, does not speak with her own personality but remembers her former life.

⁹³⁶ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 332: 2639 (*Ji wen*). The connection between children’s speech, child ditties, apocryphal texts and soothsaying will be discussed elsewhere (‘The other child’ (Pissin, not yet published)).

⁹³⁷ *Taiping guangji* 153: 1097 (*Yi shi*). Being able to conduct household tasks by girls below the age of ten, and young girls offering help by themselves, is probably the counterpart to a precocious behaviour of boys. See example above in part ‘Introduction.’

had when he saw the incredibly skillful embroidery of the fifteen-year-old daughter of one of his maid-servants.⁹³⁸

One additional part of education received much more attention in narratives and biographies than the teaching of language and behaviour or the integration into household tasks, namely the teaching of spoken and written literary styles to children of both sexes. This part appears to be of considerable importance, not only to highly literate families, but also to families who were already content with the oral mastery of texts. The prayer from Dunhuang that I have quoted above in the part about the goals of education, requests for the ability to master the oral language of the Tang as well as for the ability to ‘mumble *fanyu* (梵語 a Sanskrit transcript),’ which means reciting mantras by heart.⁹³⁹ Because narratives and biographies put a great emphasis on the inculcation of literary language, I concentrate on how early education at home took place in the following paragraphs. I also focus on the materials used to teach, and in relation to that I will discuss teaching methods, materials and educators.⁹⁴⁰

As we have seen above in the discussion on precocity, one sentence regarding childhood occurred very often – especially in biographies of poets, statesmen, concubines and courtesans: ‘he made an astonishing poem.’ This sentence, although expressing surprise, was a biographical convention for eminent personalities. The mastery of poetry was essential within the literate communities “down to the lowliest monks and courtesans, and an elegant prose style was deemed essential for all serious communications, public or private.”⁹⁴¹ It was crucial that this style of elaborated communication was trained from an early age onward, depending on the financial and cultural capacities of the parents, and their plans for their male and female offspring. Mastery of

⁹³⁸ Liu Zongyuan 1974: 219. As I have mentioned somewhere above, children probably also learned many things without being explicitly taught, but by copying adults, see *Taiping guangji* 103: 693-4 (*Ming bao ji*).

⁹³⁹ On Siddham and Sanskrit and how much or what kind of Sanskrit a Tang Chinese person would master, see van Gulik 1956. The simplified Indian script, Siddham, was especially used for *mantras* and *dharanis*, which were inconvenient to write down in Chinese script because the Indian ritual speech was difficult to pronounce when written in characters (see especially p. 46 ff). Moreover, *fanyu* (梵語) does not necessarily mean that the script was Indian. With respect to character-combination with *fan* (梵), van Gulik explains that “in such expressions the term *fan* means ‘Indian’ in general, it cannot be adduced as a proof that the language the manuscripts were written in was Sanskrit, or that the script used was the Brahmi-lipi. These books may well have been written in some Central Asiatic language and in one of the scripts used in that region; for it was chiefly by way of Central Asia that the early Buddhist texts reached the Middle Kingdom,” van Gulik 1956: 47.

⁹⁴⁰ See Gao Mingshi 2005a, Lei Qiaoyun 1998, Zhou Yuwen 2005.

⁹⁴¹ Frankel 1962: 65.

communication was important not only for 'private' situations but also for success in the exams and especially networking.⁹⁴²

Children were thus most probably exposed to literary language from an early age onward due to social expectancies. Examples from biographies and narratives suggest that often children from families with sufficient financial and a certain cultural background already gained literary skills by oral means, before the age of five. The stereotypical childhood as a Tang member of the *shi* is therefore summarized by Frankel as: "His innate talent as a writer became manifest early in his life. He was precocious, bookish, learned, and endowed with a prodigious memory."⁹⁴³ Despite this stereotypical image, children who composed poems at the age of four most probably did exist. Because an elite child grew up surrounded by literary people and frequently heard people quoting or reading aloud texts of different genres, it would not have been difficult for that child to quote a poem itself. To 'create a poem', then, was not a big step further, because for the child it was just another way of using a language-style which is very familiar.⁹⁴⁴

Also girls were reported to quote and create poems at a young age. Although this could be only a stereotypical image as well, we can likewise act on the assumption that this was indeed true. This means that in some families literary Chinese was used often and aloud.⁹⁴⁵ Some girls even might have been encouraged to proceed with their literary studies. Even though women were often praised for having been the primary instructors of their children and teaching them all sort of texts posthumously, girls that were literate might have had a slightly bad image, as an episode of female entertainer Liu Jilan's childhood implies.⁹⁴⁶ Of course, not all texts and styles would be learned by merely listening to them repeatedly. Children from literate families also received special instructions based on certain texts.

⁹⁴² See also Frankel 1962: 73, where he states that the reason why it was best to start learning poetry and other form of literary communication was that "there were many occasions in the lives of the literati that called for improvisation and swiftness in writing..."

⁹⁴³ Frankel 1962: 83 and 72.

⁹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the child receives positive attention from using poetic language.

⁹⁴⁵ We can conclude that at a young age boys and girls used the same rooms and were exposed to similar experiences.

⁹⁴⁶ *Taiping guangji* 273: 2150 (*Zhong xing xian qi ji*), see above.

Concerning elementary teaching material,⁹⁴⁷ some texts that were known during medieval times were especially used as primers. These were texts that were given to young children in order to introduce literary language to them. Biographies and narratives, however, report of teenage girls who could quote by heart the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the *Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, Buddhist sutras, the *Narratives of Exemplary Women*, and the *History of the Han Dynasty*. Therefore, when putting together a list of the texts used in education, we actually get a very broad collection. This generates an impression that any text at hand, including texts memorized by the instructor, could be used in getting young children between the age of four at its earliest and ten years old acquainted with literary Chinese styles. Together with the characters a Confucian world view that was contained in the texts was also bestowed to the children.⁹⁴⁸

Lei Qiaoyun divides children's literature, as she names it, which she has collected from among the Dunhuang material, into six categories. One category contains texts that ought to be studied in order to learn characters, such as the *One Thousand Character Text* (*Qianziwen* 千字文), the *Important Instructions to Open Up the Bemuddled Minds* (*Kaimeng yaoxun* 開蒙要訓), and the *One Hundred Household Names* (*Baijiaxing* 百家姓). The next category is made up by family instructions, such as the *Family Teachings of Mister Tai* (*Tai gong jiajiao* 太公家教). A third category consists of the *Twenty-four [Examples] of Filial Piety* (*Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝). Followingly, there is a category of biographies of saints, *Guxian ji* (古仙記), a category of fables such as the *Yanzi fu* (燕子賦) and the *Chajiu lun* (茶酒論), and lastly a category of texts about children's experiences or precocity, such as the *Scripture of the Dialogue of Kongzi and Xiangtuo* (孔子項託相問書).⁹⁴⁹ These works are often interpreted as children's literature. Nonetheless, children, as I explained, were presented with a greater variety of texts. And children's

⁹⁴⁷ I cannot sufficiently talk about the actual material-part concerning teaching materials. Texts found at Dunhuang show that at least in this oasis children (or students in general) used paper and ink to write their exercises (Zürcher 1989). Texts were also put in stone for others to copy. If these texts, however, were used in order to teach one's children to read I cannot tell. Another possibility how texts were available in households were through the transmission of religious texts. That means that for example a parent could have lived as a monk or nun, returned to lay life, but took Buddhist texts with her or him, which were mostly on silk. Furthermore, texts could have been copied from family members and friends.

⁹⁴⁸ One wonders whether this really reflects Tang didactic practice or just elite idealised thinking.

⁹⁴⁹ Lei Qiaoyun 1985. Lei Qiaoyun's aim is to write the history of children's literature in China which is an underrepresented topic in academic works. In her later work she has set up the categories: Children's songs; children's poetry; literature to study characters; family instructions; mythology; biographies; fables. Concerning several texts I would avoid them categorizing as children's literature, because they did not address children in the first place and have only later be used for teaching literacy.

literature was probably meant for older children who learned to write, which was most probably not trained within the scope of family education. These texts were not necessarily written for children alone but was used by any person who was introduced to literacy, who could be adult men and women as well. Withal, the *New History of the Tang* mentions sixty-nine authors of books categorized under elementary learning who wrote all together seven hundred twenty-one chapters of elementary instructions.⁹⁵⁰

All these texts, in fact, aimed at two goals in particular, namely the recognition of characters,⁹⁵¹ and the internalisation of moral behaviour with the help of examples from antiquity as well as recent history. Recognition of characters did not only mean that children were taught to connect a sound with a character, and it most probably did not mean that children were taught how to write, but rather that they became familiar with this particular usage of language.

One style of primers was that of short word-lists such as the *Jijiu pian* (急就篇) which has been written during the Han dynasty as a text for elementary education. The *Jijiu pian* was perhaps the first composition made for the purpose of learning how to read and write.⁹⁵² In the following centuries, “this primer succeeded to become the single most important primer through the early Tang.”⁹⁵³ The *Jijiu pian* did not make use of moral lessons, but focused on the teaching of characters. This was a noticeable feature of the text because there is almost no repetition of words, “a feature that dominated contemporary and later primers.”⁹⁵⁴ The content of the primer is informative and deals with common knowledge, such as different materials of silk, rags, measurements, food, such as cereals, fruits, vegetables, and sauces, clothes, metal objects, and manufactures, women and slaves, interior equipment of the bed chamber, musical instruments, the human body, weapons and military knowledge, animals, diseases, pharmacological knowledge, and rituals.⁹⁵⁵

Texts like the *Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety* or the *Yanzi fu* were of moral content, providing examples from history or from animal realm on how to behave filial or how social networking and the legal system worked. The *Family Instruction of The Yan Clan* taught about the social structure within the family and everybody’s behaviour and expectations.

Lee points out that in the second half of the Tang dynasty, teaching material differed from that of the beginning of the dynasty. For example,

⁹⁵⁰ *Xin Tangshu* 57: 1451.

⁹⁵¹ See also Lee 2000: 435.

⁹⁵² See Bottéro 2003: 113-117; Lee 2000: 436-439; Lei Qiaoyun 1998: 334-355.

⁹⁵³ Lee 2000: 437.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 438.

⁹⁵⁵ Bottéro 2003: 114-5.

narratives existed that were used as teaching material but that did not derive from standard history texts or any other known literary source. These narratives might have been taught orally before, and written down in a stage of social development where literacy became even more important.⁹⁵⁶

Furthermore, in the second half of the Tang dynasty, “there was an increased awareness of the need to teach reliable pronunciation.”⁹⁵⁷ Despite there being a tendency to write texts that consisted of short units of characters carrying brief information,⁹⁵⁸ texts that could especially be used by children to study, the curriculum of children that ought to learn reading and eventually writing as well, was in fact rather open and dependent on the availability for the instructor.

Who were these elementary instructors? In general, with respect to teaching how to read on an elementary level, mothers were often credited with being the first adults to teach children, boys as well as girls.⁹⁵⁹ Viewed in the light of the violent circumstances of the Tang dynasty it is not a strange idea that children were taught reading and writing by their educated female care-givers, because their fathers could be either dead or otherwise separated from them. Therefore accounts such as the one of the mother of an aristocratic family who was kidnapped by boat-people when she was pregnant, does not seem to be pure fantasy but could very well be based on reality. In capture, she gave birth to a son and clandestinely taught him characters.⁹⁶⁰ Or, in another narrative when a father was killed in war, mother and son became prisoner of war. The son followed the mother and later managed to participate in the exams, thanks to the education by his mother.⁹⁶¹

In order to be able to instruct young children, the mother most probably had gained knowledge about literacy in her own childhood. If a girl married between her fourteenth and twentieth year of age or earlier, and from that time onward was kept busy with household tasks and serving one’s in-laws, she would not have much time for studying literary Chinese.

A woman that was recruited into the imperial palace, for example, was not only chosen for her looks and behaviour, but also thanks to a refined literary

⁹⁵⁶ Lee 2000: 435-451.

⁹⁵⁷ Lee 2000: 451.

⁹⁵⁸ The One Thousand Character Essay (*Qianziwen*), for example, has four characters in each line, and thirty-two characters make up one topic.

⁹⁵⁹ Gao Mingshi 2005: 459.

⁹⁶⁰ *Taiping guangji* 121: 854-5 (*Yuan hua ji*).

⁹⁶¹ *Taiping guangji* 128: 908-9 (*Wen qi lu*); when the father is absent, the mother might take over the role as a teacher of literacy, see also Gao Mingshi 2005: 463-5. Most probably, the mother has set the foundations and then was able to rely on a network of people that ensured the professional education of her son. Unfortunately, female networking is very difficult to trace.

knowledge.⁹⁶² Zhang Sun, for example, married emperor Taizong when she was thirteen years old. She is known for having gathered narratives of exemplary women from antiquity, which she had compiled in ten chapters and for which she has written a foreword herself.⁹⁶³ Although we do not know if she could read and write before she became empress, it is clear that her literacy was an example for other women and girls at least within the palace.

Tomb inscriptions in particular provide ample examples of mothers who were praised for having taught their daughters and sons literary Chinese in an apparently normal upbringing situation. Zhou Yuwen has spent much effort to collect numerous examples from tomb inscriptions from throughout the dynasty, and on the basis of her data she points out the essential role of women in family-education. Additionally, her analysis shows that the texts used in teaching apparently were known by many mothers and daughters as well, and not only by fathers and sons.⁹⁶⁴

Nonetheless, girls also had their own textbooks that corresponded to those of boys.⁹⁶⁵ Aside from Liu Xiang's *Lienüzhuan* from the Han dynasty, girls also were referred to Ban Zhao's *Admonishments for Girls* (*Nüjie* 女誡),⁹⁶⁶ also from the Han dynasty, and to the work from the above mentioned empress Zhang Sun, *Rules for Girls* (*Nüze yaolü* 女則要錄). Especially for girls Mrs Cheng's *Classic of Filial Piety for Girls* (*Nü xiaojing* 女孝經) became very famous.

Empress Wu was in charge of many works that focused on the education of girls.⁹⁶⁷ The female scholar Song, consort of emperor Dezong (r.779-805), compiled the *Analects for Girls* (*Nülunyü* 女論語).⁹⁶⁸ At that time, several books for female education were compiled by women with an elite background, starting with Ban Zhao (班昭, 45-116), who had indicated that the book "was meant for her daughters."⁹⁶⁹ Most of the works were also intended for girls with their own background. Still, Gao Shiyu argues that The *Analects for Girls* was also intended to reach women from among 'common folk.'⁹⁷⁰ Zhu Fengyu discusses a short work called *Essay for Obedient Girls by the First Lady of the Cui Clan* (崔氏夫人順女

⁹⁶² Gao Mingshi 2005: 461.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid*: 459.

⁹⁶⁴ Zhou Yuwen 2005: 9-36.

⁹⁶⁵ See Zhou Yuwen 2005: 34-5 and Zhu Fengyu 2005: 37-57.

⁹⁶⁶ Mrs Yang, wife of prince Zhuan in the Tang also edited a *Nü jie*.

⁹⁶⁷ See *Xin Tangshu* 58.

⁹⁶⁸ Gao Shiyu 2003: 127-157, Jamazaki Junichi 2003: 158-187, Wong Yin-lee 2003: 188-109. All authors compare the *Nü lun yü* with the *Nü xiao jing*.

⁹⁶⁹ Hou 1986: 178.

⁹⁷⁰ Gao Shiyu 2003: 148ff.

文) found in Dunhuang, and states that this thirty-two *ju* short, rhymed text was probably disseminated by sale among different layers of educated women.⁹⁷¹

However, although literacy among women of elite families appeared to be common and was widely admired, it was also criticized. The broadly learned female Daoist master Li Jilan, who was praised and admired by many, also had some enviers and people disliked that she mastered what were considered a man's skills.⁹⁷² Similarly to precocious children, literate women were praised and marvelled at, somewhat like entertainment. Literate children were the prospect of the family, and literate women could also add relief to the burden of literate education. Yet, not every man liked the idea of women handling ink and brush.⁹⁷³ Nonetheless also girls, and therewith women, participated in the starting hype of teaching and learning during the Tang dynasty.

We should not expect, however, to find an equal rate of literacy among women as among men.⁹⁷⁴ Moreover, mothers could be expected to be the instructors mostly just in the absence of fathers.⁹⁷⁵ When living together with their family, fathers would be the main elementary instructors of literary Chinese. Yao Silian (姚思廉), for example, received teachings about the *History of the Han* from his father.⁹⁷⁶ Gao Mingshi points out that the Yao family was famously engaged with the *History of the Han* for several generations.⁹⁷⁷ Furthermore they compiled several other *Histories* such as the *Liang shu* and the *Chen shu*. This means that with regard to teaching material, the Yao family was equipped with at least the *History of the Han* if not other texts. Also due to the ambition and family tradition, in any case the sons would have dealt extensively with the material. In this case, the father as the heir of the tradition, was the teacher of his son.

Fathers also taught their daughters. Above I have mentioned Liu Jilan, who, sitting on the arm of her father, would recite poems together with him. Although the narrative does not tell who had instructed her in poetry, it could very well have been her father. Ting Fen (庭芬) father of female scholar Mrs Song, female matron of the general palace service (born between 760 and 775, died

⁹⁷¹ Zhu Fengyu 2005: 44. See Seo 2003: 23-27 for a translation of this important work, and pp 2-3 and 22-28.

⁹⁷² Gao Mingshi 2005: 463. See also chapter III 'Fathers and emotions'.

⁹⁷³ Gaining a noteworthy expertise in using ink and brush might have been very extraordinary indeed. I assume that more women could read or knew texts by heart, but gaining real calligraphy skills would have been rather seldom, because they were also busy with very time-consuming household tasks such as weaving and making clothes.

⁹⁷⁴ However, we have no statistics about literacy rates anyhow.

⁹⁷⁵ They, in fact, were frequently absent as I have discussed in chapter IV.

⁹⁷⁶ *Jiu Tangshu* 73: 2592.

⁹⁷⁷ Gao Mingshi 2005: 456.

825),⁹⁷⁸ is known to have taught his five daughters himself.⁹⁷⁹ “At first he instructed them in the classical works and then he taught them to create poetry. When they had not yet reached adulthood they could all compose texts.”⁹⁸⁰ This account also points out the sequence of learning: first, the children had to learn the classics. Most probably this meant that they would have had to learn them by heart, or at least some paragraphs of them. Second, the daughters learned to make their own short and longer poems, and finally they learned how to create other types of texts.

Alternative teachers to mothers or fathers were older brothers and sisters. Sometimes siblings would intentionally teach each other, sometimes children would participate in the lessons of their older siblings and would then learn ‘by chance’. This is similar to those children that would pick up literary knowledge by overhearing conversations of adults, who subsequently would be detected as precocious.

In family education it was important to set the first fundamentals for later achievements. Ideally the first teacher would be the head of the family, because he or she supposedly was also the one who had the highest moral standpoint in the household. The main issue was to study, and educators hoped that learning showed effect in behaviour and, above all, that it resulted in office holding or marriage into a prestigious family.

What did children do when they learned the texts? How did they study? In the contexts of elementary learning, narratives do not report that children copied and wrote down the texts they were confronted with, but that they memorized (*nian* 念 and *ji* 記), recited and chanted (*song* 誦, *feng* 諷) and read (*du* 讀) them. Children understood (*ming* 明) poetry, deepened their [knowledge] (*dun* 敦) of poetry, and read (*yue* 閱) the *Liji*. Girls as well as boys were versed (*tong* 通) in the *Lunyu* and the *Maoshi* and could understand how to compose (*xiaozu* 曉屬) texts (*wen* 文). We do not know if children recited after their instructors, or if they had texts lying in front of them, neither do we know if instructors occasionally would write characters and if they did, we generally cannot be sure about what material they used. Teachers instructed (*jiao* 教) or transmitted [knowledge] (*shou* 授), while students received (*shou* 受) knowledge. From the vocabulary used for elementary learning we can infer that writing was not part of family instruction. Here, memorizing a large amount of texts was the aim of instruction.

⁹⁷⁸ 女學士尚宮宋氏, *Shanggong*: Hucker 1985: no. 5013.

⁹⁷⁹ On Mrs Song, see Gao Shiyu 2003: 127-157.

⁹⁸⁰ *Jiu Tangshu* 52: 2198; Gao Mingshi 2005: 460-1.

In the Dunhuang library, many writing exercises have been found. Most of them are the texts that I have listed above and that are interpreted as children's literature, such as the *One Thousand Character Essay*. Zürcher concludes from the existence of those texts that children who entered the monastery at the age of eleven – which was the official age for being allowed in a monastery – or five to eight years old – which was the age group that was represented in those places in several instances – learned writing from the beginning onward.⁹⁸¹ According to what I have discussed above, I assume that it would be required from an eleven-year-old child to start writing exercises with brush, but not from a five- or six-year-old child.

Education and punishment

When he discussed education, Yan Zhitui brought up punishment by beating. He suggested that children should not be beaten until they were several years old, without fixing an exact age. Sun Simiao suggests likewise, fixing the lower limit of punishing by beating around ten years of age (*you* 幼), which was the age when professional training started. Somewhat earlier, in the first half of the fifth century, Liu Yiqing also did not present examples of severe punishment of small children.⁹⁸²

Beating a child was seen as part of professional education strategy and considered to be helpful for the child. Boys had to be beaten in order to provide them with a good upbringing.⁹⁸³ This ideal opinion found consent among medieval authors. Yet, aside from the few examples from medieval narratives that I provide below, severe punishment of small children or other reasoned violence against them is unheard of.

Violation of the child's sphere was only mentioned if a case could be used to point out problems in the adult's sphere.⁹⁸⁴ Often events, in which an uncle, a father or a stepmother abused or caused death of at least one child, had been considered noteworthy by authors. Because no punishment was designated for violent acts against a child by law, other institutions punished children's murder or mistreatment. Violence against a child in connection with education was

⁹⁸¹ See Zürcher 1989: 36.

⁹⁸² Mather 1995: 117.

⁹⁸³ See for example Hsiung Ping-chen 2005, who points out that in late imperial China "popular wisdom held that severe discipline in child training was a proxy for parental attention and social importance," Hsiung Ping-chen 2005: 202.

⁹⁸⁴ I could not find cases of sexual abuse of boys, which does not mean that it did not take place. Sexual abuse of girls, of course, could take place under the roof of an early marriage. Rape of unmarried under aged girls was rarely mentioned in a straightforward way.

education and not violence. Violence without an educative reason, however, was understood as an act of aimless cruelty. Often it was not pursued by law, but by supernatural, moral punishment.

Education of filial piety

Filial piety (*xiao* 孝) attracted much attention in medieval writings and also receives much attention from contemporary scholarship. Here I will only discuss *xiao* as part of family education.⁹⁸⁵ Usually, scholars and writers act on the assumption that filial piety was induced in order to secure oneself for one's old age. Hsiung Ping-chen, however, doubts that induction of filial piety was done with a realistic aim for practical aid in old age or for help during calamities. She assumes that the average age of death for adults was about forty years in late imperial times, therefore offspring rather constituted a further troublesome burden during a calamity, and they would not so much be helpful to their families. This means that children would not often have the chance to help their parents because they usually passed away before their offspring reached adulthood.⁹⁸⁶ Cole, additionally, remarks that "incidentally, Confucius' requirement that the young care for their elders represents an inversion of biological time. In fact, it could be argued that filial piety is unnatural not because it involves altruistic care for others but because it is care and nutrition directed backward in biological time, which means to those who have already reproduced, instead of forward to those who have yet to reproduce, which is the usual direction in the animal kingdom."⁹⁸⁷

Although the average age in medieval China was probably rather low as well, we mostly deal with elite offspring in the cases I present here, and, as tomb inscriptions reveal, the average age of elite men and women in many cases was somewhat higher than from non-elite members. We therefore also find narratives which feature interaction between grandparents and grandchildren. This means that in an elite context the inculcation of filial piety would have made sense.

I presume, however, that the benefits of filial piety were especially seen in a ritual and moral sense and to a lesser degree in a practical one, although the latter also plays a role. It therefore it would not have posed a great problem for the filial needs of parents, if they would have died when their children were only, say, fifteen years of age,⁹⁸⁸ for filial piety was first and foremost aimed at service

⁹⁸⁵ On medieval filial piety see especially Knapp 2005, Chan (ed.) 2004, Cole 1998.

⁹⁸⁶ Hsiung Ping-chen 1996: 18.

⁹⁸⁷ Cole 1998: 19.

⁹⁸⁸ Hsiung Ping-chen 1996: 21.

to the ancestors on behalf of the descendants. The descendant-producing adult complied with his duties towards his parents, and did all that was in his might to assure that his service to his ancestors would in return later be done for him as well. In order to be sure that this need would be fulfilled, the child's character was checked from an early age onward.

When premature, children had no chance to actually help their fathers and mothers during the latter's lifetime. A father, however, could be assured that his son was educated in a way that he would continue his father's life and projects, which in most cases implied "not to disgrace the father's name or his other ancestors."⁹⁸⁹ The *Histories* are abundant with accounts of filial behaviour during childhood by famous people that read somewhat similar to each other:

(a) The princess of Xiguo was born by consort Cui. When [the princess] was three years old, the consort died, and [the girl] cried and did not eat for three days – just like an adult.⁹⁹⁰

(b) When Dexing was seven years old his father died and [Dexing] cried and moved like an adult.⁹⁹¹

(c) When Meizhi Qizhang, daughter of Jian, the Lord of Wancheng, was three years old everytime her parents were sick, she would already understand it to serve [them] and her facial expression was like that of an adult.⁹⁹²

(d) When Xu Fazhen was three years old, he already had [gained] consciousness. When his mother was sick, he would not drink her milk and would sorrowfully have a sad face.⁹⁹³

(e) When Duan Xiugui was six years old and his mother was sick, [he did not allow] water and gruel to enter his mouth. Just after the disease was cured he was eating and drinking again.

Although these examples do not mention the word 'filial', xiao is intrinsically included in these biographical accounts, for the children precociously understood how to display correct ritual behaviour in significant, publicly perceived situations. As long as the parents were alive, children ought to show their respect in daily ceremonies, "sons and daughters-in-law would wait upon

⁹⁸⁹ Cole 1998: 23

⁹⁹⁰ *Xin Tangshu* 83: 3656.

⁹⁹¹ *Xin Tangshu* 165: 5076.

⁹⁹² *Xin Tangshu* 250: 5819.

⁹⁹³ *Xin Tangshu* 195: 5590.

their parents like servants and serve them food.”⁹⁹⁴ Knapp has shown that food and feeding one’s parents even at the cost of one’s own nutrition and up to self-mutilation, was a major aspect of filial piety in medieval times.⁹⁹⁵

Serving food and waiting upon one’s parents could already have been asked of children from the age of seven, but texts mostly focused on adult sons and their spouses. Yet, we can assume that this kind of behaviour was already trained in earlier years, although the handling of it might not have been very strict. Thus we can see in the narratives about precocious children that they were always around their father and his guests, ready to entertain with witty or amazing parrot-like comments. Although these young, pre-teenage children were not serving food, they were serving entertainment and therewith displayed the good education which their father had provided.

Filial piety was an educational program that was on the agenda of parents. We do not know how filial piety was induced, but it might have been by practical training, such as practicing serving one’s parents, performing ceremonies and behaving respectful. In the long run, filial piety primarily involved serving the parents and serving one’s deceased ancestors. Filial piety, furthermore, was a theoretical practice and a type of desirable behaviour. “Even if one did not receive public office, a reputation for filiality could still earn one’s family many privileges and rewards,”⁹⁹⁶ and stories on filial piety “legitimated that family’s privileged position within local society.”⁹⁹⁷

3. Professional Education

Family education ideally was over at around ten years of age. Starting from then, sons were supposed to study with persons other than their care-givers. Several narratives deal with the practice of sending teenage sons away to special places where they could study. We did already come across the Southern Mountains where some teenagers went to study on their own. I will here introduce some other places and institutions to which parents would send their sons. Although we know that schools existed during medieval China, we do not know how they operated. Yet, we have some accounts and narratives about school education that I will analyse in this section.

⁹⁹⁴ Knapp 2004: 46.

⁹⁹⁵ Knapp 2004, see also Qiu 1995 on the idea of cutting one’s flesh in order to prove one’s filial piety, an idea that gained ground from the Tang dynasty onward.

⁹⁹⁶ Knapp, Keith 2005: 39.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

Furthermore I will discuss religious education. Our knowledge about how one became a religious expert is very limited but we do have some information about education towards what medieval texts call a Buddhist or Daoist profession. In these cases we are mostly confronted with teenage children that left their parental home on their own account to follow a private teacher. The own choice of a teacher usually concerns the study of religious texts and rituals with a Buddhist or Daoist master.⁹⁹⁸ I will additionally consider the biographies of healers who claimed to trace their professional skills back to their childhood. At the end of this section, I present material about children at work as apprentices and slaves.

Education at school

I heard that in ancient times the wise kings established the study-officials who instructed the princes in the six virtues, the six conducts and the six arts. Completing those three teachings concluded the Way of Man. The *Liji* writes: "That what transforms people and makes them vulgar surely comes from learning." Concerning studies with regard to people, it should be broad. Therefore [the rulers] set up the Great Learning in order to spread instructions throughout the country, they established regional schools in order to cause transformation [of the people within] the city walls. The sons of the ruler, the sons of the ministers and aristocrats, as well as the talented and selected from the country, all go there. When [the sons] are eight years old they enter the elementary school, at fifteen they enter the Grand Academy. In spring and autumn they are instructed in the [classics of] *Rites* and *Music*, in winter and summer they are instructed in the [classics of] *Poetry* and *History*. That is, by instructing to be in harmony and the flow of transformation, the behaviour will be perfected and not rebellious. From the Son of Heaven to the common people, there will be no one who does not obey the studies and is perfected by it!⁹⁹⁹

⁹⁹⁸ Although many institutions existed where children could be educated outside of their parental home, we can speak of an educational system during the Tang dynasty in a very restricted sense only. Furthermore, although there was a governmental system of schools spread over the Tang empire, it is not clear how and if the schools actually functioned. Moreover, even if they did have a practical value in educating boys, their capacity was very small and most probably much less influential than the other educational institutions. Because the governmental school system has left many written traces, much has been written about it. In English see Lee 2000, in Chinese see, among others, Li Guilin 1989 (about the educational system from pre-imperial to post-imperial times), Liu Haifeng 1991 (specifically about the Tang). Gao Mingshi 2005 has written the most comprehensive works on education during the medieval period, including the official school system and also private institutions.

⁹⁹⁹ *Jiu Tangshu* 88: 2866.

This is part of a memorial that the chancellor Wei Sili (韋嗣立, 654-719) submitted to the throne. His biography informs us that he had displayed a correct and nearly masochist behaviour during his childhood, for whenever his stepbrother received punishment, he asked for it, too and would ask a servant if his mother would not see to it. Sili kept himself busy throughout his life with punishment and education. In the following we will see, in how far education had been institutionalized during the Tang dynasty.

Especially since the second half of the Tang, places and study halls in mountains and monasteries were in the focus. Gao Mingshi lists fourteen such places, like Zhongtiaoshan (中條山), Taishan (泰山), Lushan (廬山), Jiuhuashan (九華山), the Dunhuang monastery, monasteries in Fujian and more.¹⁰⁰⁰ Zhongtiaoshan attracted most students, who would stay there in large groups in order to study. Studying in such places probably was similar to studies in the Dunhuang monastery, where there was a big hall with students copying texts, as described by Zürcher.¹⁰⁰¹

Children who were expected or hoped to become professional literates were sent to schools, where they were taught by a private teacher and where they shared the education with other children of an – in most cases – aristocratic background. The private tutors were sometimes connected with the government, or they otherwise had a reputation as a literate person. Instructive material consisted of a wide range of texts which were associated with Confucian thought, but also of oral narratives, written down for moral education. The texts were intended to inculcate teenagers with a certain set of moral values, as well as teaching them reading and writing. Most teaching was done through learning by heart. Instruction and texts thus did not differ greatly from family instruction, which I have discussed above, except that writing was included in the instructions.

We have a lot of information about the theories about the government school system, while we know less about the private and practical solutions parents chose for their sons with respect to education. One major part of the official institution focused on the instruction of the imperial heir and other princes, and was established in the capital Chang'an (or Luoyang). There were six schools: the School for the sons of state (*guozixue* 國子學), the Great school (*taixue* 太學), the School of the four gates (*simenxue* 四門學), law school, school for mathematics and the school for orthography. "Of these six constituent schools, three, the Taixue (Great school), with an enrolment of five hundred, the Guozi xue (School for the sons of state) with three hundred and the Simen xue

¹⁰⁰⁰ Gao Mingshi 2005: 482.

¹⁰⁰¹ Zürcher 1989.

(School of the four gates) with one thousand three hundred students, were concerned with instruction in Confucian canonical texts. Each had its precinct, with a gateway, court and hall. Each drew pupils from a different group. The *Guozi xue* enrolled mainly sons and grandsons of third-degree officials and above; the *Taixue*, sons of fathers and grandfathers of the fifth degree and above; and *Simen xue*, sons of fathers and grandfathers of the seventh degree and above and commoners of great ability.”¹⁰⁰² Subordinated to this were the schools of capitals of the provinces, districts, schools of towns, villages and of ‘a hundred families’. The schools of the provinces integrated classical studies and medicine, and the other schools offered classical studies only.¹⁰⁰³

The age of the boys that started to study at one of these institutions was between fourteen and nineteen years, and at most institutions the start of studying was nine years of age. Herbal sciences (*yaoyuanke* 藥園科), for example, had the beginner’s age of sixteen.¹⁰⁰⁴ However, Gao Mingshi points out that this information, deriving from the encyclopaedia *Liudian* and both *Tang Histories*, is not necessarily consistent with reality. For example, regarding the age of entry of the Great school, seven out of sixteen boys did not meet with the officially required age of fourteen to nineteen.¹⁰⁰⁵ The actual functioning of these institutions is unclear.¹⁰⁰⁶ For many study subjects and institutions we have no clear information on the duration of the study.

Insights into the functioning of Tang education are very rare. One tragic incident from the first half of the eighth century provides some interesting information about a village school. The author of the narrative, as we will recognize, was very critical about the education at village schools:

In February or April 741 a person from the district Xiuwu wanted to marry out his daughter. The bridegroom’s family invited her, and the girl and the cars went off. The father was afraid that people in the village would barricade the car and borrowed a horse on which the girl was ordered to ride. Her younger brother was riding on a donkey a hundred steps behind her. Suddenly two men came jumping out of the grass alongside the road. One took the horse while the other jumped on, and so they kidnapped woman and horse. The younger brother could not catch them, went home and told his father. The father went looking for her together with some relatives for a whole night but they could not find her. [In the end] they went back home.

¹⁰⁰² McMullen 1988: 18.

¹⁰⁰³ Gao Mingshi 2005: 221; *Jiu Tangshu* 189: 4940.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Gao Mingshi 2005: 230-1.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: 17.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See Gao Mingshi 2005 and 1986.

In the village [where the girl went through] was an elementary school (小學). Around that time, evening lessons were held and many students stayed overnight. [At the next morning] in the coldness of dawn, they opened the gate. Outside the gate lay a woman. She was naked, her tongue was cut out and blood was flowing from her womb. The students asked her [who she was]. When the woman [tried to] talk, much blood was flowing out and she could not say a word. The students told their teacher [about her]. The teacher came outside the gate and had a look at her. One student said to him: "We heard you teaching us that the anomalies (怪) of trees and stones are the one-legged monster *kui* (夔) and the *wangliang* sprites (魍魎). The anomalies of water are dragons and the *wangxiang* monsters (罔象). The spirits of the earth are the goat-monsters (墳羊). Our residence is close to the Taixing [mountain range], where weird things come into existence. Could that not be a mountain spirit or a demon from the wilderness? Let us beat and then stone it!" The woman had her tongue cut out and thus could not talk. The students beat her up and she died.

The next day, [it turned out that] she was not a ghoul. Suddenly the family members of the girl, who were looking for her, arrived and saw her. They then took the teacher and his disciple with them to the capital of the district. The head of the district examined the case, [judged] that this act indeed was murder and informed the prefect. The teacher and his student were flogged. [As a result,] three people died. The robbers, [however], were not caught.¹⁰⁰⁷

The pitiful woman by sad chance found herself in the midst of dreadful students. This incident shockingly illustrates some dangers and consequences of textual education in a village school. Similar to other narratives about schools, the students are described in a non-studying situation. The depiction of the teacher, moreover, is not very amicable, because he appears to listen to his students and not to his own senses and knowledge, and so his morality can be questioned. Moreover, the content of his teaching is inappropriate to Confucian moral that ought to be taught to aristocratic children. The teacher instructed his pupils in matters of the spirit world, which misled them. Their way of recalling his lessons was repeating texts by heart. We can deduce from this narrative that teachers ought not listen to their students, and that they should study texts that taught about social relations, and therefore focus on a Confucian moral.

Teachers at village schools were thus not necessarily enhancing Confucian values – or at least parents and other members of the aristocracy feared that a teacher did not teach Confucian values to his young students. Especially among the group of village teachers, teachers could be found that were suspected to have pursued several different intellectual interests later in life. The teacher of

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Taiping guangji* 494: 4056 (*Ji wen*).

Dou Yizhen (竇易真),¹⁰⁰⁸ a later bureaucrat,¹⁰⁰⁹ for example, was also a Daoist practitioner, but nobody knew this. Dou Yizhen's teacher as well as the teacher from the narrative above were both working in village schools. Those schools were supposedly for the 'poor' people, as Zhao Lin (趙璘, fl. 836-846) describes Dou Yizhen's situation: Because his family was poor, Dou Yizhi went to a village school.¹⁰¹⁰ Still other teachers were officials, like the imperial historian Yang Xunmei (楊詢美), who lived together with his students.¹⁰¹¹

Next to literary instructions, schools apparently organized excursions as well. Dou found out about the Daoist interest of his teacher while they were stuck in a snow storm during an excursion in the vicinity of some tombs, located outside of the village. Still, we do not know what the educational element of this excursion was.

Religious education

Under religious education I mainly understand an education that lead to a livelihood of a religious professional, such as becoming a professional Buddhist or Daoist practitioner. In medieval China "leading clergy was often not socially distinct from leading officials. Sons and daughters from great families became Buddhist monks and nuns, gained leading roles in the Buddhist community, interpreted Buddhist teachings in ways compatible with their social background, and used their social and political connections to secure patronage for their religious communities. Similarly, Daoist scriptures in the fourth and fifth centuries had been the work of men from aristocratic families, and here too political issues had been involved."¹⁰¹² Also, the social border between Buddhist and Daoist professionals, as well as literati, was very permeable. A son of a literati family who was hoped to become a bureaucrat could turn out to prefer following a Daoist teacher and finally became a Buddhist. The following discussions stay very limited and are only meant as an introduction to the fluctuant condition of taking up a literate profession handling Confucian classics, Daoist scriptures or Buddhist sutras or all of them.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Yizhi's childhood name was Mi (秘).

¹⁰⁰⁹ See *Jiu Tangshu* 167: 4363.

¹⁰¹⁰ *Taiping guangji* 223: 1712-3 (*Yin hua lu*). Dou Yizhi's father, however, was a prefect (刺史), which meant that he probably was not really poor, since a prefect was ranked 3b or 4a, but maybe he was not rich either.

¹⁰¹¹ *Taiping guangji* 395: 3154-5 (*Yi shi zhi*).

¹⁰¹² Bol 1992: 19.

Buddhist Education

Education towards becoming a professional Buddhist could only take place in a monastery.¹⁰¹³ The minimum age of entrance into a monastery theoretically was eleven. However, orphans and other children were also taken into the Buddhist community at a younger age.¹⁰¹⁴ The famous Buddhist monk Teacher Dao'an (釋道安, 312-385), for example, became an orphan when he was still very young. He was first raised in the household of his mother's older brother where he was taught literacy already by the age of seven. When he was twelve he entered the *sangha*.¹⁰¹⁵ How exactly those young members of the community were integrated we do not know.

Buddhist teaching and texts were not confined to monasteries, and numerous narratives mention people that were confronted with Buddhist scriptures during their childhood. In fact, Buddhist texts appeared to be widely spread, and many people had access to them, no matter if they could actually read them or not. Children probably recited together with their father or mother or at least witnessed them reciting certain Buddhist texts. Because of the rhythm and the many repetitions that the reading of a Buddhist text requires, it must not have been difficult for children to be able to recite the text themselves. The sentence "he studied the Buddhist method (浮圖(氏)法) when he was ten years old,"¹⁰¹⁶ was therefore a frequently used statement, usually in biographies of eminent monks or filial people. Many narratives do not specify which Buddhist texts were studied, and they are usually just summarized as 'Buddha method.' The master Seventh Teacher, for example, who was very respectful and never dallied around, liked the Buddha method at the age of ten. He was able to recite Buddhist scriptures, we are told by Zhang Du in the ninth century, and he autodidactically learned to read the Siddham script.¹⁰¹⁷

The Seventh Teacher was a precocious child. He apparently had access to Chinese Buddhist scriptures before he became a monk and entered a monastery. In his vicinity were texts in probably Siddham script and their Chinese translations, which he could study. That means that he either resided in a monastery already or he grew up in a broadly educated or very devote family that somehow had those Buddhist texts in Siddham at hand. Above I have already introduced the wish of parents in Dunhuang that their child should not

¹⁰¹³ The introduction of Buddhist scriptures often takes place at home, though.

¹⁰¹⁴ Zürcher 1989: 29; e.g. *Taiping guangji* 87: 567-70 (*Gao seng zhuan*), *Taiping guangji* 95: 631-35 (*Ji wen*), *Taiping guangji* 457: 3738-9 (*Guang yi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 232 (no. 297).

¹⁰¹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 89: 583-5 (*Gao seng zhuan*).

¹⁰¹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 97: 649 (*Yi shi zhi*).

¹⁰¹⁷ *Taiping guangji* 96: 642 (*Yi shi zhi*).

only learn the language of Tang but also Siddham. The prayer, however, expresses the wish that the child should at least be able to mumble mantras. The parents did not ask for the ability to read or write it.

It is not clear how people gained access to Buddhist texts. The case of a desperate mother shows one way of how to obtain them: The former nun Zhitong brought Buddhist texts with her when she re-entered lay life. Yet she did not use the texts she had at hand to teach her child, but to make clothes from them for her son.¹⁰¹⁸ Probably it was mostly through this way – mothers or fathers, who were part of a Buddhist community or who have Buddhist acquaintances – that children grow up with the ideas and teaching of certain monks or nuns.¹⁰¹⁹ This might then be the reason for Yi'er (意兒), the offspring of the Liu Ji family from the Shuangliu district (雙流縣劉乙) to decide that he wants to serve Eighth Master Niwei (尼魏八師) when he was only eleven years old.¹⁰²⁰ Yi'er, thus, must have heard of the nun at home. Because he is from a noble family, the nun might even have been a visitor and Yi'er was somehow impressed by her.

Notwithstanding those cases, becoming a student of a Buddhist master most probably happened on the initiative of the parents or the Buddhist master. I assume that usually the Buddhist specialist was known to the parents, and outsiders would have a difficult time to take a child along, like in the case of Nie Yinniang, a daughter of a general:

Nie Yinniang was the daughter of a general and about ten years when a begging nun is startled upon seeing her. The nun asked the father if she could take the girl with her and instruct her. The father was very angry and scolded her. At that night, the daughter disappeared. The parents were very anxious and ordered people to search for her. Day in day out the parents missed and cried a lot. Five years later the nun sent the daughter back to the parents, saying that her education is finished. The parents were very happy. Nie reported that in the beginning she learned reading sutras (讀經), reciting (念) and making incantations (咒). However, the 'nun' gave her drugs and the girl – together with two other ten-year-old female disciples – slowly changed into a demonic bird. She then could change her form at will, and in that shape she had to behead people on the street at the order of the nun [...].¹⁰²¹

¹⁰¹⁸ *Taiping guangji* 116: 806 (*Ming xiang ji*); see chapter IV for a translation.

¹⁰¹⁹ See Moore for the remark that "by the ninth century the prestige of the Buddhist establishment was so great that some leading families sought to have one son join the Buddhist clergy and the other take the civil service examinations," Moore 2004: 192.

¹⁰²⁰ *Taiping guangji* 213: 1629-30 (*You yang za zu*).

¹⁰²¹ *Taiping guangji* 194: 1456-9 (*Zhuan qi*).

This narrative is abundant with different themes: demonic birds, fears of parents that their children would be kidnapped, and especially the fears of fake travelling monks and nuns that steal children, put them under drugs and make use of them. The education started before the girl began her puberty and ended when she would be ready for marriage, exactly the time at which she would have learned the female household tasks at home that made her suitable for marriage.

Daoist Education

Children could study one of the numerous strands of Daoist theories and practices at home as part of their family tradition. They could also stay at home while they study with a teacher nearby. Moreover, they could study in the household of their teacher and then take over the role of a son towards the teacher as a father. Alternatively, they could be given away by the parents as some sort of tribute to the Daoist priest, who was in search of spiritual descendants. Lastly, touched by an impressive encounter with a Daoist master, children could choose to leave their parents in order to live at their teacher's house.

Narratives on the beginnings of a Daoist and Buddhist career are very similar. Nevertheless, Daoist practice was integrated in different ways into medieval communities compared to Buddhism, and its impact on childhood therefore was most probably different as well. Daoist practices could be inherited within a blood-related family, which means that children learned about Daoist practice from their fathers or anyhow within their families by participating from a certain age onward. Such is the case of Hui Kuan (惠寬), who followed his father to arrange a Yellow Register (黃籙齋) ritual at the age of six. The crowd was worshipping the statue of Shitianzeng (石天尊), but Hui did not dare to participate, arguing that the stone statue then would fall over.¹⁰²² Hui went together with his father at the age when children can be initiated into a Daoist community.¹⁰²³

More often than Buddhist monks Daoist practitioners were on search for students. Children, however, did not have to leave their family in order to study with a Daoist. They can live at home, and study, as in in Zhang Ding's case which I partly translate below, secretly with a Daoist who lives nearby:¹⁰²⁴

¹⁰²² *Taiping guangji* 98: 653 (*Cheng du ji*); he then did participate in the worship and the statue did fell over as he said.

¹⁰²³ Benn 2000: 313.

¹⁰²⁴ About studying secretly with a teacher, see Schipper 1985: 136.

Zhang Ding was from Guangling. He started studying when he was very young. [One day] he got up early. On the streets were no people and he wandered alone for more than a hundred *bu*. There was a Daoist master walking in haste. He looked up and saw [Ding]. He stopped and he talked to him: "This one I can teach!" Therefore he asked: "What is it that you like?" [Ding] answered: "I like the prolonging of life (命)." The Daoist said: "That is not difficult to attain. You have the immortal bone (仙骨).¹⁰²⁵ If you pursue the *dao*, you will definitely succeed. Let me also teach you the art of transformation. Don't reveal this to the other people." And so he taught him [with the help of] pithy formula. Ding was respectful, slow of speech and careful. At home he was very filial. Summoning demons and spirits, transforming men and things – there was nothing he could not do.¹⁰²⁶

Like Nie Yinniang, Zhang Ding learned the art of transformation. Zhang Ding on the other hand could stay at home and learned it secretly.¹⁰²⁷ Likewise, the inclinations of Dou Yizhen's teacher were not known to anybody either. In the case of the 'Buddhist' education of Nie Yinniang, the girl had to leave her family's house – similar as if she would leave into a monastery for education. Zhang Ding learned his skill from a local teacher, as was more common for Daoist practices.¹⁰²⁸

Another way to acquire Daoist skills was that children, usually as young teenagers but sometimes also below the age of ten years, would be given into the care of a master in order to be educated. Parents, as followers of a certain Daoist teacher, were reported to hand out one of their children in this way: a Daoist, who did not have a follower dreamt that he would get two children. One day, the monk passed the family Wang, who had a son who was just one-year-old. When the infant saw the monk, he grabbed his legs and did not want him to leave. After the monk had left, the boy cried day and night, and he only stopped when the monk came a second time. Several years later, then, the parents handed over the boy to the monk. The monk also received another boy as a gift (捨). This boy had five-coloured eyes, and his parents applied moxabustion on him because they thought that this was strange. The colours eventually vanished, and

¹⁰²⁵On the 'immortal bone' as a marker for transcendence, see Bokenkamp 1997: 107 (especially the footnote).

¹⁰²⁶ *Taiping guangji* 74: 464-5 (*Xian zhuan shi yi*).

¹⁰²⁷ 'Secretly' could mean one-to-one learning. Daoist masters usually held their teachings very private and secret, therefore learning was done in secret, too.

¹⁰²⁸ See also *Taiping guangji* 328: 2605 (*Ji wen*).

when the boy was four or five years old the parents presented him to the monk.¹⁰²⁹

In another narrative we find an account of how the son of the instructor for court entertainers, who left his parental house as a teenager for he wanted to serve the Daoist master who had healed him from jaundice, might have lived in the household of his teacher. In the summer of 825 Luo Xuansu (駱玄素), who answered to the invitation of a mysterious man and entered his mountain hut, where he encountered the mysterious man's servant: The servant was very young, and his hair was in tufts. His clothes were short and coarse, and he had a white plaid with a bound belt and worn out shoes.¹⁰³⁰ This description leads us to the following topic, apprentices, because the boy probably was a novice living in his master's house.

Apprenticeships and slavery: children at work

Generally speaking, apart from formal education or informal teaching at home, children often had small jobs or apprenticeships during which they learned first and foremost by doing. Children held all kinds of jobs. Usually they were only mentioned alongside the main story-line in a narrative as small details. The most common work for children of non noble descent in rural areas was tending oxen.¹⁰³¹ Yet, we do not know from which age onward they were given this responsibility.

There is also no information on how girls learned to work. Like boys following their father, girls probably learned by imitating their mother and other female care-givers. Although we can assume that most of their tasks took place in the household, there were probably numerous female jobs in entertainment as well, and girls might have been trained from an early age onward.

We can assume that most boys followed in their father's footsteps or may have been trained by a relative. Most probably training consisted of accompanying experienced adults. The nephew of salt inspector Shi Mou, who came along with his uncle to inspect the salt fields, might have been his apprentice.¹⁰³² He Zhiyong (何致雍), the son of a trader, accompanied his father

¹⁰²⁹ *Taiping guangji* 162: 1172-3 (*Lu yi ji*). Parents, however, were not always too willing to let their child go, see *Taiping guangji* 85: 556-7 (*Ji shen lu*), see chapter IV for a translation.

¹⁰³⁰ *Taiping guangji* 73: 459 (*Yi shi zhi*).

¹⁰³¹ See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 102: 686 (*San bao gan song ji*); for examples of child labour during the Song dynasty see also Zhou Yuwen 1996: 39-55, she includes becoming monk or nun as child labor as well.

¹⁰³² *Taiping guangji* 269: 2110 (*Guo shi bu*), he was murdered by his uncle as a punishment for stealing salt.

and uncle on business trips.¹⁰³³ However, he was also good at studying and received the prediction that his future did not lie in trading. Mostly, a person probably did not have many options to take up another job than those practiced by his male family members. One more example, Guardian of the Right, Ma Zhen (馬震), was visited several times by a little boy who came to collect money that Ma Zhen supposedly owed the boss, a donkey lender of the eastern market in Chang'an, for using his service.¹⁰³⁴ Some alternative options to joining the occupation of family members were becoming a monk, a healer, a eunuch or a beggar.¹⁰³⁵ Often, miraculous stories were built around those occupations – or tragic ones as in the case of eunuchs.

The largest part of our information was about the offspring of elite families. Their tasks usually comprised jobs in the bureaucracy, such as clerks. We do not know whether these tasks were requirements in order to make one's way into a bureaucratic career, and to create important relations with officials, because the information about this is very brief. Most remarks about a teenager working in an office are limited to sentences like: [X] became a [Y] with age seventeen.¹⁰³⁶ [X]'s forefather had an official function when he was a teenager.¹⁰³⁷ [X] became [Y] when he was a teenager (*you*).¹⁰³⁸

The practice of employing teenagers to work within the bureaucracy was also reflected in the underworld system. Often the people that were summoned to the underworld were guided by these boys, and boys were described as standing at the sidelines. It is difficult to determine to what extent these descriptions were a representation of contemporary reality. Children probably delivered short distance messages, accompanied adults and assisted them. They waited at the sidelines, ready to execute orders. They also had the power to tell off adults, if they were misbehaving.¹⁰³⁹

A special profession was that of a healer. Healers were adults, who worked with the help of supernatural resources or powers, and they occasionally referred to a childhood incident to explain their distinctiveness. They might have done so, in order to show that they had supernatural help and gained special powers at an innocent age. Ye Qianshao (葉遷韶), for example was busy with a household task, gathering fuel while tending oxen – the usual work for children

¹⁰³³ *Taiping guangji* 278: 2213 (*Ji shen lu*).

¹⁰³⁴ *Taiping guangji* 346: 2741 (*Xu xuan guai lu*).

¹⁰³⁵ E.g. a beggar *Taiping guangji* 305: 2420 (*You yang za zu*).

¹⁰³⁶ *Taiping guangji* 146: 1052 (*Gan zi bu*); 147: 1058-60 (*Ji wen*).

¹⁰³⁷ *Taiping guangji* 170: 1243 (*Zhi tian lu*).

¹⁰³⁸ *Taiping guangji* 183: 1363 (*Zhi yan*).

¹⁰³⁹ See for example *Taiping guangji* 288: 2285 (*Chao ye qian zai*), *Taiping guangji* 231: 1771-2 (*Yi wen lu*), and my article 'The other child' (Pissin, not yet published).

– when he was surprised by a thunderstorm. One day later he was presented with a scroll and a talisman from the thunder-lord, with which he could heal diseases.¹⁰⁴⁰ Another man, Li Zhi (李玫), was able to see demons since he had suffered from a childhood disease. With this ability – legitimized also through his childhood experience – he predicted fortune and misfortune.¹⁰⁴¹

A dramatic employment situation was that of a eunuch. Eunuchs were ‘made’ at a very young age, when they were about seven years old. Gu Kuang (c. 725-c.814) composed a very moving poem in which he discusses the deep sorrow caused by the apparently flourishing business in Fujian of stealing children, castrating them and selling them off:

Sonny grows up in Fukien;
The officers of Fukien seize him,
Then they castrate him,
Hold him as fugitive and slave,
And receive gold that fills up the house.
They shave him and brand him,
Treat him like grass and plants.

“Unknown are the ways of Heaven,
So I fall into their venomous hands;
Unknown are the ways of gods,
And they receive their blessing.”
Daddy bids farewell to Sonny:
“How I regret giving you birth!
At the time of your birth,
People warned me never to rear you;
I didn’t heed that advice,
And now I come to this misery.”
This is Sonny’s farewell to daddy:
“My heart’s crushed, and I can only weep blood,
As I’m parted from heaven and earth.
Till I come to Yellow Springs,
I shan’t be able to stand in front of Daddy.”¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Taiping guangji* 394: 3151 (*Shen xian gan yu chuan*). See Davis 2001: 25, who discusses that narrative and analyses it within the scope of the cult of the thunder god. See also Meulenbeld 2007 (dissertation) on Du Guangting’s thunder god (60-64).

¹⁰⁴¹ *Taiping guangji* 313: 2476 (*Ji shen lu*).

¹⁰⁴² *Sunflower Splendor*: 151, translated by Irving Y. Lo. See more in chapter VI on Gu Kuang and his son, who died in early childhood.

The slave Peng Yan, whose bizarre biography we have discussed earlier, was more or less predestined to become a eunuch, since his testicles were attacked twice by a dog and his master probably considered this the best way to make use of him.¹⁰⁴³

Eunuchs themselves also adopted children, who subsequently worked in the palace as well. The young son of the famous eunuch Yu Chaoen (魚朝恩), for example, was used by the emperor Daizong to have the dangerous politician killed in 770. Su E, the compiler of the narrative, writes that Chaoen's adopted son, when he was just around fourteen or fifteen years of age received an assignment in the inner quarters.¹⁰⁴⁴

Although parents occasionally might have sold their sons for reasons of poverty, becoming a eunuch was probably traumatic to both, parents and son. Not only was the operation difficult to cope with, but leaving parents for good weighed hard on the young boys. For the parents to give away a son meant to give away a descendent who could care for them in old age or death. I assume that, under normal circumstances, eunuchs did not come from the elite class and that other parents resorted to selling their children only in extreme circumstances.

¹⁰⁴³ *Taiping guangji* 275: 2166 (*San shui xiao du*), see beginning of chapter III for a translation.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Subsequently the emperor took advantage of his youth and entangled him in an intrigue which brought Yu Chaoen to death. *Taiping guangji* 188: 1410 (*Du yang za bian*).

VII. Child Death

Many children survived childhood and became adults. These children no longer form the topic of this inquiry. Instead, in this chapter we will be dealing with children who did not survive to an adult age but died before they could have found families of their own.

Estimating an average birth rate for the medieval era in China is difficult and in fact impossible due to the lack of representational data, and so is estimating an average mortality rate for children impossible. Approaching immortality quantitatively therefore has to stay extremely vague, and I feel safe in following Ebrey's statement about immortality concerning children for the Song dynasty: "whatever the dangers pregnant women faced, their babies' lives were even more precarious. Infant mortality must have been high, considering that about half the daughters born to the Song emperors died in infancy. [...] Death seems to have had a way of attracting babies."¹⁰⁴⁵ However vague we have to be about numbers, we find many records that deal with child death and dead children. The lack of quantitative data therefore can be countered with qualitative data. Like birth, child death occurred so often that it was noticed only in extraordinary cases, and we will be mostly dealing with either exceptional or stereotypical events around child death.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ebrey 1993: 176. This remark reminds of Lawrence Stone's remark on child death in Victorian England about there being a "constant presence of death. Death was at the centre of life, as the cemetery was at the centre of the village," Stone 1990: 54. How did Victorian parents deal with this fact? Stone suggests that "there is growing reason to suspect that a proportion of the infant deaths of the poor were due to culpable neglect," *Ibid*: 55. Furthermore, "parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their infant children," *Ibid*: 56). He thus concludes that there was a "neglect of babies/infants due to their high mortality rate," *Ibid* : 65.

Although not every child's death was noted, it was given an expression of its own with the character 夭 (*yao*): 'to die young'.¹⁰⁴⁶ The usage of that character points out that child death was understood as different from adult death. I will discuss *yao* in connection with longevity (*shou* 壽) in the first part of the first chapter. In this part I will also examine the parallel activities carried out at both events, birth and at death, in order to show the special notion of child death and to analyse the idea of return to a stage similar to childhood by persons of any age after they have died.

One peculiarity of presentations of child death is that they often are situated together with accounts of communal conflict. In the second and third part of the first section I will therefore discuss the impact and significance a child's death had on a community. I will also analyse the role of the community at the funeral of a child and present my cases in the light of the interaction of people.

The second section then is concerned with the cultural possibilities that were given to cope with the death of one's own offspring. Basically we are dealing with two methods of emotional digestion concerning child death, namely the belief in afterlife and rebirth. These gross beliefs often overlapped and had many different degrees and levels. Although the narratives I present are often stereotypical descriptions of the emotional dealing and the motifs therefore have probably been utilised by large groups of people, I assume they were mostly meant to describe individual coping with child death by adults.

1. Child death and the community

Dead children could cause problems for the living.¹⁰⁴⁷ One problem for medieval Chinese people occurred when the dead child's small body was unceremoniously thrown away and left to decay, because any unknown dead body was a possible threat to individuals and communities. What is more, the thought of not having held a death ceremony on behalf of a dead child could weigh heavily on the parent's conscience and emotions.

Another problem arose from a ritual perspective related to the prevalent ancestor cult. The ancestor cult comprised the worship of dead ancestors. Yet, in relation to dead children who never became ancestors themselves, worship was guaranteed for a short time only. Children could usually be remembered

¹⁰⁴⁶ As well as *shang* 殤, which is not much used, see *Xin Tangshu* 13: 347, which explains that one uses 殤 when the deceased has no descendants.

¹⁰⁴⁷ These problems are not openly addressed in medieval sources, yet they are constantly suggested in narratives.

privately and emotionally by their parents, rather than in the context of a larger family and with rituals for deceased individuals or within the category 'ancestors'.¹⁰⁴⁸ Once the parents and other close care-givers were dead as well, a dead child would fall into oblivion.¹⁰⁴⁹ If a child was part of a family grave, it would be remembered individually if it had died recently. Dead children buried within a tomb would have been remembered collectively – a dead child then was a member of an anonymous group of dead children. Otherwise, in case of individual disposals where the body was just discarded somewhere, the remains turned into an unknown pile of bones and, again, it became a threat to the living, because the more unknown a dead child was, the creepier it became and the more dangerous to a community, similar to unknown dead adults.

In this section I will examine the connection between life and death as it was presented in numerous narratives. According to some texts children were believed to receive their *hun*-souls from those who have just passed away. In this belief, which cannot be associated with any well-defined religious group, the connection between those who live and those who die seems evident: a person can only fully live after another person died. I will also analyse what authors implied when they wrote that a child or a group of children died young.

After having established a general picture of child-death, I will analyse the role child-death could assume in a community conflict. In some cases the death of children was used symbolically to display moral deprivation of the head of a community. Finally, I will examine funeral practices in relation to children. I present some material that shows how funerals for children were carried out, which vary between the two extreme practices of throwing the dead body away and granting it a lavish funeral.

Life and death

Rituals for life and death contained similar elements. Therefore, by comparing these elements, we can analyse the belief behind those ritual handlings in which

¹⁰⁴⁸ The same accounts for unmarried (and childless) women and men.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Wu Hung 1995 suggests that the bond between parents and children grew very tight from the Han dynasty onward (see Chapter III). He observed furthermore the problem "that the parent/child tie was inevitably challenged and conditioned by death. When a child died young, his soul would enter eternal darkness. In trying to protect and nourish him, his parents would have to rely on religious means. Thus Xu Aqu's father and mother [Xu Aqu is the dead child whose case is discussed by Wu Hung] constructed an offering shrine for their son and entrusted him to the family ancestors. But when the parents were about to die, the problem would become far more serious and practical: who would take care of their orphaned child in this dangerous world?" Wu Hung: 82-3.

the condition of newly dead as well as newly born persons was addressed alike. For example, in the context of the celebration of the seventh moon, Teiser shows that this celebration “marks the passage of the dead from the liminal stage, where they are troublesome, threatening and feared as ghosts, to the stage of incorporation, in which they assume a place of honor within the family ghosts as species of transition. The dead person’s *hun* and *po* spirits are unstable, waiting to be assigned their next rebirth.”¹⁰⁵⁰ The quote reminds of a familiar notion in medieval medical texts where the authors discuss the physical situation of children, for these texts often point at the dangers caused by the instability of a child’s *hun*-soul, *shen*-spirit or *jing*-essences.¹⁰⁵¹ Instable souls thus mark the insecurity of a new mode of existence – no matter if the existence is in death or life.

Both *hun*- and *po*-souls, as some narratives suggest, apparently existed independent of the human body, and a limited number of assigned body-hosts seemed to exist, which means that certain *hun*-souls were destined for certain bodies. The absence of *hun*- and *po*-souls meant disease and their instability in young bodies was often the cause for complications in a child’s upbringing. *Hun*- and *po*-souls, in fact, were the substances that connected just deceased and newly born beings. These souls occasionally were the victims of confusion in the underworld administration and they were stuck in other bodies than their destined ones – it is through narratives about such events that we can gain an idea about the connective flow of souls between the dead and the live. A person could nevertheless manage to live without the *hun*-souls, although only in a weak and sickly condition, as we saw in the case of the girl whose soul was stuck in its former host, who did not die in due time.¹⁰⁵²

The fifth century Buddhist apocryphal text, the *Consecration Scripture* also shows the comparability between newly born and newly dead, for it states: “In the intermediate darkness the body of the person whose life-span has ended is like a small child.”¹⁰⁵³ The comparison is clear – the body of the just deceased person is equated with that of a small child. However, there is no further explanation why this comparison is made.

Lastly, the author of *Great Petitions for Sepulchral Complaints*,¹⁰⁵⁴ a text dated around the late Tang writes about “the construction of bathhouses for the bathing of the soul of the deceased ...”¹⁰⁵⁵ This is a further parallel to the

¹⁰⁵⁰ Teiser 1988: 220.

¹⁰⁵¹ See chapter IV for the dangers connected to that instability of these souls, spirits and essences.

¹⁰⁵² See *Taiping guangji* 358: 2837 (*Yi shi zhi*); translation in chapter V “Body substances”.

¹⁰⁵³ Teiser 1994: 24. For a discussion on the *Consecration Scripture* see Strickmann 1990: 75-118.

¹⁰⁵⁴ In Bokenkamp 1997: HY 615, 5:23b-34b.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Bokenkamp 1997: 255 (fn. 22).

treatment of new born babies, for whom the first bath on the third day after birth is understood to be a crucial part of its survival and socialisation.¹⁰⁵⁶

The newly born and newly dead were thus treated similarly after arriving in their respective new modes of existence. They were also connected through the fact that the life-giving substances were instable. Upon death, souls and essences gradually waned and were wandering over to other bodies. Instability meant danger: danger for the child's health and danger for the dead person's eternal rest. In both cases of instability – in the here and now and the beyond (*Diesseits* and *Jenseits*) – the security of the living community was also affected. For example, if a male descendant died,¹⁰⁵⁷ the family-ancestor-line was threatened to be interrupted; if the dead were restless or unhappy, the descendants would face problems, among which childlessness was one of the worst.

One further connection between the notions of life and death deserves attention, because it concerns children in particular. One explanation for early death (*yao* 夭) is fate, as the boys Zengzeng and Heqi posthumously told their parents in order to soothe them.¹⁰⁵⁸ This belief in fate was related to the idea that one could not do anything about one's lifespan – one person just lived long, the other died early: "All, death, short life, long life comes from nature."¹⁰⁵⁹ Early death, in this explanation, was not a sign or a punishment, it just happened randomly. Here we find the character 'die young' opposed to 'live long' (*shou* 壽). This rather laconic – or realistic – idea of death expressed in the *Old History of the Tang* is only seldomly applied when child death was described, because usually, within the settings of a family situation, the death of a child was experienced as a deeply emotional or stressful event.

Although the death of a child was often due to natural circumstances, some people thought that it could and should be prevented in many situations. With respect to infant mortality and death of very young children up to the age of six, for example, medieval doctors wrote vehemently against the *laissez-faire* treatment and neglect of childhood diseases and the development of the child's body. Sun Simiao wrote clearly that he compiled his *Prescriptions* in particular because he wanted to prevent children from dying a premature death.¹⁰⁶⁰ He saw a chance for prevention of child death by spreading knowledge about the child's

¹⁰⁵⁶ Bokenkamp 1997 sees a connection between the appearance of this idea of bathhouses in after-life and the shuilu ritual for universal salvation.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Male children are the average children doctors are concerned with.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Zengzeng: *Taiping guangji* 149: 1075 (*Qian ding lu*), see Prologue of this thesis; Heqi: *Taiping guangji* 128: 905-6 (*Ji yi ji*), see section below.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Jiu Tangshu* 79: 2715.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 8: 1b.

body, growth and physical development. He and the other medical authors aimed at decreasing cases of premature death by recognizing special childhood disease, explaining how to observe children, giving advice for prevention of certain diseases, and suggesting a certain attitude from especially mothers and wet nurses towards the infant children. The reasons for premature death, according to these doctors, were mostly ignorance about the premature, infantile body, about its development and its proper treatment, and not only fate.

Longevity and premature death, as the greatest hope and fear, are both mentioned in medical texts, as well. Authors gave advice for how to recognize signs of premature death upon which care-givers should immediately give up hope for longevity of their children. They furthermore list those signs that point at possible longevity.

Communal conflicts

When authors emphasised that children died in excess it often was used as an indicator for disorder within a community. In reports with such an emphasis the character for 'die young' (*yao* 夭) was used, and it was part of a general listing of problems. For example, among all the social problems that happened at the very end of the Tang dynasty, we find that in the tenth month of the second year of the Tianyou reign period of emperor Ai (907), early death was one negative result of the 'rebellion of the ladies of the bedchamber.'¹⁰⁶¹ Accordingly, for harmonious times we do not find child death in great numbers.¹⁰⁶²

Community disorder on a smaller scale, such as a conflict in a village, could likewise be made explicit by the death of a child. In the cases that I will discuss below, child death fell together with a community conflict or rather was at its pivot. The first case concerns the unsolved murder of a child which took place in the fields of the village Gaoan (高安):

Among the people of the village Gaoan was a little boy. He was working in the fields, when he was murdered by someone. The murderer could not be caught.

One year later, on the day of his death, his family was preparing the [memorial ceremony] for him. On that day, a boy in the village saw this little boy, who said to him: 'I am the dead boy of that family. Today my family is preparing the [one-year-death-ceremony]. Shall we both go together and feast?' The village

¹⁰⁶¹ *Jiu Tangshu* 20b: 800.

¹⁰⁶² Kinney shows that keeping up the cosmic harmony and preventing early child death (she focuses on infanticide in that case) is supposed to go hand in hand and falls into the job description of a governor, Kinney 2004: 102ff.

boy then followed him. When they arrived at the house they both sat down on the spirit-bed (*lingchuang* 靈床) and they were eating quite unceremoniously. The family could not see them. After a while [the little dead boy's] maternal uncle arrived. He turned to the spirit-bed and cried. The [dead] boy then pointed at him and said: 'that's the person who killed me. I can't stand the look of him!', then he left.

The little [living] boy wanted to leave, too. But then the family saw the little boy on the spirit-bed. Everybody was quite surprised, and asked for his reason [to be there]. The boy told them everything, and he also told that the maternal uncle killed [their boy]. Thereupon they took the uncle to the official. Subsequently he received his punishment.¹⁰⁶³

The narrative contains rich information. We learn that the death of a little boy was remembered with an elaborate effort, similar to the celebration of the one year death-day of an adult person. The parents set up a special construction, a spirit-bed (*lingchuang*), and apparently the members of the family or community were invited to pay their respects to the dead boy one year after his death.¹⁰⁶⁴ Until that day the murderer of the boy had not been found. However, with the help of a receptive medium – a boy of probably similar age as the deceased one, because he is described as a young boy, who is willing to head off with the murdered boy – the murderer was pointed out. This narrative might hint at a conflict within a community, and its solution was set up around the death of a little boy. It further shows how parents handled their son's death practically and how a community was involved, at least in the memorial ceremony. The soul of the child was believed not to have left the scene of the crime yet, but on the day of the death-memorial, after the crime had been solved, it probably went over to the realm of death and would not return to the living.

While the narrative about the boy in Gaoan apparently deals with an intentional child homicide, the following narrative deals with burglars who accidentally killed a child while also looting a house. The solution of the case again happened with the intervention of the dead child itself:

Among the farmers to the north of the river Jing was somebody called Wang Anguo (王安國). He was a farmer and was self-sustaining. In the winter of the third year of the Baoli reign period of the Tang (around 827) two robbers sneaked into [his property] through the wall at night. They held sharp swords. Anguo did not dare to withstand and hid himself inside his clothes and [therewith tried to] help [to delude the robbers in believing] that nobody was left [in the house]. At

¹⁰⁶³ *Taiping guangji* 124: 878 (*Ji shen lu*).

¹⁰⁶⁴ The parents were probably ordinary people, which shows that not only the elite would make much effort for their dead offspring.

that moment, Anguo's only son, called Heqi (何七), who was just about six or seven years old, woke up startled and then called out that there were thieves. He was immediately shot by the thieves and died. Outside of the dwelling Anguo kept two dark donkeys which were also taken away.

At dawn, the villagers assembled. Together they consulted on which road they should pursue [the thieves]. Suddenly Heqi's *hun*-soul arose at the door of [his father's] house and exclaimed: "That I died is fate. [However] there is still much pain. What hurts, is that I have to depart from my father and mother forever." Subsequently he cried for a long time about this injustice. All of the fifty, sixty people from the neighbourhood wiped away their tears because of that. Then [Heqi's *hun*-soul] said: "Don't plan a persecution [of the thieves now]. Next year, in the fifth month they will be sent to death." Then he summoned Anguo and whispered the names [of the thieves] into his ear. [The villagers then] lived on as usual and did nothing.

During the wheat-harvest [in the fourth lunar month of the following year], when Anguo had harvested half a *jing* and was just about to tidy up, two oxen arrived [at his plot] in the morning. They trampled all over [the place] and scattered [everything] around. Anguo [caught them and] dragged them along with him, back [to the village]. He told everyone in the village: "Whose oxen destroyed my crop? I have already bound them. The owner of the oxen should repay by buying them back. If that is not done, I will notify the officials about this." The villagers turned towards him and said: "These oxen are from nobody among us." They crowded around them and stared at them for quite a while. Suddenly two outsiders came and said: "Hé! These are our oxen! Last night they suddenly ran away. Wouldn't have thought that they'd end up here. Please, return them and we will reward the one who has locked them up with twice their value."

The villagers investigated where [the two men] came from. Then they consulted the contract of sale. Among its entries was this that [the oxen] were an exchange for dark donkeys. Anguo then remembered what Heqi has said. When he inquired the names [of the outsiders], they were the same [that Heqi had whispered into his ear the year before]. Subsequently, he bound them and said: "You must be those men who shot my son last winter and stole my wealth!" The two robbers looked at each other. They could not hide anymore, and said: "There is no escape from death! ..." (to be continued below)

It was the boy's *hun*-soul which appeared in front of fifty or sixty witnesses of the community in which the child grew up.¹⁰⁶⁵ The *hun*-soul personally consoled his parents – who might have felt guilty because they did not sufficiently protect

¹⁰⁶⁵ From a medical point of view a person has seven *hun*-souls and three *po*-souls. Narratives, however, usually talk of one *hun*-soul only, or of an unspecified number of *hun*-souls.

their child and who therefore fell victim to homicide.¹⁰⁶⁶ The child's soul moreover foretold that the crime would be solved in the following year, and therewith prevented a probably costly manhunt by the villagers. The soul even revealed the names of the thieves – but only as a whisper into the father's ears, who kept the names to himself until the unexplainable event the following year when the criminals would finally be convicted.

With the words of the dead boy's *hun*-soul a year later, the mysterious information in a contract book of sale and the 'knowledge' about their names, the thieves felt overwhelmed, and they told which events had led them back to the site of their earlier crime:

"After we went on our raid at that time [last year] we turned north to hunt around the frontiers of Ningqing. We told ourselves that the event already happened quite a while ago and thus bought the oxen and returned on a path over the mountains. Last night, twenty *li* to the north of this village the oxen refused to walk any further. They were pacing around and did not walk on. They were waiting until the dark of the night and just then they would walk over here. We were sleeping soundly by then.

"We dreamt of a little boy of around five years who was naked, dancing wildly, and we went astray in confusion. Just after the night was over we woke up [and saw that the oxen were gone]. We realised that the ropes of the oxen were not cut off [like it would be when they] were stolen. So we traced them and came directly to this place – the site of last year's crime. Who could dare to run away from this!?" The villagers escorted them to the district city and both [criminals] were put to trial.¹⁰⁶⁷

The villagers found the thieves and murderers of Heqi nearly a year after the crime. The events around Heqi's death led to the clarification of the murder and robbery case, and similar to the aftermath of homicide case of the boy of Gaoan, the criminals were convicted with the help of the boy's soul. The criminals in both cases were intimidated by the events in such a way that they apparently could not defend themselves against the dead children.

The little boy the murderers of Heqi saw in their dreams might have been Heqi himself. However, like in the case above, the involvement of a child in the solution of a crime reminds of the practice of using child-mediums which occurs

¹⁰⁶⁶ The mother actually appears only in the narrative, when Heqi says farewell to 'father and mother'.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Taiping guangji* 128: 905-6 (*Ji yi ji*).

more often in sources from the Song.¹⁰⁶⁸ The two narratives about the murder of the boy in Gaoan and Heqi show that the death of a child could have a considerably big impact on a whole community. The murder of a child was not something that would have been taken lightly, at least not in all cases.¹⁰⁶⁹

Funerals

One reason for the existence of unknown dead children was that children did not always receive a proper coffin to keep their remains. Instead, children were sometimes discarded in places between civilized human territory and wilderness. Such unceremonious disposal probably was carried out in secret, but it was well known and disapproved by some people, as we will see below. Another reason for child ghosts was that dead children tended to be forgotten sooner than dead adults. The following narrative deals with the ghost of such a forgotten and maybe unburied child in the year 802:

Zhou Jichuan (周濟川) was a person from Runan, and [his family] had a country house in the West of Yangzhou. He and his brothers loved studying. One night, after teaching was finished around three *geng* (11-1 am), they all went to bed and were about to fall asleep, when they suddenly heard a squawking noise outside the window. It went on for a long while and did not cease. Jichuan peeped through the window at [the source of the noise], and saw that [the noise came from] a skeleton-boy, who was running criss-cross around in the garden. First, he had his fingers interlaced and then he placed them on his arms. The squawking was the noise [that occurred] when the bones rubbed against each other. Jichuan called his brother, and together they took careful glances at it.

After a little while, [Jichuan's] little brother Ouchuan expelled his breath at [the skeleton-boy]. At the first noise, the little boy jumped up the stairs. At the second noise, he entered the door. At the third noise he wanted to climb up the bed. Ouchuan, who was originally expelling his breath [at the boy], scolded and became anxious. The little [skeleton-] boy said: 'Nursie has to feed baby!' When Ouchuan hit him with his palm, his palm fell to the ground [like a wet fish], and [the skeleton boy] raised to the bed as swift as a *Yuanyue*-ape.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See below and Davis 2001. Although prescription for how to make use of a child medium were already part in Tang medical texts, such as the *Qianjin yaofang* 30, section 22, we do not have as much cases of children who are used as a medium in jurisdiction

¹⁰⁶⁹ In chapter II I have displayed another case, in which a little boy was killed in a road accident. His parents were paid with the oxen, but the death of the child did not draw more legal attention than this – however, this case again was the pivot of a community conflict, targeting an unpopular nun.

The household members heard this but could not make any sense of it. Therefore they took knives and sticks and came. The little [skeleton] boy said again: 'Nursie has to feed baby!' and the people from the household beat him with the sticks. The little boy's joints scattered around and came together again four times. Again he said: 'Nursie has to feed baby!' The people from the household put him into a linen sack and took him outside. While they were walking he was still searching for milk. They brought him four or five *li* away from the outer walls, where they dropped him into a rotten well.

The following night he came again, holding the linen sack in his hands. He threw it away and jumped to get it back himself [in play]. The people of the household crowded around to seize [the boy]. Again they put him into a linen sack, and they wrapped him like before. [This time] they tied the sack up with a rope and to a big stone, and they drowned him in a river. When they wanted to turn their back on him and run out [of the river], he said from within the sack: 'Hé, again the same guys as last night!'

After some days he came back again, gripping the sack in his left hand, and in his right hand he had the rope. He was running and throwing [the things] around in play as before. The people of the household had already prepared a big piece of wood beforehand, which they had hollowed out like a drum, and they squeezed the little boy into it. They took big iron plates and nailed it shut. Then they put an iron chain on it, tied it to a big stone and let it flow in a big river.¹⁰⁷⁰ When they turned their backs on him and wanted to run away, [the little boy in the wood construction] said: 'Thanks for putting me into a coffin and sending me off.' Since then, he did not return. At that time it was the seventeenth year of the Zhenyuan reign period (802).¹⁰⁷¹

The little boy died at an age when he was still suckled. Quite uncommon for ghost-children of that age he spoke, and he wanted to convey a message in his child-like way. Persistently he returned to the country house of the Zhou family and forced the people of the household to dig up and use their knowledge on how to expel ghosts: by breathing at him, beating him with sticks and drowning him. Yet, only when they had put him into a wooden construction, the child finally calmed down and did not return to haunt the house any more. In the end we learn that the dead boy only required a proper coffin.

The boy's original place of disposal has not been revealed to us, he just appeared as a talking skeleton. Apparently a general hiding place for dead children was a hole in a tree.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Throwing the corpse of a dead child into the river was, next to putting it into trees, probably a common practice. See below, and Yü Chün-fang 2001: 124.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Taiping guangji* 343: 2715-6 (*Xiangyi ji*).

In the middle of Yuanhe (between 806 and 821), outside of the big gates of the street of Zongxian ward [in Chang'an] was a locust-tree. When Chen Bu (陳朴) once during dusk was hanging around and peeping outside, he saw some sort of bird, like a crossing of an old woman and a fox, flying into the tree. Subsequently he fell [the tree]. It had three forkings, which were hollow. In one of these was a hole, from which one hundred twenty-one chestnuts [scattered around]. A dead child, which was several *chi* long and put in a carrying cloth, was embedded inside of it.¹⁰⁷²

Although the dead body of the child was buried in wood – a requirement by the skeleton-boy from the previous narrative to leave for good – the tree probably could not be considered as a proper burial site, partly because it was part of the wilderness and perhaps because the wood was not processed by men.

We can assume that this kind of disposal of the dead body, throwing away or hiding it, was a common practice. Consequently, we find this custom mentioned as one of the more severe violations in the *Great Petition*: “hidden corpses or old remains of those who died before reaching adulthood causes punishment and calamity and brings disquiet, causing illness among the descendants [...]”.¹⁰⁷³ In fact, it appears that one of the most important features to take into consideration was that the dead body was stored away in such a manner that its remains would not be set free easily.¹⁰⁷⁴

¹⁰⁷² *Taiping guangji* 407: 3292 (*Youyang zazu*).

¹⁰⁷³ Bokenkamp 1997: 268. In the discussion of this text, Bokenkamp remarks that “child burials presumably could pose a greater risk in this regard since they were normally less formal and thus might be unmarked,” Bokenkamp 1997: 273 (fn.11). However, I could not find any clearly evidence for this in my sources, but I agree with this assumption because of the several narratives that hint at this. Concerning the throwing away of corpses, mostly in late imperial China, de Groot states that “many corpses were thrown away in China in every age, especially in times of great mortality,” de Groot vol III, book 1: 1386. However, he also emphasizes that throwing away the dead has never “been practised anywhere in China as an established system,” *ibid*: 1387. Yet, “a really systematic throwing away only prevails in regard of corpses of infants. Countless are the babes that, closed in urns or wooden boxes are abandoned in the open country and so given a prey to ravens, dogs and swine, or to quick dissolution under the operation of weather and vermin,” *ibid*: 1387. A reason for throwing away children’s corpses, de Groot says, lies in the *fengshui* system applied for burials, “inasmuch as the bones of infants are not sufficiently solid to serve the living as durable fetiches able to yield profit and felicity by the meditation of the graves in which they lie,” *ibid*: 1387.

¹⁰⁷⁴ De Groot points out a custom he has observed in North China during the nineteenth century where the bodies of dead children can be disposed in constructions called ‘baby towers.’ The corpses decay in an especially confined space, and they cannot be eaten by animals. He considers geographical reasons for the difference in treating dead children in North and South China: “Throwing away the corpses of infants probably prevails in the northern parts of the Empire on a

In some cases, unceremonious disposal of a child's body appeared to be a requirement. For example in cases in which a child was born severely handicapped, its parents might have killed it right away, as we can see in the case of Zhang Han's offspring:

At the beginning of the Tianbao period (742), the wife of a relative of the military assistant Zhang Han (張翰) gave birth to a child. When she had just received the child she had given birth to, [she saw] that it was a child without a head. It was trampled [to death] at the side of the house.¹⁰⁷⁵ When they wanted to seize [the trampled body] they could not see it. And when they took their hands off it, it was there again, to the left and to the right. According to the *Baizetu*, it is named *chang* (常). Relying on the *Baizetu*, they called out the name three times and suddenly it vanished.¹⁰⁷⁶

The narrative does not reveal what happened to the remains of the body, after the adults managed to get hold of it. The infant, however, instantly turned into a demonic being that needed to be exorcised.¹⁰⁷⁷ Because such demonic infants had been assimilated into a probably well-known work with which help one could identify and therefore get rid off demons, the *Baizetu* (白澤圖),¹⁰⁷⁸ their existence must have been widely accepted.

The above mentioned cases all dealt with children who probably were below the age of three years. Because it is hard to find any discussions beyond narratives for funerals of children that young, we have to resort to the work of the nineteenth century Dutch sinologist and anthropologist, J.J.M. de Groot (1854-1921), who made some observations about the disposal of dead children, and the kind of coffins or receptacles used to coffin them. He combined information from literary sources from different periods of Chinese history with

more extensive scale than in the southern, where the mountainous condition of the soil almost everywhere affords waste ground in abundance to bury them in," de Groot vol III, book 1: 1388.

¹⁰⁷⁵ The text does not say who trampled on the infant, if it were women, men, family-members or servants.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Taiping guangji* 361: 2869 (*Ji wen*).

¹⁰⁷⁷ For early imperial China, Kinney 2004 finds two prevalent theories about the spirit of dead children: "...according to one theory, a spirit's ability to seek revenge on the living was determined by the person's age and social prestige at the time of death. ... Other theorists believed that the spirits of deceased infants could trouble the living but that such spirits were fairly easy to dispel," Kinney 2004: 106.

¹⁰⁷⁸ For brief information on the *Bai ze tu*, see Harper 1985: 491ff and Seidel 1983. Perhaps the belief in such child-demons knew local differences, and one could examine this and other narratives on *chang* (also the *chang* of child tiger-spirits) in relation to the *Baizetu* as well as the *Guangyiji*, which focuses on the tiger-spirit *chang*.

his own observations in South China, and pointed out that apparently there were no fixed rules for funerals of children.

Receptacles resembling those which are in vogue for up-grown people are only provided for children above the age of eleven or twelve. [...] Babies and very young children are usually confined in boxes made of six flat boards of thin wood. Such [...] small coffins or [...] boxes are of such weak construction that they must inevitably be crushed to pieces in the ground under the weight of the earth. [...] Children dying under two years of age are in a great many instances placed inside large mouthed earthenware jars, and thereupon buried in the ground or deposited somewhere in the mountains or in the open fields. This convenient mode of ridding one's self of such corpses is especially practised by the poorest classes, jars being much cheaper than wooden boxes. There are, however, no fixed rules of conduct for the people on this head. Their behaviour in each particular case depends upon the sex of the child, the affection of the parents and, most of all, upon their pecuniary circumstances.¹⁰⁷⁹

What de Groot concluded for the nineteenth century probably holds true for medieval China as well, for we find no ritual manuals or passages in prescriptive texts that deal with funeral practices concerning a dead child.¹⁰⁸⁰

Regarding methods and material of a child's funerals, de Groot understood it as a convenient method of especially the poorest classes to rid themselves of the corpses in a cheap way namely by using jars instead of boxes. He further observed that there were different treatments for children below the age of two and above eleven.¹⁰⁸¹ This observation deserves some more investigation, because it would mean that dead children were treated differently according to their age groups – a convention which is noticeable in medieval sources as well.

We have seen in chapter III that children younger than two years of age were subjected to important developmental processes which were understood to be necessary to make a 'completed person' (成人) out of the unfinished infant. This medical understanding of childhood development, or an unwritten corresponding understanding of the age category zero- until two-years-of-age, might be a reason why de Groot was able to observe special treatment of dead infants in modern rural China. Because when a child who was younger than two

¹⁰⁷⁹ De Groot 1968 (1892): 329-30.

¹⁰⁸⁰ De Groot's statement derives from a combination of different sources, ancient texts, narratives from throughout several dynasties as well as his own observations in nineteenth century China. It is nonetheless valuable here, because children's burials have not found any other attention among scholars.

¹⁰⁸¹ See chapter I for the division of the ages and their specific treatments.

years died, it was not yet considered a real person according to the medical theory Changing and Steaming, therefore its treatment as a dead being must have been different.

Burying infants in earthen jars, as we saw in de Groot's description, I assume, resembles the treatment of the placenta after birth. The placenta was understood as an almost living being that existed to connect two living beings, and which was frequented by the three worms, signs of individual life and death. According to medieval medical texts, this connecting organ ought to be buried on a certain day and a certain place, according to the child's exact birth-dates in order to bring good fortune to the child's future. When the child died before being completed, it apparently could be treated as nothing more nor less than the placenta. Because it was not considered a real person yet, there was no need to put it into a coffin like a real person.¹⁰⁸²

Narratives do not feature the alchemist/medical theories of early child development from the first two years. Still, the death of infants has been processed into a persistent theme: a female fairy or were-animal, such as a bird or tiger, is tricked into partnership, or somehow mates with a human man, and lives together with him. When her child is around two years of age, she finds out that she has been hoodwinked, leaves her husband and takes the child with her or returns later in order to fetch it.

A well known story that belongs to that theme is the one of the woman from the painting. In this story the *jinshi*-scholar Zhao Yan (赵颜) obtained a screen with an extraordinary beautiful painting of a woman on it. With the help of a particular ritual the woman came alive. They lived together and had a child. When the child was about two years old, a friend expelled the woman, accusing her of being an evil spirit. She then took her child and stepped back into the painting. The child was henceforth a new detail of the painting, but it was gone, which means dead, for its father.¹⁰⁸³

One explanation for this motif could be that the children at that age did not yet fully belong to the realm of the living. Only once they were 'completed' after two years of age, they were considered wholly human. The woman who 'left' her husband was usually not a legitimate wife and often appeared to have been kidnapped or she became affiliated with her 'husband' in an illegitimate way.¹⁰⁸⁴ Her departure might bear the meaning of dying. Her return later on to fetch her offspring therefore probably expresses the death of the infant.

¹⁰⁸² See chapter II (Acts around birth', *Waitai miyao* 35: 978.

¹⁰⁸³ *Taiping guangji* 286: 2283 (*Wen qi lu*).

¹⁰⁸⁴ See also the narrative of the Swan Maiden, *Soushenji* 14: 175 (no. 354); *Taiping guangji* 463: 3806 ("Yuzhang nanzi"). Translated by de Woskin 1996: 167. This translation here is mine.

The reason for the existence of such a child-snatchers image might lie in beliefs around maternal death during child birth or during the first critical two years of a child's life. A child whose mother died before it became independent from being fed and taking care of its own basic physical needs, had little chance of survival, especially if the household could not afford a wet nurse. The child's death was then explained by the mother returning to fetch the child.¹⁰⁸⁵

Another frequent picture of infants in medieval narratives is that of the child as an unsubstantial (*wesenlos*) and faceless anonymous bundle in the arms of a woman, as part of, or coming from the underworld. Thus, concerning children less than two years old we do not find open discussion of their death nor do we find information concerning the disposal of their remains. We find no jars nor other material in which children were buried, but we find a strong and prevalent picture in anecdotes. These might have been inspired by local narratives and mythologies and used to explain child and maternal death to soothe the emotional pain of the remaining family.¹⁰⁸⁶

Above, I have quoted De Groot who emphasises that the "behaviour [of the adults facing the death of their offspring] in each particular case depends upon the sex of the child, the affection of the parents and, most of all, upon their pecuniary circumstances." The skeleton child who jumped around and asked for milk might have been around two or three years old. Its bones were probably lying in the open and it required a coffin. We do not know how it died or how it was buried nor if it was grieved for, and we have no information about its family's economic situation. Some more information, fortunately, has been given in the case of the death of another child: Prince Su Wang Xiang, the beloved fifth son of emperor Dezong (r. 779-805), who died at the age of four. His funeral caused quite some commotion in the palace:

Su Wang Xiang (肅王詳) was Dezong's fifth son. He received his title (封) in the sixth month of the fourteenth year of the Dali reign period (779) and passed away in the tenth month of the third year of Jianzhong (783). At that time he was four years old. The court [activities] were stopped for three days, and [Su Wang Xiang] was bestowed with the title Commander-in-chief of Yangzhou (揚州).¹⁰⁸⁷ [Su Wang Xiang] was very smart and the emperor loved him a lot and ceaselessly thought about him. [The emperor] did not order to set up a grave mount (墳墓),

¹⁰⁸⁵ For more about child snatchers see chapter IV 'Supernatural and natural dangers'. Since an infant during life could not talk or communicate otherwise, it also cannot talk in death. If justice is asked for a violent death (murder of the child and the mother for example) it is the mother, holding the infant in her arms, who does that.

¹⁰⁸⁶ See for example *Taiping guangji* 158: 1138 (*Yutang xianhua*).

¹⁰⁸⁷ 大都督: Hucker 6096.

but gave orders to [make something] similar to the [funeral-] methods of Xizang, and he considered building a pagoda (塔).

Li Yan (李岩), the Administrative Assistant of the Commissioner for Ceremonial Propriety,¹⁰⁸⁸ Director of the Transit Authorization Bureau,¹⁰⁸⁹ said to the emperor: “Concerning the right conduct of a *fan*-grave mount, its tradition is very long. From old times until now I have not heard from deviating from the regulations. Raising a pagoda was first done in India (天竺) and is called ‘Buddhist’ (Futu 浮圖). Moving [that custom over] to China (中華), I am afraid, would be improper. Moreover, Su Wang belongs to Heaven, his name and position are honoured and the funeral ceremonies are done as [written] in the documents. I humbly ask to prepare to order the creation of a grave mount, and [then] everybody [else] follows the rites [as well].” The imperial mandate [accordingly] followed [this advice].¹⁰⁹⁰

This episode that occurred during emperor Dezong’s reign displays a conflict in funeral propriety: traditional Chinese grave mounts versus Indian pagoda, whereby the Indian pagoda loses out as a foreign building for the dead. The funeral preparations for the four-year-old boy thus led to a serious discussion on the proper behaviour for a funeral – and led to criticism of the emperor’s decision.

Even though Su Wang was so young, his death received much attention. The account points out that it might have been normal – at least for imperial children – to get a grave mount, and that the son’s name and position would be remembered. Nevertheless, it also shows that there was room for the emperor to express his wish to experiment with funeral methods. This was probably due to the fact that a child’s funeral did not have a fixed form in writing.¹⁰⁹¹ Here, again,

¹⁰⁸⁸禮儀使判官 Hucker 3614 and 4425.

¹⁰⁸⁹司門郎中 Hucker 3565 and 5718.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Jiu Tangshu* 150: 4044. See also an abbreviated version of this in *Xin Tangshu* 82: 3625.

¹⁰⁹¹ Discussions on the right funeral, usually concerning adults, have been reported in numerous documents throughout the whole of Chinese history. Kuhn observes that for the succeeding Song dynasty, “those persons belonging to the class of scholar-officials --- evidently adhered to traditional principles of burials [or those that they thought to be traditional, since it is evident that, because of all these numerous discussion about the ‘right’ funeral before and after that time, no one tradition has existed] which mirrored their notion of Confucian simplicity. Such an understanding was based on a theoretical tradition from Zhou times which was shared by the protagonists of philosophical schools with otherwise irreconcilable objectives. Simple burials had already been championed for various reasons by Guan Zhong (d. 645 B.C.), Kongzi (551-479 B.C.), Mengzi (372-289 B.C., and Zhuangzi,” Kuhn 1996: 5. Kuhn provides an example from the burial of Yang Wangsun who lived around 144-88 B.C. and who had asked his sons to bury him naked “so that the body lies in direct contact with the earth. The sons were far from being enamoured of this declaration of their father’s. They attempted to change his mind, with the help of his old friend Qi Hou, who quoted the classical Confucian text of filial piety, to the effect that an inner

the death of a child is taken as a pivotal event within a debate of propriety, used by the emperor to express fancy ideas, and by his bureaucrat to admonish the emperor and put him in his place.

To summarise, we find no detailed discussions and theories in medieval literature about funeral practices and the material part of funerals concerning children. Yet narratives display certain frequently recurring motives that might have derived from the actual events of the death of children. From these narratives we know that killing a severely handicapped child right after birth created fear that the child might become a demonic being. When children died before the age of two they possibly died together with their mothers, which gave rise to the existence of motifs such as child-snatchers and divine beings that take their children with them to their worlds after having spend a while among humans.

When remains of dead children were found, people might have given them a belated basic funeral, which means that they at least fabricated a wooden construction to simulate a coffin. It was deemed that young children in general did not require more than that. Still, depending on their parentage, to have a grave monument build for a child was also not out of the question.¹⁰⁹²

2. Individual coping with with child-death

Next to the communal involvement in a child's death, we also find information which represents ways of individual coping with child-death on behalf of the parents. In this section I will hence introduce examples of how parents dealt with the passing away of their offspring. I found two prevalent themes in my sources which appear to express emotional pressure of adults facing their child's death. One theme consists of the existence that a child leads after death in the realm of the dead. Another theme is the belief in rebirth. Although the significance of the community is evident, too, in both ideas the emotions of the parents are central. Yet emotions were not only articulated with the help of these two topics, occasionally they were also more openly expressed. While forms of public grief, such as building a monument for a dead child, composing a tomb inscription or

and outer coffin, garments and winding sheets must be prepared for the deceased. All their efforts were in vain: parental authority prevailed," Kuhn 1996: 6-7. Parental – and imperial – authority, however, did not prevail in the case of emperor Dezong's request to bury his little son in a way he wished to.

¹⁰⁹² In the following sections we will come across other funeral methods such as burying children in family tombs or methods applied during social unrest. I will use those following narratives in order to point out other features I have not mentioned them so far.

writing a poem obeyed the respective conventions of each practice, the fact that they have been carried out for the occasion of a child's death alone was a strong sign for direct emotional expression.

Afterlife

Discussing the celebration of the ghost festival, Teiser points out that "the family is composed of members both living and dead."¹⁰⁹³ He further explains that "death does not sever the link between family members, it simply changes the way in which older and younger generations fulfil their obligations to one another."¹⁰⁹⁴ This idea suggests that medieval family structures were similar in life and afterlife. An event during the funeral of Mr Wang's mother highlights this cohabitation of the living and dead.

The mother of Mr Wang from Junyi, a serviceman, died. During the funeral her son-in-law got drunk and fell asleep inside the tomb without his family realising it. The tomb was closed and he could not be found anywhere. After a few days, the son-in-law's family accused the Wangs of having killed their son. Then they finally opened the grave and found the man alive. The son-in-law needed several days to recover and then he told about his experience in the grave. He had seen all the dead Wangs, old and young ones, coming together. "When the ghost-crowd saw me they were very surprised. A ghost among them said: 'Why don't we kill him?' and my mother-in-law said: 'The little girls and very young children are all around and can see it, how could you kill him!'" The ghost-crowd then integrated Wang into their festivities and he drank and ate together with them.¹⁰⁹⁵

The dead children were protected by the dead adults, like one would expect from the relationship of living children and adults. In this case, emphasis is put on the fact that children should not be exposed to the sight of an execution or violent death of a person.

Dead children, as members of families, were not only protected, but they were also taught how to behave in the new situation and environment of death, similar to living children, who are rebuked and told how to behave. We have a fine example from the ninth century:

¹⁰⁹³ Teiser 1988: 13-14.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 199.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Taiping guangji* 335: 2658 (*Guang yi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 197 (no. 119).

Li Zuowen (李佐文) stayed in a house overnight which was occupied by an older man. He heard a child crying again and again to which the older man always responded with: “you can stop that! This is the way it is [and we can’t do anything about it]. What’s with all this crying and sadness!?” At one point, Zuowen intervened and said: “the child is very young and is freezing, why don’t you bring it to the fire?” This happened four times before the old man took the child and brought it near to the fire. The child turned out to be an eight- or nine-year-old village girl. At first, she was neither ashamed nor afraid. Yet, she was drawing lines with something into the ash, like harbouring deep remorse. And suddenly she would gulp with resentment and cry out unexpectedly. The old man then explained to her [the situation] with the words [he used] before. Although Zuowen inquired about all this, in the end he did not get any explanations of this situation. One day later, Zuowen learned from a woman whom he met on the road that these two were her deceased husband together with her daughter who had just turned seven years old. Both died suddenly because of a disease several days one after another. After Zuowen and the widow went to the tomb again, she cut her hair and went into a Buddhist monastery.¹⁰⁹⁶

Aside from pointing out the continuity of child-life, which meant receiving protection and admonishment, the last two narratives also display another custom of burying children, in addition to the ways of burial I have discussed in the previous part. The premature dead offspring of the Wangs and the child Zuowen encountered were buried alongside adult members of their family. This does not tell us how the funerals of the children were conducted, but we do learn that at least some children were part of family graves and that they were not completely forgotten and stayed an integral part of the family. Children were talked about – in the case of the Wang family tomb they are depicted as an anonymous group – and were mentioned in narratives of family tombs. Like many adults, children would also lead an after-life, which, in many ways, did not differ greatly from their pre-death life.

The dead existed without their *hun* and were confined to certain places that belonged to the dead. As long as the living members of their families did not meet with catastrophes they assumed that they fulfil their ritual duties correctly. If a family met with disaster, the reason could be found, among others, in the

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Taiping guangji* 347: 2751-2 (*Jiyi ji*). This narrative is furthermore interesting, because it contains a discussion about education. Before Zuowen learns that he is dealing with dead people, he asks his conversational partner for some understanding of the child as his side. Zuowen’s behaviour suggests that he thinks that the man is mistreating or at least neglecting the crying girl. Perhaps it is also a sign of good manners not to have children around without the guest’s permission.

incorrect treatment or wrong burial place of the family. Thus Teiser writes, “once they have died, people are found in or near their graves, visiting ancestral halls and family banquets, and lodged in specific sites like Hao-li or the Yellow springs. Accompanying these topoi was a philosophy of personhood which [...] viewed human life as a temporary embodiment of a multiplicity of forces, some *yin* and some *yang*.”¹⁰⁹⁷ If human life in this world view was ‘a temporary embodiment of a multiplicity of forces, some *yin* and some *yang*’ this would mean that there could not have been any difference between children and adults in that respect.

The clearest difference between descriptions of dead adults and dead children was that while dead adults appeared to pronounce individual desires and needs, dead children were described only vaguely. The sources in general present three age categories in which children leading an after-life and interacting with the living display similar behaviour.

The first age-category consists of children who were newly born until the age of two years. These infants did not appear alone, but mostly together with a female care-giver; occasionally they resembled demonic beings. Similar to depictions of living infants, they often were mere wailing bundles in the arms of women. The women holding the child likewise were dead. The demonic female child snatcher in bird- or tiger-shape, who is believed to come forth from women who died during child-birth, is an indispensable part of images of child death in that age category as well.¹⁰⁹⁸

The second category consists of children from three to around ten or eleven years old. Most of the children described are around the age of five to seven years old. While alive, these children were “only” loved and did not have many, if any, duties yet. Therefore the ghosts of children who died while within that age category were often described as playing. This can be seen in the narrative about Yuan Can’s little son, who was killed by his father’s follower and the follower’s mother. As a ghost he appeared playing and riding on a dog.¹⁰⁹⁹ To give another example, Liu Quan (劉 雋), a Gentleman Cavalier Attendant who lived in Danyang during the Yuanjia period (424-454), observed some children that were rather weird:

Once Quan happened to ride [home] while it was raining. In front of his gate he saw three little boys who were around six- or seven-years-old. They were

¹⁰⁹⁷ Teiser 1994: 14.

¹⁰⁹⁸ See chapter V. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁹ *Taiping guangji* 119: 837-8 (*Gu jin ji*). Certainly there are exceptions like Zengzeng who had a light job as errand boy in the underworld and who, during his leisure time, did not play around but communicated with his father and stepmother.

running after each other [making a rather] mischievous [impression on Quan] and made sure that they did not get wet. Suddenly Quan saw them fighting in a vase. He drew a bow and shot at them, and hit the vase. All over the sudden, he did not see [the little boys] anymore. Quan took the bottle and placed it on the street next to his house. The following day a married woman entered his gate, grasped the vase in her arms and cried. Quan asked her about it and she answered: "That was the toy of my sons. I have no idea how it came here!" Quan told her all that had happened and the woman carried the vase to the front of the tomb where her boys were buried. One day later, Quan saw the boys carrying the vase to the side of his gate again. They raised it and said laughing to Liu: "We (Anong 阿儂) have the vase again, [duh]." After they had said this they became invisible.¹¹⁰⁰

The three children, who all died around the same time, were playing together. Their sight slightly troubled Liu Quan who felt compelled to shoot at them, which means that he attempted to exorcise them. Even though a woman came who said that they were her sons and who then took the toy-vase back to their tomb, the boys returned to Quan's house. Their rather mischievous character and their way of communicating with Quan, as well as the fact that they played with and in a vase, hint at the demonic identity of children that we find in numerous narratives.¹¹⁰¹

The third category is formed by children who were older than ten or eleven years of age. Living children older in that age category were already subjected to some sort of education, and in most cases they had probably already started training in a profession. For this reason their death was often treated more like that of an adult and their appearance as ghosts was also more elaborate than that of younger children. Especially dead teenagers communicated with words and often had a clear message to take across to the world of the living. Female ghosts in their adolescence frequently managed to have living men fall in love with them. Such a relationship then stopped as soon as they received proper attention for their death.¹¹⁰²

¹¹⁰⁰ *Taiping guangji* 324: 2571 (*Youming lu*)

¹¹⁰¹ Non-human beings in the form of children appear at death of a person or are carried around as symbols by 'Daoist masters' denoting the master's immortality. Children who are found playing outside human borders are usually understood to be mischievous and demonic, meaning to harm or at least tease humans.

¹¹⁰² See for example *Taiping guangji* 280: 2235 (*Guangyi ji*), Dudbridge 1995: 186: 63. When Yan Zhi was a young teenager, his father had to take an office in Mizhou and Yan was following him there. Once he slept in the morning and dreamt of a fifteen or sixteen year old girl (the daughter of the former Aide) who died in that house and had not yet had a proper burial. He dreamt several months of her (she is beautiful). Her brother came later and organised her proper burial.

Although the depiction of children in the three categories roughly resembles depictions of living children in the same ages, we see that what was meaningful with regard to living children was not meaningful regarding dead children anymore. Thus, abilities of living children such as literary abilities or filial piety, which were desirable for living children, became unimportant in the underworld. Even so, those children that were deemed filial or faultless during their life or were below the age of seven were often rewarded with an office job in the underworld bureaucracy.

Rebirth

Leading an afterlife and being reborn did not necessarily oppose each other, and medieval narratives occasionally used both concepts together. In fact, it is important to note that rebirth was not necessarily a purely Buddhist concept, and narratives on rebirth of people existed prior to the introduction of Buddhism.¹¹⁰³ In the previous sections we read that the *hun*-soul could be reborn and that only the body of the person stayed behind in the tombs and lead its afterlife. In some cases the soul was sensitive to emotions and could arrange rebirth on its own account. In the famous case of Gu Kuang's son, the invisible soul of Feixiong who died in early childhood, felt pity for the sadness of his father and managed to be reborn as a son of the same family.¹¹⁰⁴

Related to his research on beliefs around rebirth, de Groot has observed that one way of dealing with feelings of sadness concerning adults who have lost a child, was the consoling belief in a second reincarnation: "The fancy of sorrowing mothers, musing of the departed darlings while transposing their affections on later-born ones, has furnished its due contingent to the tales of second incarnations. We in fact read of many children who died, and returned to their families by being reborn in their own mother's wombs."¹¹⁰⁵ In Buddhist rebirth the reincarnated entity was reborn with the ability of remembering its former life. However, unlike Gu Kuang's case, one did not get the chance to choose the place and status of the reincarnation.¹¹⁰⁶

¹¹⁰³ See Gjertson 1975 and Bokenkamp 2007.

¹¹⁰⁴ We do not know how he managed that. Most probably he would have asked for mercy of his father in the underworld administration, because in the Buddhist life circle he would not have the chance of doing that and would just be reborn according to his *karma*. *Taiping guangji* 388: 3091 (*Youyang zazu*). On Gu Kuang, see *Jiu Tangshu*: 3625 and Nienhauser 1986: 486-7. On Gu Feixiong see Nienhauser 1986: 485-6.

¹¹⁰⁵ De Groot IV: 146.

¹¹⁰⁶ According to the above quoted narrative, then, it would be *hun* and *shen* that carry the memory of a person and that make him remember a former life.

De Groot has further paid attention to ‘the re-incarnation of the soul through birth.’¹¹⁰⁷ He observed that “people reborn by the intervention of a second mother may have clear reminiscences of their former existence. In a great many narratives on this subject it is, indeed, revelation of the child itself about its previous life, or about things it concealed during its previous life time, which led to the discovery of that life not being a product of its fancy. There are also cases recorded of previous lives detected by certain spots or marks on the body.”¹¹⁰⁸ De Groot, at first impression, connected the tales from any imperial period with a general folk-belief of Chinese people that he has observed in the nineteenth century focusing on the detachment of the soul and its flexibility to take over any body. Yet, regarding narratives that feature children in particular he states that “in the epoch of the Jin dynasty, however, tales crop up which represent souls as transplanted from dying men into children in the womb. Buddhism here shows its influence.”¹¹⁰⁹ By the Tang dynasty then, these ideas from the Jin dynasty (265-420 AD) have had several centuries to manifest themselves in writing and intermingle with more ideas, such as medical and alchemic concepts of the child.

It is striking that quite a few of the narratives in the *Taiping guangji* that are grouped under the title ‘awareness of previous existence (*wu qian sheng* 悟前生)’¹¹¹⁰ feature children and not adults who remembered their former life or lives.¹¹¹¹ Most of the children who did remember their former lives were about five to seven years old and have died around that age in their previous life, which was also the age in which they started to gain consciences. Nonetheless, narratives on rebirth focused not only on remarkable events in which young children led their present parents to their former parents or displayed recognition of objects of their former lives, but they also addressed the emotions of the parents who had lost their child.¹¹¹²

On one hand, rebirth then, was very physical: a person was reborn as, for example, a sheep or a man. On the other hand, rebirth happened to the different ingredients of a person: the body was reborn in death and lived a similar life as during lifetime, provided that it has been equipped with all the necessities by the

¹¹⁰⁷ De Groot IV, chapter 9.

¹¹⁰⁸ De Groot IV: 144.

¹¹⁰⁹ De Groot IV: 151. Why would that be? Similar to importance of mother who can only be respected in Buddhist practice, children find attention in Buddhism.

¹¹¹⁰ *Taiping guangji* chapters 387 and 388.

¹¹¹¹ It was of course the adult who wrote down the event of a child ‘remembering’ its former life. In average, children who remember their former life are about six or seven years old. This observation would fit with their gaining of self-awareness at that age.

¹¹¹² These stories suggest that the children featured in them were free of bad karma, because they were born as humans and often even as male humans. Or are the motives just intermingled with the idea of the empathetic *hun* of the first narrative quoted?

living. It was deprived of human ambitions and was only capable of crude emotions. Its *shen*- or *hun*-soul was transferred to another body that was about to be born. In this context we should probably place Gu Kuang's case and the case of the girl who was reborn to her mother as a boy as punishment. Both children were reborn as children into their former family. Also the souls of several other children I have mentioned in this chapter lingered around their families after death until the reason of their deaths had been clarified. Authors in these cases did not mention rebirth into other living beings. In between those views of rebirth we find several underworld systems that appear to exist not only for punishment but also for redirecting of souls to new bodies.

Emotions

Although a child could be regarded as an investment, an insurance, for the continuation of the ancestral worship, as well as insurance for the relations between different families through marriage, feelings of attachment to one's offspring should not be neglected.¹¹¹³ Among the Dunhuang manuscripts are numerous prayers, some of which address the birth of a child and some of which deal with the death of a child. These prayers are directed at both sexes. Death of a boy is compared in the prayers with a withered tree, a shattered pearl, lilies dying in frost, and cinnamon felled by the wind. The heart of the deceased child's father is said to be cut and his mother's thoughts are in confusion. Space, formerly occupied by their now lost son – the place where he used to play and the cradle – gives rise to sad emotions and tears. Questions are asked about the post-mortem whereabouts of their son. In the end comfort is found in the idea that they – the parents – will always remember their son and will erect a fast (*zhai* 齋) in his memory. A prayer for the event of the death of a girl contains many allegories to star-lore.¹¹¹⁴ The composition of such prayers for the occasion of the death of one's child indicates its seriousness and emotional impact, and the necessity of a ritual handling of the situation.

Because the death rate of children is probably high, one might expect a more detached way of dealing with a dead child.¹¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, we have other

¹¹¹³ Except for the fact that according to the Tang law children are supposed to be loved.

¹¹¹⁴ S 5637 and S 4992, *Dunhuang yuan wen ji* 1995: 139 and 239.

¹¹¹⁵ Kinney has pointed out that concerning the death of infants in narratives during the Han dynasty, "there is seldom any expression of grief, anxiety, or regret by the abandoning parent," Kinney 2004: 112. However, I am not discussing the grief of parents who abandoned their child but whose children died by accident, disease, fate, as punishment by a supernatural power, i.e. children whose parents did not plan their death.

accounts besides prayers in narratives and poetry that reveal the parents' grief over their lost child. A famous example for the expression of grief after the death of his three sons during their childhood is the composition of Meng Jiao (751-814), who wrote several poems about this theme:

Apricots die young: their flowers are nipples which the frost cuts and they fall.
They lead me to grieve over my late child and to write these poems.

In vain I gather up these stars from the ground,
yet on the branches I see no flowers.
Sad – a solitary old man,
Desolate – a home without children.
Better the duck that sinks in the water,
Better the crow that gather twigs for nesting.
Duckling in the waves, breaks through them, still flies.
Fledglings in the wind, ruffled, boasting one another.
But blossoms and baby will live no more,
I sigh in vain, facing these creatures.¹¹¹⁶

Meng Jiao experienced the death of his children as arbitrary. It was neither his nor his children's fault that they are gone.¹¹¹⁷ Although a child's death did not necessarily have to affect or stress the parents at first, it still appears that it exerted considerably pressure on them sooner or later. Many narratives therefore dealt with the transition of a child from life to death and finally to a ghostly being, probably to express the means of emotional processing of the parents' grief and to point out the possibility of saying good-bye.

Above, I have shown several types of narratives that dealt with child death using certain motifs. Narratives about child snatchers made up one group of motifs, and reincarnation, which I will discuss further below, made up another. Although less explicit than the poem above, these motifs also dealt with emotional digestion. Furthermore, burial and the practical and material means with which one conducted a funeral for one's offspring also throw light on the parents' emotional behaviour. I have already mentioned that children from age eleven onward may have received similar funerals as adults. We have also seen that emperor Dezong had ordered three days off-duty at court to mourn for his

¹¹¹⁶ Meng Jiao (751-814), translation by Stephen Owen (poem no. 2 of a series of 12; *Sunflower Splendor*: 160). Meng Jiao composed a whole set of poems in which he expresses his sorrow about the loss of his three children who died at a very young age. For another translation (in Dutch) see Lloyd Haft 2003: 9.

¹¹¹⁷ Haft 2003: 47-8.

four-year-old son, and that his son received a grave mount of his own, and a memorial tablet with his name and position written on it.

Members of the ruling class sometimes ordered tomb inscriptions to be made for their premature dead offspring, but not very often. In fact, we find utterly few tomb inscriptions for girls below the age of eleven and only very few between the age of eleven and twenty.¹¹¹⁸ For example Jade Magnificence (Yuhua 玉華), the fifteen-year-old daughter of Librarian Su, received a long memorial from her grieving parents:

Yuhua was the youngest daughter of the librarian Su.¹¹¹⁹ Her pureness and beauty illuminated the outside, she was smart and her inner was beautiful. Her bones were perfect and lady-like. Her movements were harmonious and her conduct [according to the] rules. Later, she was adept at charts and histories (圖史) and she spend some time on phonology (音律). She lived in the Ailan-women's quarters in her native village Shengmian. But what about her good qualities, when the years that she was sent down [to earth] were not long? She finally died prematurely, at the age of fifteen. She passed away on the ninth day of the fifth month of the second year of Wude (November 620) in the house in Jude and was buried at the twenty-fifth of that month in Shenheyuan, Jingtao. Oh, such grief! [...]¹¹²⁰

Princess Yuhua's parents appear to have loved their daughter above her conduct, and when still alive they must have spent some time to educate her. In this tomb inscription she is engaged with all kinds of attributes that suited a well-lettered adult man better than a young teenage girl. Her interest in phonology thus might have been a flattering exaggeration on behalf of her parents, to make her more a part of her father, who was a librarian, and his work. It could, however, also have been a real interest, because phonology formed the basis for composing poetry, and thus a requirement for well-educated girls. After she died it took another sixteen days before she was buried. This means that much attention was paid to her death and that her family spend much time on the preparation for her funeral. Librarian Su had the economic means as well as the time to care for his dead daughter in such a way.

Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元, 773-829) also composed tomb inscriptions for three girls, among whom one was his own daughters, who died aged ten and aged

¹¹¹⁸ See Cen Jingwen 2005: 138.

¹¹¹⁹ An aristocrat during the Sui, see *Suishu*: 1784.

¹¹²⁰ *Tang dai muzhi huibian* 1992: 1 (inscriptions from the Wude reign period 武德 (618-627), no. 1).

thirteen.¹¹²¹ She had travelled together with her father when he was exiled from Chang'an to Yongzhou in 805. He also wrote an inscription for a thirteen year old girl, who probably was his cousin's daughter. Another inscription was written for a fifteen-year-old girl, the niece of one of his maid servants in Yongzhou.¹¹²² Each of the inscription is an individual account of each girl's death, and written in different styles, they are very moving. On behalf of his ten year old daughter, he wrote about her last months, especially that she became Buddhist when she turned ill.¹¹²³ He must have been very sad by this loss, because he was said to have "enjoyed playing with his daughter," while in exile.¹¹²⁴ For his thirteen-year-old niece he wrote a short, but very touching memorial:

Her name was Elegance (雅). Her family-name was Liu. She was born in the year Jiashen (甲申, 797) and passed away in Jichou (己丑, 810). The day was the twelfth and the month was the ninth. On this day she was also buried, at the top of the Eastern Mount. When she was alive, she was cherished – but her fate was to die young. At first, she was not. Now, what do we have? The frailty of her existence would [let her] perish quickly. [Thus] inscribing this tile, [I want to make her remembered] for eternity.¹¹²⁵

The inscription for his servant's niece was done after the fifteen-year-old girl had already passed away. She was the daughter of one of the few literati in Yongzhou and Liu wrote in her memory that he was deeply amazed by her embroidery skills. This girl, called Thunder Five (Lei Wu 雷五), when she knew that she was about to die, sought from her aunt to ask Liu for an inscription for her tomb. Her parents, however, were too humble and ashamed to ask the great and famous writer and statesman in exile. Thus Liu heard about this just after Thunder Five was already dead, whereupon he still wrote a memorial and had it put into her tomb later.¹¹²⁶

¹¹²¹ The inscription for the youngest girl is titled 下殤女子墓埵記; and the commentary reminds that the character 殤 is used for those who died before they reached adulthood., Liu Zongyuan 1974: 214.

¹¹²² Nienhauser e.a. think that for the inscription he wrote for friends and fellow scholars, and certainly family as well, he was paid only little or not at all (Nienhauser e.a. 1973: 38). These inscriptions therefore might have been especially personal and inspired by a lack of pressure to write in the usual tomb inscription-style.

¹¹²³ The girl's name was Young Lady Harmony (Heniang 和娘); when she turned to a Buddhist faith, her name was changed into Buddha's Servant Girl (Fubi 佛婢) and after she had her hair cut as a nun, she got the name Original Intention (Chuxin 初心). In Yongzhou, Liu was in close contact with the Buddhist community of his area (Chen 1992: 83).

¹¹²⁴ Chen 1992: 82.

¹¹²⁵ Liu Zongyuan 1974: 215.

¹¹²⁶ Liu Zongyuan 1974: 219.

At the other side of the scale of emotional and practical handling of the death of a child on behalf of the parents, we find parents who had no time at all to bury their dead child:¹¹²⁷

During the Huang Chao rebellion (874-884), a certain official Bei fled together with his wife [the social disorder]. They hastened southwards to the centre of Han and when they were proceeding to Jingdu [Bei]'s unmarried daughter died a sudden death. The army was moving to the South with difficulties and they had no time to bury [the girl] and sacrifice to her. They [thus] tossed her into a valley on the way.

During night [the parents] heard the voice of their daughter but could not see her body. The parents asked her [how she was] and the daughter said: "I have been raped by the son of the river god Chan. He misled me to go along with him. His father was angry and punished him for killing a living person without permission to do so, and beat him hard with a bamboo stick. I humbly thanked and soothed him and he ordered somebody to escort me to come here. But neither in the morning nor the evening, I [knew] where I should go to and I wanted to follow you to the South." Then [the parents] plucked up grass and bundled it into a box, so that the *hun*-soul knew that it has something to trust to [and something where it can rest for a while].¹¹²⁸ She drank, ate and talked not differently from as she used to do. Thereafter, she talked once more, [saying] that she already has a place where she will be reborn. Miserably she said goodbye and left.¹¹²⁹

Bei's daughter could not be buried and was only thrown away due to the violent social circumstances in which her death occurred. Although the parents were disposing of a dead body of a non-adult while fleeing in order to survive themselves, they did not feel comfortable with the idea that they had treated the body of their daughter this way. The inner story then reveals that the parents were confronted by the ghost of their daughter and were consoled by her.

This narrative in fact shows one very important aspect of death rituals which already surfaced in the narratives on Zengzeng and Heqi, although here it is not as obvious. In some of the narratives that I have quoted above, we have seen that little children returned from death in order to soothe their parents.

¹¹²⁷ For early China, Kinney 2004, writes about the emotions of parents who decided to abandon their child: "The tendency to attach no blame to those who abandoned children, to omit any discussion rationalizing the action, and to depict the abandoning parents as emotionally detached are features of the narrative that underscore the idea that infant abandonment was a commonplace activity, and that most people considered it a reasonable action," (112).

¹¹²⁸ Ter Haar 1998 remarks that in nineteenth century rituals of Triads bushels of grass were used instead of incense Ter Haar 1998: 61.

¹¹²⁹ *Taiping guangji* 312: 2470 (*Bei men suo yan*).

Until that point in the narrative we are usually not informed about the feelings of the parents. However, when a child returned and then left again, it cried and so did the parents. For this reason I assume that it was necessary to grieve and that there even might be certain ritual forms for it, although it has not been prescribed. I believe that it is what de Groot calls the death-howl: "Though in process of time the original signification of the howling has been lost sight of, and it now merely survives as a formality betokening grief and woe, yet the fact remains that it has never been lost its position as a rite of as much significance at least as the recalling of the dead, and this fact, we venture to say, cannot be accounted for except by concluding that the two practices are intimately connected, and identical in origin. ... [The *Liji*] shows that, like the recalling of the soul, so the death-howl was observed for everybody, from the emperor downwards."¹¹³⁰ In this context de Groot quotes Zengzi (曾子, fifth century BC) who mentioned not only "the sorrow displayed by the wailing and weeping," but also certain garments to be worn and food to be displayed.¹¹³¹ The girl's parents, official Bei and his wife, are not reported to have worn special garments, but they put out food and drinks, and provided a surrogate coffin for her *hun* soul, where it could find a resting place. Additionally they chatted with her. Zengzeng and Heqi, apart from crying, also spoke with their fathers, which might have been, I assume, an important part of the death howl.

The two different type of sources, the tomb inscriptions and the narrative from the Huang Chao rebellion, show different ways of disposing the body of dead children: Orchid, Young Lady Harmony, Elegance and Thunder Five died early and due to disease. Their family had the economic means to give her a real funeral and a tomb inscription for her to be remembered. The inscriptions rendered the teenage girls unforgettable. Bei's daughter, who died in a group of people who fled the cruelties of social unrest, might also have derived from a better-off family, yet the circumstances were such that a funeral could not be afforded and only a short while later the parents could perform a crude ritual to appease the dead girl's soul.

These sources further reveal different ways of expressing sorrow. The tomb inscriptions were ordered by the parents themselves, who might have said what they wanted to have written on it, and they did express their grief with emphasis. The death of Bei's daughter is described in a narrative and not by the parents themselves, but it is written down by Sun Guangxian who lived about a century later, and who probably heard about this case from others. Nonetheless, what he described as the personal experience of the parents in their dreams and

¹¹³⁰ De Groot I.2: 255.

¹¹³¹ *Ibid.*

their reaction to their daughter's death, perhaps was a common way how parents dealt with the emotional pain such an event caused.

The proper treatment of a child's dead body often featured in the foreground of narratives about a dead child communicating with adults. The elaboration of the communication depended on the age of the deceased child. For example, the young skeleton-child made adults try out different methods in getting rid of itself, until it received a burial. The adults had to guess what the child wanted, because the child itself could not express this due to its young age.¹¹³² In most cases regarding dead children communicating their need for a proper burial and ritual, the child was unknown to the adults, who took care of the observation of the rituals. Also when adults could not afford a burial they would perform a surrogate ritual in absence of the body.

Dead children felt pity for their parents and soothed them by expressing that it was their fate to have died. They assured their parents that it was not their fault that they have passed away. We find this assurance also in cases where the parents apparently had abandoned their child or might otherwise carry guilt for its death. Descriptions of such situations in which the child soothed its parents, and in which the parents ate together with the *hun*-soul of the child, are probably literary expressions of the ritual practice of the death-howl, or of emotions that bind children and parents.

With regard to burial, children did not require more than the basic coffin – a wooden box, and if not more could be done, basic offerings such as food and drinks were sufficient to appease a child's restless soul. Alternatively, depending on the social status of their father and the social circumstances, children might have gotten an individual grave mound, or they were buried alongside other dead family members in a family tomb. Yet we have seen that since the funeral of the child did not have to follow strict prescriptions, parents were given a certain freedom in the enactment of it.¹¹³³

¹¹³² Kinney points out that there existed the idea in the sixth century B.C. that "a spirit's ability to seek revenge on the living was determined by the person's age and social prestige at the time of death. According to a speech made by Zichan (ca. 534 B.C.) recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*, high social standing, powerful ancestors, and the accumulation of worldly experience strengthened a person's spiritual constitution, that is, the *hun* and the *po* ([...]). From this perspective, an infant's spiritual constitution would have been regarded as weak and thus of little or no threat to the living," Kinney 2004: 106. Not only with respect to revenge, but I suppose the whole constitution of a dead child resembled that of a living one, except that a dead child does not gain strength anymore.

¹¹³³ A salient function that dead children act out is that of warning (See e.g. *Taiping guangji* 428: 3482 (*Guangyi ji*)) and of assisting in solving cases of violence and crime within a community. That means, dead children fulfil the function that is often ascribed to them in apocryphal writings,

VIII. Conclusion

This thesis dealt with the medieval elites and their children. Throughout this dissertation I have demonstrated that children were a highly visible part in medieval communities. That is to say, children appear in numerous medieval Chinese texts. However, none of the children appearing in narratives and biographies were put in there unconsciously. I have shown that a man's interest in children in medieval China was based on the maintenance of the ideal foundation of a community. This interest also resulted in practical results, such as medical works. Administrative and legal works relied on medieval classification and understanding of childhood. The most powerful group in medieval times thus used stereotypical images of the less powerful group to reach that goal. Still, some children were beings in transition from the least significant group to become members of those in control. In such cases children were contested grounds by men and women, and women were described to take many measures to ensure her biological son's emotional dependency because she knew of her dependency on him in later years.

Men obviously pondered about pregnancy, the growth of the foetus and birth – events they hardly had any access to nor control over. Men also wondered about what happened when children grew and how the small body turned into an adult body and what the difference was between those two bodies. Men also worried about education, and how a child would be able to result into a morally integer adult, who was going to bring honour to the family within a community and continue the family line. Authors especially deliberated the childhood of outstanding persons. This thesis has furthermore presented material which

namely when children's songs (*tongyao*) turn out to have revealed truth. However, this will be discussed in my article 'The other child' because it does not directly deal with the death of children.

shows that medieval parents worried about their offspring and that grief about the loss of a child was well accepted and perhaps even common.

The children and childhoods I have introduced in this thesis can be summarized under a few dominant images that probably derive from integration processes of childhood-images belonging to various peoples and cultural backgrounds. We saw three basic approaches that authors used to apply images of children and childhood in texts: 1) the child in relation to the surrounding community and beyond; 2) childhood in relation to the life of an extraordinary individual; 3) children and childhood as symbols for personal immortality and the continuation of the family line.

1) the child in relation to the surrounding community and beyond

In the introduction I have mentioned that the most crucial foundation of medieval communities were the bonds and the acknowledgement of hierarchy within a family. This addresses specifically the basic relationships between father, mother and children and the hierarchic structure of the relationships. With respect to these bonds, the most significant child is a son. The quality of the nuclear family bonds exerts influence on the individual. The ability to maintain relationships and to accept the hierarchic order is interpreted to lie in childhood, but the authors of our texts did not investigate if this was really the case. They instead invented the fitting childhood to an eminent person, which means that they chose a childhood-image that was widely accepted to fit to a certain moral and social position within their own community.¹¹³⁴

The fundamental bonds between parents and children are created through education. This especially counts for the father-son bond, because men are the transmitter of rituals and the chief performers of family rituals aimed at maintaining the social order. The bond between mother and child was intimately physical in addition to educational. The physical relationship of mother and child gave rise to much suspicion among men against women.

The family bonds were also maintained in death, when children took their place as anonymous children among the dead family. In narratives about rebirth, which were partly influenced by Buddhist religious beliefs, children returned within their own family or within the range of its former community.

¹¹³⁴ According to modern insight, the ability to accept hierarchy and to maintain relationships is indeed rooted in childhood, among other influences on behaviour. However, while these insights are gained through assessment of children based on the view of childhood as a separate category, medieval authors argued backwards, starting from the position of adulthood to point out what the childhood was like.

Such ideal cases of relationships, however, do not often hold true under medieval living conditions. Fathers were often absent from their sons, and so were mothers. In case the biological mother was not the main wife of the family head, her role with respect to instructions was often taken over by the main wife, and the physical care of the child was taken over by any capable woman. This means that mothers were interchangeable. The role of the fathers could not as easily be taken over by another man. Yet, in the case of the father's death, his family could take over the ritual education and integration of the son. This is why we do not have many examples of a child's maltreatment by paternal family members.

The ideal connection of father, mother and child was constantly challenged by official appointments of fathers, migrations of members of the family, and death. In order to keep the child alive, the extended family played an important role in such cases. This again was a challenge to the system of fundamental relationships, for male members of the extended family on the mother's side, who might take care of their sister as well as her offspring, did not belong to that system. Stepmothers of children whose official mother has passed away also did not form part of the original system, because they belonged to a new father-mother-child structure that overlapped with the former family one. This overlap of structures did not work in favour of the stepmother, whose power over her predecessor's children was limited.

Images of children in relation to the surrounding community are used for numerous purposes. One often-occurring stereotype is the young child that is loved and pitied. This depiction does not assign moral qualities to an adult person, and we find it in narratives that discuss the attitude of adults towards a child. It is thus often used to highlight the bond of a parent to his or her offspring which is then further drawn on, for example to emphasise the pain of loss of that child. The usage of this depiction as a stereotype does not mean that parents did not really love their young children. Nevertheless, the picture of the beloved and pitied child below the age of ten occurs so frequently and in similar contexts that we have to approach it, before all, as a label. The image, as we have seen, was also taken over within an administrative framework, where classifying childhood was an important tool for social control and the execution of power. The classification of the ages was crucial for the administration of labour, and administrators thus assessed persons by their ages.

What is more, children who were described as 'beloved' and passed away were occasionally reported to be in the centre of the power-struggle of a community, a family or between the sexes. At any rate, this image of children is employed to highlight tensions and especially mistrust between men and women within a family.

Mistrust against women was especially thematised. Thus, women were demonised by the male authors, because a young child's disease, misfortune or death was seen in the light of exclusive female care giving. It seems that the medieval times knew many female demons that specialised in harassing and killing children. We also find more examples of women than of men whose lives are in between a demonic and a human existence.

A group of texts that is written specifically about children and aimed at ensuring their survival within the father-mother relationship is comprised by medical works that feature separate discussions about children. While the father most possibly played an important role in rituals around birth, his significance and impact during pregnancy and birth-giving was small. By composing medical texts about children, then, authors firstly tried to achieve their proclaimed aim, which was to reduce early child-death. Secondly, I assume, they wanted to exert influence on the sphere of women, which they suspected to be a threat to their own positions.

2) childhood in relation to the life of an extraordinary individual

Many biographies in official histories, in biographical compendia of religious groups, in narratives about extraordinary persons, and in tomb inscriptions include accounts of a person's childhood. Mostly these accounts were brief and only mentioned certain character traits, but they could also expand in a way that they retold certain events during that person's conception, during his mother's pregnancy, his birth and the person's youth. This approach to childhood centres around the deeds of an adult person and often tries to explain a particular tragic or glorious end of an adult's life – and end which is retrospectively understood to be rooted in childhood.

Writings of elite men approach and define children in retrospective, which means that authors used images of childhood and originated them in adulthood. That implies that children appear in texts only when they were significant for the life of an adult. Similarly, the childhood of a person was often composed according to the social position and the moral integrity of the adult person. The strongest stereotype is the filial, diligently studying and often precocious child, whom we find in the biographies of outstanding men of the elite. A famous Daoist hermit, at one point during his childhood, must have betrayed his parents and left home with the intention to not continue his family line, similar to a Buddhist monk. An eminent official must have been smart and filial when young. An exemplary wife must have been filial and cute during her childhood.

3) children and childhood as symbols for personal immortality and the continuation of the family line

In this thesis I have not focused on the connection between children and personal immortality, which is the source for a certain set of motives in many medieval narratives, such as the Daoist who carries around gourds filled with playing children. However, the image of the child as a symbol for the continuation of the family line is prominent in many instances. One lasting image of a child is the one called to mind by Li Shangyin's poem that I have quoted in the prologue. Analysing this poem now reveals many of the children and childhoods as literary constructs and stereotypes that I have investigated in my thesis.

Li Shangyin remarks that his son wore swaddling clothes at an age younger than one year old. He boasts about his son's remarkable intelligence and beauty, and he places his son's intelligence and behaviour above classically well-known children. This description could fit many elite children, and only by providing his son's name, Kunshi, Li Shangyin gives the poem a personal note.

The games Kunshi plays are riding on a bamboo stick, playing horse, playing eagle and running around wild, alone or in a crowd. These games are those that children generally play and, again, these activities could be used describing any elite child as we have seen throughout the thesis. Kunshi is playing in a crowd with nieces and nephews, annoys his older sister, and he is ordering servants around. Moreover, Li Shangyin's friends and acquaintances take notice of the boy and make admiring and polite remarks about him. The poet is also proud of his son's behaviour when he is making fun of adult guests.

These traits show the social importance of the offspring of an eminent personality. It is also an example of the custom that children who quote poems and well-known texts, and who are engaged in witty conversations with their father's guests, are used as entertainers. This presupposes that the son already underwent some kind of family instruction. In this, Li Shangyin's son is not an exception from many other children. The poet, unsurprisingly, also describes how his son learned, namely by watching his father being busy with what his father predictably does as well: practicing calligraphy and polishing the zither. Again, this behaviour is expected of children and nothing extraordinary.

Kunshi is also used by Li Shangyin to illustrate the poet's complaint about his occupation and his fate as he saw it at the time of the composition. Li Shangyin further mentions his own old age, he is nearly forty, and deems his days counted. He envies the youth of his son, and he pities his own old-age and the fact that he struggles with fleas and lice and emaciation. Finally, in the last few lines of the poem Li Shangyin uses his son to criticize current politics.

All in all, the poem is full of general images of how a child supposedly is and what a child supposedly does in medieval times. Li Shangyin portrayed the bright side of childhood; he described a child that could very well be a child of immortality. He, in fact, told of a child that we find depicted on medieval new-year cards and objects, a blessed child that brings blessings of immortality to the receiver of the card and owner of the object. Descriptions of blessed children are hence used to express an ideal emotional state of mind, and the desire for freedom and security.

Although we can detect stereotypes in the texts on which I have based my thesis, this does not mean that parents did not believe that the stereotypes were actually the true pictures they had about their children. I think that parents indeed loved their children and were concerned with their survival; that they tried their best to help when a child was sick and that they grieved when a child passed away. The depictions of blessed children as blessings for adults probably were partly based on the parents' love for their children.

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Samenvatting

Introductie

Onderzoekers zijn pas recentelijk tot het inzicht gekomen dat kinderen hun eigen geschiedenis hebben, en dat hun geschiedenis een groot gebied bestrijkt en een sleutelrol speelt in de grotere geschiedenis van sociale processen en sociale systemen. De opvoeding van kinderen is een zaak van groot belang voor elke samenleving, aangezien het voortbestaan van maatschappelijke waarden en normen afhangt van de wijze waarop kinderen worden gesocialiseerd. De geschiedenis van kinderen in middeleeuws China, alsook in andere delen van de wereld en in premoderne tijden, vormt een duidelijk contrast met de traditionele gebieden van historisch onderzoek, zoals staatsgeschiedenis, economische geschiedenis en intellectuele geschiedenis. Kinderen –in middeleeuwse Chinese teksten hoofdzakelijk gedefinieerd vanaf de prenatale fase tot hun huwbare leeftijd– hebben in het algemeen geen politieke macht of economische invloed; ze schrijven niet over hun eigen leven, maar verschijnen in plaats daarvan in de geschriften van volwassenen. Toch zijn kinderen een cruciaal onderdeel van de sociale orde. Het doel van dit proefschrift is te onderzoeken welke rol kinderen spelen in Chinese gemeenschappen tussen de vijfde en de tiende eeuw.

Onderzoeksvragen en aanpak

Middeleeuwse auteurs beschreven kinderen binnen het kader van hun eigen idee van de gepaste sociale hiërarchie, die ik heb besproken als drie basale stereotiepe beelden van kinderen en de kindertijd (*childhood*): 1) het kind in relatie tot de gemeenschap om hem heen en daarbuiten; 2) kindertijd in relatie tot het leven van een buitengewoon individu; 3) kinderen en kindertijd als symbolen van persoonlijke onsterfelijkheid en de voortzetting van de familielijn. Hoewel de bronnen zich vaak van stereotiepen bedienen, bevatten ze nog steeds voldoende gevarieerde informatie die het mogelijk maken de middeleeuwse kindertijd in zijn context te plaatsen.

Voorts laten de bronnen twee belangrijke kwesties zien waar de schrijvers zich mee bezig hielden: in de eerste plaats de manieren die gemeenschappen gebruikten om zich ervan te verzekeren dat hun nakomelingen zouden overleven en zorgeloze en goed functionerende leden van hun gemeenschap zouden worden; ten tweede de garantie dat kinderen, als de zwakste schakel van de samenleving, het overleven van de gemeenschap niet in de weg zouden staan.

Maatregelen ter garantie van de veiligheid en het overleven van een kind werden uitgebreid besproken in medische geschriften, almanakken en soetra's.

Het spreekt voor zich dat een enkelvoudige benadering niet volstaat bij onderzoek naar de geschiedenis van kinderen en de kindertijd in een periode die om en nabij vijf honderd jaar bestrijkt. Het in kaart brengen van de geschiedenis van de kindertijd uit die periode in China vereist de toepassing van zeer verschillende onderzoeksthema's, zoals geneeskunde, familie en onderwijs.

In mijn onderzoeksproject heb ik diverse literaire genres bestudeerd die handelen over geneeskunde en goddelijke bescherming, teksten over dodenverering, en biografische bronnen over beroemde en beruchte ambtenaren, alsmede godsdienstexperts. Bovendien heb ik teksten bekeken die onsterfelijkheid en het voortzetten van de familielijn prijzen. Mijn belangrijkste bron van informatie bestond uit anekdotische beschrijvingen die verhaalden van buitengewone gebeurtenissen in het leven van individuele personen. Ik heb deze teksten onderzocht met het besef van hun beperkte perspectief, omdat zij zijn geschreven binnen één sociale klasse, de geletterde elite, en alleen door mannelijke auteurs. De aard van mijn onderzoek plaatst mijn proefschrift binnen het bereik van de antropologische geschiedenis.

Medische teksten, die kinderen apart van volwassenen bespreken, houden zich eveneens bezig met het overleven en het welzijn, alsmede met de toekomst van het kind als een succesvolle volwassene. Het belangrijkste aandachtspunt van medische schrijvers was het inzicht in bijzondere kinderziekten en in kenmerkende lichamelijke condities van een kind te vergroten. Hiertoe gaven zij gedetailleerde beschrijvingen van de handelingen bij de geboorte en de cruciale eerste twee jaren van het kind. In mijn proefschrift heb ik uiteengezet hoe bijzonder deze informatie is, omdat deze handelingen werden uitgevoerd in een periode waarin mannen naar alle waarschijnlijkheid niet vaak in de buurt van moeder en kind kwamen. Voorts bespreken medische schrijvers algemene ziekten die zowel bij kinderen als volwassenen voorkomen, en wijzen ze op verschillen in het ziekteverloop en de behandeling met betrekking tot kinderen. Ze richten zich op de ontwikkeling van de foetus en de ontwikkelingen van het kind gedurende de eerste twee jaar van zijn leven vanaf de geboorte en verklaren deze in voornamelijk alchemistische termen.

Van bijzonder belang binnen de geletterde gemeenschap waren instructies voor vaardigheden op het gebied van geletterdheid en gedrag. Verhalen over opvoeding duiden vaak successen aan, maar ze wijzen ook op vele voorbeelden van mislukte opvoeding, juist om te prikkelen tot welslagen. De grootste angst in de opvoeding was het kind te verwennen, wat zou leiden tot een immoreel karakter en een persoon die de familie niet tot voordeel zou strekken. Vaak werden vrouwen verantwoordelijk gehouden voor het verwennen van kinderen.

Bovendien kon de eenvoudige komaf van de moeder de oorzaak zijn van ontwrichtende kinderen die uitgroeiden tot incompetente volwassenen. Om deze reden lezen we vaak dat ontwrichtende historische figuren de zoons en dochters waren van concubines, en niet van echtgenotes.

In het geval dat men vond dat een kind de sociale orde ontwrichtte, werd het opgeofferd om de sociale orde stabiel te houden. Zo werd abortus aangeraden wanneer de zwangere vrouw het risico liep te overlijden aan complicaties rondom de bevalling. Kinderen die werden geboren op ongunstige dagen zoals de vijfde dag van de vijfde maand moesten direct worden gedood om te voorkomen dat zij hun ouders zouden schaden. Kinderen met mensonwaardige handicaps werden gedood omdat zij werden gezien als een teken van ongeluk voor de familie.

In de meeste gevallen waren geschriften gebaseerd op de aanname van geïdealiseerde verhoudingen binnen een familie. Idealiter was de vader het hoofd van de familie; hij was verantwoordelijk voor de medische en financiële zorg. Hij was ook de belangrijkste verantwoordelijke voor de opvoeding. In sommige gevallen getuigde zijn reactie op zijn kinderen van emotie. Emoties waren echter hoofdzakelijk voorbehouden aan de moeder. Zij werd geacht in het bijzonder van haar zoons te houden, maar in het algemeen hield ze evenzeer van haar dochters. Moeders waren verantwoordelijk voor de lichamelijke zorg van hun zeer jonge kinderen.

Een kind in deze ideale gezinssamenstelling vervulde verschillende rollen, afhankelijk van zijn leeftijd. Zo vond men dat kinderen tot vijf jaar oud alleen maar liefde behoorden te krijgen; enkele uitzonderingen daar gelaten kregen zij niet veel karakter of stem toegeschreven. Kinderen boven deze leeftijd begonnen idealiter verantwoordelijkheden op zich te nemen ten behoeve van hun ouders. Bovendien werden zij rond deze leeftijd verantwoordelijk voor hun eigen daden. Van tieners tot ongeveer zestien jaar werd idealiter verwacht dat ze zich plichtsgetrouw aan de studie wijdden en hun sociale vaardigheden oefenden, bijvoorbeeld om gehoorzame en liefvallige echtgenotes te zijn of respectvolle zoons die hun familie tot eer willen zijn.

Uit anekdotische verhalen vernemen we dat deze positieve en ideale rollen werden uitgewerkt in verschillende onderwerpen, maar ook dat deze rollen hun negatieve (zij het ideale) kant hadden, en dat grote obstakels de praktische realisatie van het ideaal vaak in de weg stonden. Ten eerste zouden vaders vaak afwezig zijn geweest. In zulke gevallen groeiden kinderen soms op in de familie van hun moeder, waar één van de grootste gevaren werd gevormd door de oom van moederszijde. Ten tweede werden ook moeders vaak als afwezig beschreven. Ten gevolge hiervan groeiden sommige kinderen op met een plaatsvervangende moeder, die een ander groot gevaar vormde voor het

overleven van het kind. Een derde uitdaging voor het positieve familie-ideaal waren kinderen die hun ouders teleurstelden door niet de doelen te bereiken die hun waren gesteld.

Een ander probleem voor het handhaven van de ideale familiesamenstelling en de verhoudingen binnen een familie is –naast het uitvallen van vader of moeder– de dood van het kind. Kindersterfte is problematisch ten aanzien van het gepaste rituele gedrag van de ouders en familie, en van de manier waarop zij emotioneel omgaan met het verlies van hun nageslacht. Soms wordt het thema van kindersterfte door schrijvers gebruikt om een crisis binnen een gemeenschap te illustreren. Het lichaam van een anoniem dood kind kan bovendien zelfs problemen veroorzaken voor gemeenschappen die niet verwant zijn met dat kind en er derhalve geen bloedband mee hebben.

Opzet van het proefschrift

De structuur van dit proefschrift volgt min of meer de chronologische lijn van het proces van opgroeien van een persoon. Dit houdt in dat ik, na een algemene leeftijdsindeling te hebben geïntroduceerd en een algemeen beeld te hebben geschetst van ‘het middeleeuwse kind’, prenatale ontwikkelingen en ontwikkelingen van zeer jonge kinderen bespreek, alsook de zorg voor jonge kinderen en vroege kinderziektes. Vervolgens richt ik me op de relatie van jonge kinderen met hun directe sociale omgeving, en daarna op de opvoeding van oudere kinderen. Voor de conclusie behandel ik de laatste fase, de dood van kinderen.

Tegelijkertijd kan worden gesteld dat dit groeiproces eveneens een beweging weergeeft van het ongeciviliseerde lichaam van een kind of foetus naar zijn fysieke vervolmaking en zijn integratie binnen een groep van reeds ontwikkelde lichamen. De gevaren die een kind ontmoet hebben vooral betrekking op het lichaam. Het cultiveren van het lichaam vormt een belangrijk deel van de opvoedingsinspanningen. Sterven betekent de ontbinding van het lichaam en de integratie van de ziel in de wereld van de doden of de wereld van wedergeboorte, vaak in de vorm van een lichaam zonder substantie, binnen een groep zielen afkomstig van volwassenen en andere dode mensen of zelfs gewezen dieren. Zo volgen we de vorming van het kind – vorming in de zin van het stapsgewijs vorm krijgen van het lichaam en parallel daaraan de ontwikkeling van de intellectuele en culturele capaciteiten.

Mijn benadering is gebaseerd op de aanname dat de fysieke groei van het kind altijd de ontwikkeling van het lichaam met zich meeneemt en de cultivering van het kind binnen zijn menselijke omgeving. Na het schetsen van een algemeen portret van het middeleeuwse kind in hoofdstuk II, onderzoek ik in hoofdstuk III hoe het lichaam van het kind wordt geïntegreerd in de

gemeenschap die hem omgeeft. Ik analyseer de theoretische opvattingen van de geletterde mannelijke medisch specialist, en ik bespreek de praktische behandeling van het lichaam van het kind – vanuit het perspectief van de mannelijke intelligentsia.

De verhoudingen tussen vader, moeder en kind, die het nucleaire gezin vormen, zijn volgens middeleeuwse Chinese geschriften essentieel in welke bekende gemeenschap dan ook. Omdat deze elementaire structuur vaak werd verstoord door sociale onrust en dood, was de uitgebreide familie een onmisbare bron van hulp voor de opvoeding van kinderen. In hoofdstuk IV bespreek ik daarom de betekenis van het kerngezin en de uitgebreide familie met betrekking tot kinderen. Vervolgens verbreed ik deze analyse van sociale verhoudingen door de interactie te bespreken van kinderen met andere kinderen en met hun grotere sociale omgeving.

Hoofdstuk V handelt over de gevaren die de zojuist genoemde verhoudingen in zich dragen, aangezien alle welwillende leden van de samenleving, vooral moeders en hun familie, ook een bedreiging kunnen vormen voor het kind. Verder bespreek ik de lichamelijke zwakheid van het kind, de gevaren die het ontmoet buiten menselijk gebied en de risico's die bredere sociale onrust voor het kind meebrengt.

Onderwijs, vooral het onderwijs gericht op geletterdheid, speelde een belangrijke rol in geschriften van de mannelijke elite. Even belangrijk als alfabetisering blijkt beheersing van correct gedrag te zijn geweest. Nadat de zoons van de elite thuis zijn onderwezen, worden zij als tieners geacht hun studie buiten het kerngezin voort te zetten. In hoofdstuk VI bespreek ik daarom ook het schoolonderwijs voor tieners en de opleiding tot een beroep.

Tot slot bespreek ik zaken omtrent de dood. In de dood bleef iedereen in het algemeen dezelfde als daarvoor: een volwassene bleef een volwassene en leefde als een volwassene in het hiernamaals; een kind bleef een kind en leefde als een kind in het hiernamaals. Een groot probleem van dode kinderen was dat zij nooit nakomelingen zouden hebben. Dientengevolge konden zij nooit zelf voorouders worden en raakten ze gemakkelijk in vergetelheid; ze konden verdwaalde, hongerige geesten worden. Talrijke beschrijvingen getuigen van deze gevaarlijke situatie; ik analyseer deze in hoofdstuk VII.

Met dit verkennend onderzoek hoop ik een bijdrage te leveren aan het kleine, maar recentelijk gestaag groeiende terrein van "Geschiedenis van de kindertijd in China". Voor deze onderneming heb ik middeleeuws materiaal blootgelegd met vragen omtrent kinderen die niet alleen nieuwe manieren bieden waarop mediëvisten van China zich nieuwe inzichten kunnen verwerven in de manieren waarop gemeenschappen zich handhaafden, maar die ook –nog belangrijker– uitdagingen bieden voor *'historians of childhood'* om China te

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From 2004-2006 I was able to sustain myself through a teaching position at the Chinese department of Leiden University. These two years contained magic months spent at Burgerzaken Café where I have written more than half of my entire thesis (and where I continue my writings). I want to thank everybody there, especially Carolina Toret. Among those people who have shown me the intricate merits that acts of procrastination contain for new research were above all Lewis Mayo and Christian Uhl, real friends and teachers. Their support can never be made equal. I also thank Ethan Mark for his encouragement in many ways. Furthermore, there are a number of people who came along with the interior of Burgerzaken, who made me drink and laugh a lot, who made me feel at home and even gave me their home – which made me work most efficiently.

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Curriculum Vitae

Annika Pissin is afkomstig uit de stad Kaiserslautern, het *Bundesland* Rheinland Pfalz van het land Duitsland. Zij werd er in het laatste regeringsjaar van bondskanselier Willy Brandt [1973] geboren en groeide vervolgens op in het dorp Heidenrod Kemel in het *Bundesland* Hessen. Als kind las zij graag boeken en zij hield zeer van bergen en bossen. In het elfde jaar van de regeringsperiode van bondskanselier Kohl [1993] behaalde zij het *Abitur* aan het Gymnasium Elly-Heuss-Schule te Wiesbaden. In de zomer van het vijfde jaar van Heisei [1993] vertrok zij naar de stad Tokyo in het land Japan waar zij tot het zevende jaar van Heisei [1995] verbleef om de taal van dit land te leren. Ook voedde zij een kind van een ander familie op en vooral beklom zij bergen. In het dertiende jaar van de regeringsperiode van bondskanselier Kohl [1995] vertrok zij naar de stad Heidelberg in het *Bundesland* Baden-Württemberg in het land Duitsland waar zij vier jaar lang leefde, studeerde, bergen beklom en nog twee kinderen van weer een ander familie opvoedde. Zij begon haar studie Moderne Sinologie en Economie aan de Rupertus Carolus Universiteit te Heidelberg en een jaar later de studies Geografie en Ethnologie. Nog een jaar later begon zij haar studie Klassieke Sinologie en daarna Filosofie. In het begin van de regeringsperiode van de bondskanselier Schröder [januari 1999] behaalde ze het diploma *Zwischenprüfung* voor Ethnologie en even later de *Zwischenprüfung* voor Klassieke Sinologie. Vervolgens verbleef zij vanaf de zomer van het jaar 88 [1999] tot en met de zomer van het jaar 89 [2000] in de republiek Taiwan, in de stad Tainan om daar haar kennis van het klassiek Chinees te verdiepen, modern Chinees te leren, antropologisch onderzoek aan de Mazu-tempel te verrichten en door de bergen te lopen. In het zesde jaar van de regeringsperiode van minister-president Kok [2000] ging zij naar de stad Leiden in de provincie Zuid-Holland in het land Nederland waar zij aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden aan de opleiding Talen en Culturen van China studeerde met als bijvakken Antropologie, Geschiedenis en Filosofie. Er waren geen bergen en haar vrienden vonden haar landkeuze raar. Toch verbleef zij daar voor een lange tijd, ging verder met het opvoeden van de twee kinderen en legde haar doctoraalexamen af in de achtste maand van het eerste jaar van de regeringsperiode van minister-president Balkenende [augustus 2003]. Tussen de negende maand van het tweede jaar en de negende maand van het zevende jaar van deze regeringsperiode [september 2004 tot september 2009] werkte zij als externe onderzoeker bij de sectie Chinese Geschiedenis van het Sinologisch Instituut om haar onderzoek over kinderen in het middeleeuwse China in een proefschrift uit te werken. In deze periode hoefde zij de twee kinderen niet meer op te voeden maar doceerde drie jaren lang klassiek Chinees en Chinese geschiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden. Haar studenten waren talrijk. Ook verbleef zij enkele maanden in Taiwan en Duitsland waar zij onderzoek voor haar proefschrift verrichtte. In de herfst van haar laatste jaar te Leiden trok zij de bergen in en sindsdien weet niemand meer waar zij is gebleven.