**Xiaoshuo as “Family Instructions”: The Rhetoric of Didacticism in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel Qilu Deng**

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**ABSTRACT**

What is unique about the eighteenth-century novel Qilu deng (The Warning Light at the Crossroads) is the fact that in its initial circulation many hand-copied versions of the novel had also the novelist's "Jiaxun zhunyan" (The Earnest Words of Family Instructions) attached. Obviously, the novel and the family instructions were meant to be read together. One should not feel too surprised if one is aware that some traditional bibliographers had always classified zhengui (writings of admonishment) as one kind of xiaoshuo. Obviously, Qilu deng was meant to be read as "fictionalized" family instructions. This essay offers a close reading of the novel together with the "Jiaxun zhunyan," exploring the complicated relationships between the two. One of the conclusions it reaches is that the novel is often most compelling when it reads the least like family instructions despite or because of its jiaxun agenda.

**Key Words:** family Instructions, didacticism, novel

Li Lüyuan's 李緣園 (1707-1790) Qilu deng 崔路燈 (The Warning Light at the Crossroads) was completed around 1777, but it did not see print for a very long period of time (more than a century had passed before its first and yet incomplete printed edition came out in 1924). It was mainly circulated in the form of hand-written copies until a new complete and collated edition was published in 1980,¹ a fate not unusual for many works of traditional Chinese vernacular fic-

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¹ For an account of the history of the circulation of the novel, see Luan Xing's 樂星 "Jiaoben xu" 校本序 and "Jiaokan shuoming" 校勘說明 attached to Qilu deng (Zhengzhou: Zhong-
tion. However, what has made *Qilu deng* unique is the fact that many hand-copied versions of the novel had also the author’s “Jiaxun zhunyan” 家訓諄言 (The Earnest Words of Family Instructions) attached. Considering that writing and reading *jiaxun* 家訓 (family instructions) were a very popular phenomenon among the gentry in Ming-Qing China, one should not be surprised to learn that a Qing literati novelist, such as Li Lüyuan, wrote something like “family instructions.” The author of the novel *Xu Jin Ping Mei* 續金瓶梅 (A Sequel to *Jin Ping Mei*), Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (1599–1671) also wrote a work titled *jiazheng xuzhi* 家政須知 (The Essentials of Family Governing). But to circulate a vernacular novel with “family instructions” attached was indeed very rare throughout the entire history of Chinese fiction. It highlights the strong didactic tendency of this fictional work as well as the popularity of *jiaxun* during that time. It is believed that when hand-copying this novel, Li Lüyuan’s students also copied his “Jiaxun zhunyan” and attached it to the text proper of the novel as a sort of reading guide for the reader, presumably with the consent of their common author. Li’s “Jiaxun zhunyan” was compiled while he was serving as a tutor for the children of his clansmen. It was very likely that the entire novel and the “Jiaxun zhunyan” were completed during the same year. One of his students left the following comments on a hand-copied edition of the novel:

Those scholars (*xuezhe* 學者) who would like to read *Qilu deng* must read “Jiaxun zhunyan.” They will realize that this novel cannot be compared to those casual writings because of its morally edifying power and its capacity to provide beneficial instructions.

For a modern reader, that *xiaoshuo* 小說 (understood as fiction) and *jiaxun* are two rather different kinds of writing is something taken for granted, a major difference being that one is fictional while the other didactic and often testamentary. In traditional China, the distinctions between the two, however, were not always that obvious. For example, in the classification system adopted by the

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4. *Ziliao*, p. 101. Note here the reference to scholars. Apparently, the intended audience of the novel was the sons of the gentry families and the author’s peers who were confronted with the task of providing proper education to their sons.
Ming writer Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), one subcategory of xiaoshuo is zhen-gui 篇規 (writings of admonishment). Consequently, works such as Yanshi jiaxun 頭氏家訓 (Yan’s Family Instructions) and Yuanshi shifan 袁氏世範 (Yuan’s Precepts for Social Life), which are usually viewed as works of jiaxun, were classified by Hu as belonging to the category of xiaoshuo. Of course, Hu Yinglin’s classifying rationale was not that of “fictionality” but that of the so-called “four categories” convention (sibu 四部). According to him, xiaoshuo referred to those minor works within the category of zibu 子部 (miscellaneous writings) (xiaoshuo, zishu liu ye 小說，子書流也). For him, what a modern reader would normally consider fiction or xiaoshuo, such as Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 (The Romance of Three Kingdoms) and Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳 (Water Margin), were works of what he would call yanyi 演義 (a loose generic tag for those fictionalized versions of history), which were even more insignificant than what he would consider xiaoshuo precisely because of the assumed fictionality of the former. Despite the complicated differences between a Ming bibliographer’s understanding of xiaoshuo and our modern concept of what xiaoshuo should be, Hu Yinglin’s categorization does help highlight the close connection between Qilu deng and the con-

5. Hu Yinglin, “Jiuli xulun” 九流緝論, Shaoshi shanfang bicong 少室山房筆藪, in Huang Lin 黃霖 and Han Tongwen 韓同文, Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan 中國歷代小說論著選 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin, 1982), vol. 1, p. 146. However, in the eighteenth-century massive catalogue Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要, which was compiled by Jih Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) under imperial sponsorship, Yuanshi shifan was reclassified as belonging to rujia 儒家 (Confucianism) rather than the category of zajiia 雜家 (miscellanies doctrines) as most bibliographers had done, a change reflecting the elevated status of works of jiaxun during that period, as noted by Patricia Ebrey, Family and Property in Sung China: Yuan Ts’ai’s Precepts for Social Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), note 13, p. 170. In fact, many other jiaxun-like works such as Liu Qingzhi’s 劉清之 (1130–1195) fiezi tonglu 戒子通錄 are elevated into the genre of Confucian writings in Siku quanshu.


duct book "Jiaxun zhunyan" assumed by their common author Li Luyuan and many of his contemporaries. This assumption about the intimate relationship between xiashuo and conduct books was certainly not unique in late imperial China. Ding Yaokang claimed that his novel Xu Jin Ping Mei was written to be a detailed illustration to the popular Taoist conduct book of Taishang kaiying pian 太上感应篇 (The Taishang Tract of Actions and Retributions). Almost every chapter of the novel begins with a reference to the teachings of this conduct book. The author of the preface to the eighteenth-century novel Jinshi yuan 金石緣 (The Marriage of Gold and Stone) also urges the reader to read the novel as Taishang ganying pian. It is probably accurate to say that, as far as the author of Qilu deng was concerned, his novel was written and should be read as a more elaborate but fictionalized version of jiaxun. This particular didactic view of fiction was shared by at least another Qing fiction writer, the author of the eighteenth-century collection of short stories, Ba Dongtian 八洞天 (Eight Fairylands). The alternative title of one story in this collection is “Ming jiaxun” 明家訓 (Illustrating Family Instructions). This story is about how an evil son suffers for his unfiliality when his own son turns out to be equally unfilial, thus driving home the jiaxun-like message that one should be a good role model for one’s own son.

A great number of collections of family instructions are extant from the late imperial period, although systematic study of this genre has yet to be conducted. However, some preliminary studies have shown that the family instructions

8. Huang Lin and Han Tongwen, p. 429.
9. See Badong tian, in Wuse shi deng lianzhong 五色石等兩種 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1993). Some scholars attribute the collection to Xu Shukui 徐述夔 (d. 1763 or 1762), who was also believed to be the author of another collection of short stories. Wuse shi 五色石 (Five-Colored Stone).
from that period were often characterized by their authors’ pedagogical and testamentary intentions. These family instructions could be in various forms, long or short, and private or public. One scholar observes that family instructions usually “show how morality and the problem of generation succession, on the one hand, and the demands of status honor and social display, on the other, combined to make the creation of an instruction a testamentary act, designed to dispel perennial Confucian fear of ritual decay.”¹¹ Not explicitly testamentary, “Jiaxun zhunyan” was completed by Li Luyuan when he was seventy one (an age when one would usually feel the “testamentary” urge). Since its immediate audience was his students in the clan school, its “pedagogical” intention is even more obvious. There seems to have been no attempt to classify the total eighty one items into certain coherent categories in the “Jiaxun zhunyan” and it is in the form of “analects,” discussing at random various issues of the management of a gentry family, and especially the education of youngsters.

Li’s novel Qilu deng is also pedagogical in the sense that it is literally about the education of youngsters and its crucial relation to the maintenance of the well-being of a gentry family as well as in the sense that the reading of the novel is meant by the author to be an “educational” and a morally edifying experience. In other words, this novel is designed to be read as “family instructions,” a fact that seems to be confirmed by the neat correspondences between the didactic messages repeated throughout the novel and the instructions listed in the attached “Jiaxun zhunyan.” In fact, at one point in the novel, the narrator explicitly compares the novel to a book of jiazheng pu 家政譜 (Guide to Proper Family Governing; 107.998). The very words jiaxun and tingxun 庭訓 (father’s instructions) appear frequently at various points in the novel to remind the reader of its own jiaxun agenda. Here in the novel the word jiaxun may refer to the general moral tradition of the forefathers or to the general principles for running a gentry family rather than a specific body of “instructions” in the form of a written text. For example, trying to advise Tan Shaowen 譚紹聞 and his licentious peers against loose behavior, Cheng Songshu 程嵩淑 appeals to those moral maxims and behavior codes presented in the family instructions by the wise men in the past (qianxian jiaxun tiaogui 前賢家訓條規; 20.205); we are told

¹¹ on jiaxun source materials, the reader is referred to Taga Akigorō 多賀秋五郎, Sofu no Kenkyū 宗譜の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Bunko, 1960), which is referred to by Furth in her article and Lu Lin 隆林, ed. Zhonghua jiaxun daguan 中華家訓大觀 (Hefei, Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1994).
the reason that Tan Shaowen is initially able to resist the bad influence of his peers is because he has been taught at least some doctrines from the Confucian classics and the behavior rules prescribed in jiaxun (21.207), although he eventually succumbs to the pressures later. Here jiaxun is juxtaposed with the Confucian classics in terms of their edifying function. Later Tan Shaowen's fall is blamed on his failure to follow his father's instructions (tingxun 庭訓, 81.781). 12 Finally, Tan Shaowen's miraculous moral rebirth in the last part of the novel is again attributed to the sustaining effect of his father's tingxun (94.876).

Before exploring in detail how this novel is meant to be read as "family instructions," we have to discuss briefly the implications of the concept of "family" or jia 家 as presented in the novel. Patricia Ebrey has differentiated between two conceptions of family in late imperial China: one is network-oriented and associated with the ancient notion of the patriarchal lineage (zong 宗), and the other is more materialist, associated with the household as a budgetary unit (jia). 13 Obviously, Qilu deng's focus is on the latter, the household, which is closer to the modern concept of family, but the lurking presence of the concept of network-oriented family is always there throughout the novel to contextualize the story of the ups and downs of a nuclear jia. In fact, the concept of clan lineage looms fairly large in both the first and third parts of the novel. The first chapter is about Tan Xiaoyi’s 譚孝義 visit to his clansmen in the south to participate in the compilation of the genealogy of their clan (zupu 族譜). It is here that the reader is introduced to Tan Shaowen 譚紹文, Shaowen's distant clan cousin (zuxiong 族兄), who is to reappear in the last part of the novel to assume a crucial role in Tan Shaowen's moral regeneration.

Structurally, the novel is composed of three parts: the focus of the first part (chapters 1–12) is on the father, Tan Xiaoyi and his anxiety over his son’s education; the second part (chapters 13–82) concentrates on the son, Tan Shaowen and his appalling moral degeneration; the third part (chapters 83–108) focuses on Tan Shaowen’s clan cousin, Tan Shaoyi, who functions almost as a surrogate father for Tan Shaowen in terms of overseeing the latter’s reform, and on his own grand official career, while Tan Shaowen, arguably the protagonist of the novel, almost recedes into a secondary position in this last part. In fact, the author Li Lüyuan was so caught up with the grand official career of this clan brother that

12. jiaxun and tingxun were almost interchangeable in their use in traditional China, although jiaxun was a more broad generic term that might contain the meaning of the latter.
he had to refrain himself from devoting too much space to him in the last section of the novel, a fact that the author is fully aware of. The narrator explicitly mentions this point in Chapter 107:

“If the author goes into detailed description of his impeccable official career, which demands much more space than the novel can afford, this novel would become a biography of a famous official (mingchen zhuan 名臣傳) rather than a chronological story of family governing (jiayong pu 家政譜). Even if this is only a work of fiction (baiguan xiaoshuo 科官小說), the author has to follow the rules of essay composition differentiating what is important (zhu 主) from what is secondary (cong 從).” (107.998)\textsuperscript{14}

Obviously, the second part is the bulk of the novel’s story. The detailed account of Tan Shaowen’s downfall is carefully confined within the second part, which begins right after the death of his father in Chapter 12, and which ends before the return of the “father” in the person of the clan cousin in Chapter 84. To a large extent, the son’s fall is due to the absence of a fatherly figure to serve as his moral guidance. However, he begins to bounce back with the reappearance of the father-like Tan Shaoyi in the third part (since his appearance in the first chapter Tan Shaoyi is not mentioned again till Chapter 84, p. 801). It is also in this third part that the idea of lineage or clan (zu) receives most attention. Words such as zuqing 族情 (the attachment one feels for each other as members of the same clan) appear repeatedly (89.836; 92.861). One line in the couplet title of Chapter 95 reads “Meeting His Clan Brothers [zudi 族弟], the Provincial Intendant Discourses on Family Regulations [jiafa 家法].” In this chapter Tan Shaoyi lectures on the behavior codes prescribed by their clan ancestors (zuaxun 祖訓), and the duty of the descendants to publish the writings of the older generations as an act of filiality (95. 892–893). Tan Shaoyi again mentions twice the importance of registering every member of the clan in the zu pu 族譜 (the clan genealogy) (95. 894; 107.1000), thus echoing the significance of Tan Xiaoyi’s visit to his clansmen in the south at the beginning of the novel, where, the reader is told, the children of the clansmen are receiving very good education and where Tan Xiaoyi wishes that his family could move back to their ancestors’ place so that his own son could benefit from a proper education. Consequently, the story of the ups and downs of a jia (the family of Tan Shaowen) is framed within the context

\textsuperscript{14} For a general discussion of the novel’s structure, see Lucie Borotova, \textit{A Confucian Story of the Prodigal Son} (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1991), pp. 16–62.
of the clan lineage or *zongzu* 宗族. The fall of a small *jia* could be seen in part as the result of the lack of protection by the clan lineage.\(^{15}\) Throughout the third part of the novel, the way Tan Shaowen is able to benefit from the encouragement and exemplary influence of Tan Shaoyi makes the reader wonder if this is meant by the author to show how Tan Shaowen is able to bounce back from repeated failures by virtue of the saving grace of his ancestors—as if Tan Shaoyi were dispatched by their common ancestors to save his distant cousin from disgracing their clan (especially considering the fact that this turn-around of Tan Shaowen is so sudden, almost without explanation). The return of the “surrogate father” in the figure of Tan Shaoyi in the last part of the novel underscores the serious consequence of the absence of father, and, more symbolically, the resultant increasing importance of the help of clansmen in the life of someone who becomes fatherless, a message the author seems at pains to drive home. Read from the patrilineal perspective of *jiaxun*, the entire novel can be interpreted as a tripartite story about the painful generational succession in a gentry family: first, the untimely departure of the father; second, the fall of the son; third, the symbolic return of the father and the redemption of the son. In the third part, the successful succession of the patrilineal line is finally completed as Tan Shaowen’s own son succeeds in the examinations. Here the central story of the novel, the fall of Tan Shaowen is presented as a warning about the dangerous possibilities of the cessation of the patrilineal line. As in a typical *jiaxun*, the anxiety over successful generational succession is very obvious here in the novel. Part of Li Lüyuan’s intention of writing this novel seems to have been articulated in the last passage of his attached “family instruction:”

When the sons and grandsons become poor, they are forced to move their ancestors’ graves, sell land, exchange precious ornaments for rice, dismantle buildings to get bricks and pawn things for cash. All these are what those kind-hearted gentlemen could not bear to witness. But one has to contain their pity within one’s own heart rather than speaking out aloud in detail. Why? This is because all those doing well now must have ancestors who had led hard lives before; can any

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15. This might have something to do with the author Li Lüyuan’s own family background and his anxiety about his family living away from his clan relatives. The Li family originally lived in the county of Xin’an 新安 in Kaifeng 開封. However, because of the natural disasters that happened in the native place, Li Lüyuan’s grandfather Li Yulin 李玉琳 moved to the county of Baofeng 寶豐 in Ruzhou 汝州. There were records showing that Li Lüyuan returned to visit Xin’an several times and once even taught in the clan school there for three years. See Luan Xing, “Li Lüyuan zhuan,” *Zitiao*, pp. 1-2 and 27-29.
of descendants of a family boast that the family can remain prosperous forever?\(^{16}\)

Placed right ahead of the story proper of the novel, this particular family instruction, which concludes “Jiaxun zhunyan,” is intended to be a serious caution to the reader against any sense of smugness or superiority as he is about to witness the fall of the novel’s protagonist — this can happen to everyone or the son of any gentry family. The novel is meant to be “instructions” and warnings to every member of the gentry.

**I. Pedagogical Failure and the Fall of a Gentry Family**

With the above analysis of the general plot pattern of the novel in terms of how it is structurally informed by the *jiaxun* ideology, we are now in a better position to explore in detail the specific novelizing process of *jiaxun* — how the novel is meant to be read as illustrations to family instructions, focusing on “exhortations of the son” (誨子) (presumably because the continual prosperity of a gentry family depends mainly on the competence of a son or sons and most family instructions are therefore directed towards the sons).\(^{17}\) The beginning passage of the novel certainly sounds like a typical passage from *jiaxun*, albeit in a more conversational tone:

> A man’s life can be a success or a failure, but all this is in fact already decided during his teenage years. To be successful, a man has first to be honest in character and composed in conduct; he should be given strict family upbringing (家教) during his childhood; the relatives and fellow students he associates with must be well-disciplined children from good families. This is just like the case of a tree: it will grow big and strong if it is deeply rooted and receives good nourishment and care. As in the case of a man who is a failure, he is usually smart at trivial things but his character is superficial; sound advice from his father and elder brothers, for him, is just water pouring onto rock, having no effect; he cannot bear the company of respectable elders as if he were sitting on a blanket with needles piercing through; but he likes to befriend those who are morally compromising. This is surely to lead him to a disastrous end beyond salvation. This is why ancient people had this saying: “To establish oneself is as difficult as ascending to heaven, while to fail is as easy as burning off a hair.”

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\(^{16}\) *Ziliao*, p. 152.

\(^{17}\) For example, Liu Qingzi’s 劉淸之 (1130–1195) *Jiezì tonglù* 戎子通錄 is a collection of various historical figures’ advice and teachings to children. See the edition in the *Siku zhenben* 四庫珍本, 1st series.
This is a remark out of deep concern and a message one has to bear in mind. In fact, many fathers and elder brothers are concerned and worried but few young people pay their attention. (1.1)

Thus at the very beginning of the novel the reader is already told that the anticipated fall of the protagonist Tan Shaowen is probably due to what happens to him as a teenager and due to the improper family upbringing (jiujiao). The first part of the novel, where the father Tan Xiaoyi occupies the position of the protagonist for the moment, is already pervaded with a sense of impending crisis, although, on the surface, nothing has gone wrong yet. Tan Xiaoyi seems to be constantly worried if his son is getting a proper education. As indicated in its couplet title “In Memory of the Ancestors’ Legacy, A Thousand-Mile Trip Is Made for the Sake of Filial Duty/ In Worry of the Descendants, A Slap on the Head of the Son Is a Testimony to the Fatherly Concerns (念先澤千里伸孝思·慮後裔一掌寓慈情), the first chapter is about Tan Xiaoyi’s trip to his clansmen in the south for the compilation of the clan genealogy and his discovery upon his return that his son is not under careful supervision by his wife. The father’s trip to the south emphasizes the importance of the succession of patrilineal line and the concept of zu 族, while what he finds out upon his return — his son is not studying hard — and his resultant slap of his son underscore the importance of the son’s education. Here the issue of generational succession is made very prominent as the first half of the chapter is about “ancestors” (xianze 先澤), while the second half about “descendants” (houyi 後裔). Tan Xiaoyi confesses: “Living in this street, I have witnessed so many prosperous families going bankrupt in a very short period of time. I have been bothered by fear all the time.” (3.22) Indeed, the fear for family decline and decay dominates the first part of the novel (more about this point later). However, in this part, despite these expressions of anxiety, under his father’s strict supervision, Tan Shaowen’s education is not a major problem, although we are told that the son does not have a strong character and his mother dotes on him. His father is able to find him an excellent teacher, Lou Qianzhai 廖淸齋.18 However, things begin to change for the worse, when Tan Xiaoyi is recommended to receive imperial honors and has to travel to Beijing. During the two-year absence of the father, Hou Guanyu 侯冠玉 is chosen.

as Shaowen’s teacher because Lou Qianzhai has passed the juren examinations and has to travel to the capital to take the jinshi examinations. This sets in motion the downfall of Tan Shaowen. Later, upon his return from the capital, Tan Xiaoyi is so upset when he learns of what has become of his son under the supervision of this new teacher that he soon falls ill. His illness deteriorates rather rapidly. The death of the father Tan Xiaoyi in Chapter 12 marks a new stage in the life of Tan Shaowen and the beginning of the second part of the novel — the undoing of the son.

In the second part of the novel, the author is quite masterful in delineating the gradual process by which Tan Shaowen undergoes his moral degeneration that almost results in the complete ruination of his family. The lengthy second part is composed of 70 chapters (chapters 13–82) and it is divided into four sections by the accounts of three painful but futile attempts of “repentance” on the part of Tan Shaowen: the first section is from Chapter 13 to Chapter 25. Here, due to the bad influence of the teacher and peers, Tan Shaowen begins drinking and gambling in secret, starts a romance with a female impersonator and has an affair with his maid; the second section (chapters 26–35) begins with his first major repentance (26.245) but he soon falls into the trap set up by people like Xia Fengruo 夏逢若 and begins gambling in public and is humiliated when he is caught in an affair with the wife of a shoemaker; the third section (chapters 36–55) begins with another repentance by Tan Shaowen but he soon again succumbs to the appeal of gambling and is dragged into legal trouble due to the suicide of a gambler; the fourth section (56–82) once again starts with Tan Shaowen’s repentance and his decision to return to serious study after finding an excellent teacher. However, his new tutor is driven away due to the elaborate tricks by those determined to draw him back to gambling and he soon resumes gambling.

It is in this section that Tan Shaowen’s downfall reaches its nadir. He attempts to commit suicide under the pressures of the accumulating gambling debts; he involves himself with various criminal activities such as opening a gambling den at his own home and counterfeiting coins. All this culminates in a very symbolic act — selling timber grown at his father’s burial site (chapters 81 and 82). It is symbolic in the sense that selling trees from the burial site of the father is considered to be an extremely unfilial act on the part of a son, an indication that the son has no regard for his father and ancestors. Read in the con-

19. Gambling is considered a very serious threat to the moral upbringing of young people as well as the well-being of a gentry family in the novelist’s “Jiaxun zhunyan” and many other jiaxun works; see Ziliao, p. 142 and Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy,” p. 197.
text of the *jiaxun* ideology of the novel, this also symbolizes the ultimate crisis of
the patrilineal succession. It is significant that the four sections of the second
part of the novel are divided by three acts of repentance on the part of Tan
Shaowen and it dramatizes the painful and treacherous process through which
our protagonist begins his downfall. It illustrates graphically how Tan Shaowen,
despite his repeated repentance and determination to redeem himself, is gradu-
ally and almost inevitably reduced to contemplating suicide and having to sell
the trees at the burial site of his father (thus becoming the ultimate unfilial son).

Here the influence of the environment appears to be decisive: the un-
expected death of the father, the doting of the mother, the incompetent and even
immoral tutors, and most important of all, the bad influence of his nefarious
peers. Our novelist almost succeeds in convincing us that the impact of environ-
ment is too overwhelming for anyone to act otherwise. Given his situation, Tan
Shaowen can do almost nothing but transgress. However, the narrator also
attributes Tan's downfall to his own weak character. The novel's focus on one
small detail of this character is illustrative in this regard: Tan Shaowen's ten-
dency to blush, a sign of his shy personality. For example, his blushing is first
mentioned when he takes part in the ritual of swearing brotherhood in a Taoist
temple: "Feeling a bit uneasy, Tan Shaowen blushed. He used to have strict fam-
ily upbringing (jiajiao 家教) and had been taught by his father and teacher. This
is why he felt uneasy about what was going on now." (16.166)20 A bit later, when
invited to gamble, Tan Shaowen blushes again, saying that he doesn't know how
to play the gambling game. (16.171) However, in the next chapter, when rolling
dice in a drinking game with Sheng Xiqiao 盛希橋 and a prostitute, Tan is
already said to be feeling quite at home: "his face even failed to turn red and his
hands did not shake at all." (17.177) When introduced to other lewd activities,
however, he blushed again: for example, his face turns red when the female
impersonator begins to flirt with him; (21.211) he blushes once more when he is
first introduced to the game of quail-fighting; (34.319) Besides being bashful in
personality, Tan Shaowen blushes because at that time he still has qualms over
being part of these activities. In a word, he still has a sense of shame. However,
later when he becomes of one these people (*feiren* 匪人), there is no reason for his
face to turn red:

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20. In "Jiaxun zhunyan" the author has advised against establishing nominal kinship (*ren
ganqin* 詞幹親) with one another, which is obviously a threat to the sanctity of clan lineage.
Swearing brotherhood can be viewed in the same category as *ren ganqin*; see Ziliao, p. 144.
When Tan Shaowen entered the room, the three were just in the middle of gambling. The two students stood up blushing. . . . This is the first time Shaowen visited the family of his in-laws and he felt bored. He happened to enter this gambling place and couldn’t help himself. (50.466-467)

This time those who blush are the two young students instead of Tan Shaowen, who is already an old hand in gambling by then. By virtue of this subtle reference to the question of who is blushing, the reader is shown what a long way Tan Shaowen has come since his face turns red for the first time when participating in such disgraceful activities. Of course, despite this subtle change, Tan Shaowen is still a very shy person in general and he is in constant fear of losing face, although what specifically makes him feel ashamed may have changed. His own sense of “etiquette” often renders him indecisive in breaking up with his corrupting peers while his “thin-skinnedness” becomes his liability. This is a fatal vulnerability pointed out early by the loyal servant Wang Zhong: “You are going to suffer a lot for being thin-skinned.” (buhao yisi 不好意思; 16.170). After he was caught in adultery with another woman, Tan Shaowen even threatens to commit suicide if other family members merely mention this scandal (30.272). Tan Shaowen’s vanity also results in his extravaganza (the celebration of his new-born son and his own mother’s birthday) when the family is already in dire financial situation (chapters 77, 78 and 79). In his “Jiaxun zhunyan” the novelist already warns that vanity or fear of losing face (buhao yisi) is another important factor that would lead a family into decline.21

This shyness or vanity on Tan Shaowen’s part is also related to his general incompetence. He is always at a loss as to what to do whenever there is a crisis. All he can do is burying his head in the sand: his favorite act when in trouble is to find relief in sleep, a usual strategy a frightened child often resorts to after misbehavior. For example, he sleeps for almost three days after his affair with the shoemaker’s wife is exposed; after being involved in a gambling scandal, he again resorts to sleeping (56.474); after losing eight hundred taels of silver in gambling he again tries to sleep away his regrets and worries (59.545); he does the same thing when he learns that someone runs away with his money after promising him that the money will be used to counterfeit coins for him. (76.735) Often he is saved by other people’s kindness rather than his own efforts at self-vindication or redemption. This becomes most obvious when he is implicated in legal troubles. Each time he is saved by a judge who is reluctant to punish him thanks to his good family background or the judge’s memory that Tan is once a

good student. All these details conjure up an image of a very vulnerable young man, which helps to vindicate the novel’s emphasis on the need to be in constant worry about one’s “moral vulnerability” and “the resultant decline of the gentry family” as exhorted in the “Jiaxun Zunyan:” “No matter what happens in one’s life, if one can remember the word ‘fear’ (pa 怕), one would not err too far.”22 This is also reminiscent of Tan Xiaoyi’s anxiety and his discourse on “fear” at the beginning of the novel as discussed before, the fear that taking one wrong step will lead to rapid moral degeneration and the decline of the whole family. This is also a central theme in many works of jiaxun.23

II. Within the Walls of A Family Compound

Many readers are impressed with the novel’s detailed account of the perils the young protagonist is to face once he ventures outside the compound of home or jia. Indeed, Tan Shaoven’s association with peers of compromising moral character proves to be fatal. How to safely guard the door of the family appears to have become a crucial issue. Time and again, people such as Xia Fengruo are able to come in and “seduce” Shaoven away from his study and his virtuous wife. Of course, the most dramatic account of the importance of guarding the door is in Chapter 89, when Tan Shaoven is already an “awakened” person: Xia Fengruo comes to visit again, but this time our protagonist is studying with his son in a newly-purchased house with the gate locked from outside. When Xia asks to come in, Tan Shaoven is able to keep him out by pretending that the gate key is in the hands of his mother. Later when Zhang Zhengxin 張正心 (a nice guy as one can tell from his name) asks to open the door, Shaoven lets him in by throwing the key to him over the wall. After Zhang leaves, Shaoven asks the servant to lock the gate again from outside. The narrator is eager to add:

During the two visits by Xia Ding 夏鼎 (Xia Fengruo) and Zhang Zhengxin, Tan

22. Zitiáo, 149. Elsewhere in “Jiaxun zhuunyan” (p. 148), Li Lìyuan also urges his audience to be aware of the need to “be afraid” (jié 懼) and “to be vigilant” (shèn 憑).
23. In her study of jiaxun, Furth (“The Patriarch’s Legacy,” p. 194–195) discusses the pervading fear of decline and decay in many works of this genre; see also Ebrey’s discussions of some of Song jiaxun writers’ views on this issue in her Family and Property in Sung China, pp. 40 and 159. For example, note Sima Guang’s warning quoted by her: “What took a man several decades of hard work to accumulate his sons can dissipate through extravagance in a year” (p. 40); the reader is also referred to Ping-ti Ho, The Ladder of Success in imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 141–147 for a discussion of the fear of downward mobility in Ming-Qing China.
Shaowen's attitudes are entirely different in terms of hiding the key inside and throwing the key outside to show whether that person is welcome or unwelcome. The "key" should always be kept in the control of oneself and how can it be in the hands of others (bābing zài jī, qízài rén zài 把柄在己，其在人哉). (89.840).

Obviously, the narrator is emphasizing, with the help of the image of key, that one is ultimately responsible for one's own behavior. By the same token, the decline of a family has its root cause within that family itself (what is within the walls). As has been observed, the fear for "inner corrosion" is a very prominent issue in a jiāxīn. 24 This point is driven home when the reader is told at the beginning of the novel that Tan Xiaoyi and his family live in the street called Xiaoqiang jie 蕭牆街, which immediately reminds people of the common Chinese saying huo qǐ xiāo qiáng (troubles have their origins within the walls). 25 Incidentally, in the novel, the "moral nature" of a family is often symbolized by the respective name of the street where that particular family lives. For example, Mme. Wang's (Tan Shaowen's mother) brother, Wang Chunyu 王春宇 is a merchant and this suggests that Mme. Wang's total incompetence in supervising the upbringing of her son may be related to the fact that she is originally from a merchant family (merchants were traditionally considered morally questionable because of their lack of training in Confucian teachings and their pursuits of profits). What is symbolically significant is the fact that her brother lives in a street with the name of Qumi jie 曲米街 (folk music and rice), which also happens to be the same street where Shaowen's second wife, Wu Cuijie, lives before she is married to him. Rice probably refers to Wang's business dealing of daily goods and money-making (zhìshēng 治生), while folk music may refer to Wu Cuijie's "bad" hobby for popular opera. Both female characters associated with the Qumi Street are supposed to be of relatively low cultural and moral status; on the other hand, Kong Yunxuan 孔耘軒, who is presented as an exemplary scholar and who is the father of Tan Shaowen's first virtuous wife Kong Huixin, lives in the street called Wenchang jie 文昌街. Of course, Wenchang is the name of the god for scholars. Consequently, this change from being first married to a virtuous wife from the Wenchang Street then to marrying a wife from the Qumi Street parallels neatly the process of moral decline on part of the husband, Tan Shaowen, who, we are specifically told, lives in a street whose name has the symbolic cautionary meaning that "troubles have their origins with the walls,"

and who, we are led to believe, should blame himself or some of his family members for his stunning failures. In other words, what is important is within the walls; it is the people within the walls or the family compound that have the control of the “keys.” Besides Tan Shaowen and his father (the latter dies early in the novel), who else are “within the walls” and who else have control of the “keys”? They are the women within the family.

In his “Jiaxun zhunyan” Li Lüyuan does not devote too much space to the discussion of female members of the family (presumably because his immediate audience then was his male students in the clan school), while such issue is often an important topic in a typical jiaxun. Writing this lengthy novel, however, offers Li Lüyuan a full opportunity to express his views on this issue. It is in this sense of a fictionalized jiaxun that we have to conclude that Qitu deng is obviously a much more comprehensive jiaxun than his own “Jiaxun zhunyan.” The most prominent woman in the novel is Mme. Wang, Tan Shaowen’s doting mother, who plays a major role in the downfall of her own son. It is she who, during the absence of her husband, chooses Hou Guanyu as his son’s tutor when Lou Qianzhai has to resign after passing the juren examinations, a fatal misjudgment that not only seriously undermines her son’s chance for a sound education but also results in the shock and disappointment of her husband, Tan Xiaoyi, and ultimately his death. There are only too many examples in the novel demonstrating how her doting and her near-sightedness help quicken the downfall of her son as well as the decline of the family. Tan Shaowen’s complaint after his own “awakening” in the last part of the novel is certainly telling: “Mother, you have loved me too much and you have spoiled me.” (86.816) Another woman that has a negative impact on Tan Shaowen is his second wife Wu Cuijie. Her main hobby is theater, a sign of her compromising moral character, and, to make it even worse, she also likes gambling. The narrator deplores that “although Tan Shaowen had undermined some of the old household rules [lei shi jia gui 累世家規] of the Tan family, the basic ‘household management’ [nei zheng 内政] remained intact. However, after Wu Cuijie was married into this family and started gambling at home, the household management was completely disrupted.” (50.464) Early in the novel, the narrator is very adamant about this point when he declares that the role of women is even more crucial than that of men in maintaining the well-being of a gentry family. (4.32) A line in the concluding

verse of Chapter 11 reads: "Disaster is seeded as soon as the female governing starts [牧政初成福已贻]." (11.129) This is referring to the fact that Mme. Wang is assuming the role of a decision-maker during the absence and illness of her husband. 27 Of course, there are also a few "positive" women characters in the novel, such as Tan Shaowen's first wife, Kong Huiniang 孔惠娘 and his maid concubine Bingmei 冰梅. However, ironically, due to their very womanly virtue (as defined by the patriarchal ideology), they fail to exert any positive influence over Tan Shaowen. According to the traditional view on wifely virtue, a wife is not supposed to argue with her husband even if the latter is obviously wrong. Kong Huiniang is such a perfect "model" wife that she never openly criticizes Tan Shaowen and the only avenue for showing her disappointment is dying: she dies of a broken heart in Chapter 47, thus problematizing the implications of this model of womanly virtue, which the narrator, paradoxically, has taken great pains to praise. 28 Considering the fact that our male protagonist is pretty impressionable, he might have been saved much more easily if his wife and concubine were more active and stringent in their "remonstration." The first eighty chapters of the novel almost compel the reader to concede that with women such as those surrounding him (a doting mother plus the almost too obedient wife and concubine), Tan Shaowen is doomed to be a failure.

As argued above, the novel is almost too convincing in its demonstration of the inevitability of the fall of its protagonist, and, consequently, the reader might feel unsucessed by the sudden moral rebirth Tan Shaowen is supposed to have experienced in the last part of the novel. Of course, Shaowen's rebound is necessitated by the novelist's overall didactic jiaxun agenda, otherwise there would be no motivation (or rather hope) for the members of a gentry family to strive towards moral improvement and family prosperity. 29 At the end of the novel, the

27. There are more negative images of women in the novel, who are said to have become liabilities in their husbands' lives, such as the wives of Sheng Xiqiao and Hui Yangmin 惠養民.
29. But Tan Shaowen's sudden moral awakening and the development of the last part of the novel can also be explained in part by some factors in the author's own personal life. As the seventy-one year old author acknowledges in his own preface to the novel (Ziliao, p. 95), he began to write the novel thirty years ago but stopped after ten years of writing when he started his official career which lasted almost twenty years. He even quite candidly confesses that the last part might fail to live up to the expectations raised in the earlier part of the novel. It is generally believed that the portion up to around Chapter eighty was written before the author's tenure as an official while the last thirty chapters or so were
narrator confesses that "If [Tan Shaowen] had remained a wastrel as before and had failed to reform himself, how am I supposed to conclude this novel." (108.1014) The problem for a modern reader is probably the novel's failure to show how Tan Shaowen is suddenly able to achieve his moral rebirth after so many thwarted attempts before. Instead of showing, the narrator results to telling or explanatory summaries. In Chapter 85, the narrator, with little warning, tells the reader that Tan Shaowen is someone already reformed (\textit{gaixie guizheng de ren} 改邪歸正的人). (85.810) Here the reader is left on his or her own to figure out the reason. Perhaps, the sense of guilt as a result of selling his father's grave trees finally awakens him. This can be inferred from the equally dramatic change of Mme. Wang. During her visit to the grave of Tan Xiaoyi, the desolate grave site, with all the trees already cut down, suddenly makes her realize how the family has deteriorated and possibly her own responsibility for this deterioration. The narrator further comments: "Mme. Wang has always been a muddle-headed woman. How could she become so enlightened all of a sudden? This is due to the fact that wealth cultivates stupidity in a woman while suffering and frustrations enlighten her and even make her realize that books and pens are the most important things." (83.794) Interpreted according to this logic, Tan Shaowen's redemption process can be considered to have lasted almost as long as that of his moral degeneration. Every time the humiliation and hardship he suffers as a result of his transgression also become part of his redeeming process. In a word, he begins to pay for his own mistakes as soon as he starts to transgress (although this does not directly account for his reform). Suffering is an integral part of redemption and it is a form of paying for one's sins or mistakes. Only after enough suffering will one be able to achieve "moral rebirth."^{30}

^{30}. This is probably why in the seventeenth-century novel \textit{Xingshi yinyuan zhu} 醒世姻緣傳 (The Marriage that Awakens the World) the redeeming process its protagonist Chao Yuan undergoes in the person of Di Xichen, his reincarnation, is almost nothing but suffering. In this tradition, redemption mainly takes the form of paying for one's sins in terms of suffering. Once the debt is returned, the redemption is also completed. Of course, to a certain extent, Tan Shaowen's redemption continues after all this "suffering" in the form of doing all the right things but the reader is never given convincing explanations as to how this transformation is achieved.
Another important factor crucial to the success of Tan Shaowen’s redemption, according to the novel, is the “saving grace of his ancestors” (or in the word of the narrator, xianze 先澤). The ancestors’ intervention takes the form of the help by his distant clan cousin Tan Shaoyi, who always acts as a surrogate father in the last part of the novel. It is significant to note that Tan Shaoyi is not mentioned again since the first chapter till Chapter 84 (84.801) approximately the moment when the reader is told that Tan Shaowen is already a reformed person. Here in the novel again the central agenda of a jiaxun — the mandate of patrilineal succession — is allowed to be fulfilled, a feat a more typical work in the genre of jiaxun could only wish for but can never boast of. Another interesting fact is that, as the narrator frankly confesses, he cannot sustain his interest in continuing his story of a gentry household (or in his own words jiazheng pu) in the last part of the novel. This might be a sign that even the narrator himself is not completely persuaded by his own version of Tan Shaowen’s miraculous moral rebirth, which is probably not consistent with what is being suggested in the first eighty chapters. This inconsistency notwithstanding, the narrator has told a very convincing story about how easily one transgresses. Often this story is so convincing that the reader may wonder whether any superbly-written jiaxun is able to help halt such a “fall.”

III. Between Xiaoshuo and Jiaxun

There are many direct references to the negative impact of xiaoshuo in Qilu deng and the most prominent case is that of the sixteenth-century novel Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus or The Plume in the Golden Vase). One of Tan Shaowen’s tutors, we are told, even assigns his student to read this novel and the famous play Xi Xiangji 西厢記 (The Romance of the Western Chamber) because he believes reading them can help one master the principles of (eight-legged) essay composition, a view apparently advocated by some well-known fiction commentators such as Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608–1661) and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670–1698) but criticized by this novelist.31 Here those commentators’ views

31. Criticizing these commentators’ view that fictional works such as Shuihu zhuan is comparable to those great works of historiography, the author remarks in the preface to Qilu deng: “I would say if one cannot understand The Zuo Commentary and The Records of the Grand Historian (zuoshi 左史), how can one read these fictional works? If they can understand The Zuo Commentary and The Records of the Grand Historian, why do they have to read these works?” Ziliao, p. 94.
obviously become target of parody. Finding his son reading works such as *Jin Ping Mei* is so shocking to the father Tan Xiaoyi that he soon falls ill and eventually dies of this illness. Thus, fictional works like *Jin Ping Mei* are shown to be literally "lethal." This, as the novel is going to demonstrate, will be an important factor contributing to the moral degeneration of our young protagonist. In Chapter 18, Tan Shaowen and his friends in fact watch the performance of a certain play based on *Jin Ping Mei*, a further sign of the downfall of the son because right in the following chapter he is said to have an affair with his maid and in Chapter 21 he begins a romance with a female impersonator. All these are meant to be understood as the result of the bad influence of these harmful books. The moral impact of fiction is therefore underscored by default: reading bad xiaoshuo can have devastating moral impact on people.

The narrator also points out the danger of watching popular opera. The vulgar character of Tan Shaowen's second wife, Wu Cuijie, is attributed partly to her hobby for opera; an official is ridiculed when he tries to arrange dramatic performance of *Xixiang ji* for his superiors. This leads his superior to launch a lengthy discourse disparaging the moral and historical authenticity of this drama, proclaiming that its author should be punished with his tongue cut in hell. (95.888) However, the appeal of these genres of popular entertainment is often too strong too resist. Even Tan Xiaoyi and Lou Jianzhai once go to watch a play based on the novel *Xiyou ji*. This prompts the narrator to offer an uneasy apology: "Unlike sages, people [like Tan Xiaoyi] do sometimes feel bored. . . . Tan Xiaoyi and Lou Qianzhe are authentic Confucian scholars. How can they really take serious interest in this vulgar entertainment!" (10.110) By the same token, the narrator himself becomes liable to similar criticisms when he is found referring to other fictional works for rhetorical effect. For example, Xia Fengrui, when embarrassed, is said to have wished that he could dig a hole on the ground so that he could disappear immediately just as a particular character in the novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (The Romance of Thousand Gods) is capable of doing. (20.203) All this demonstrates the power of popular literature and, therefore, the urgent need to produce a different kind of *xiaoshuo* work that is morally edifying (consequently, the justification for Li Lüyuan's own writing of *Qilu deng*). In the novel, when given a copy of the new version of the *Book of Filiality* by Su Linchen 蘇霽臣, which is written in simple language and with many illustrative pictures, Cheng Songshu offers the following lengthy praise:

I just found out after reading the book you gave me a few days ago that you have always harbored the noble intention to promote morality. You have done this without the notice of other people during these past two decades. You use simple language to paraphrase the whole Book of Filiality so that a young child who is barely literati will understand it. Judging from this achievement, I would say it is much easier to write elegantly to win praise from famous scholars but it is far more difficult to make the sages’ profound principles accessible to women and children by using simple and easily comprehensible language. (90.850)

Cheng further praises Su’s strategy of using illustrations to make his book even more accessible to its readers (this illustrative book proves to be so attractive that even the opera fan Wu Cuijie confesses that she likes it better than those operas she has watched). (91.854) Then Cheng launches another attack on fictional works such as Jin Ping Mei and Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳 (Water Margin) Su Linchen’s response is very interesting: “I haven’t read Jin Ping Mei and Shuihu zhuan. But I heard people praise them for their superb compositional structure [bili zhangfa 筆力章法], saying they are comparable to the works of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 and Sima Qian 司馬遷.” Cheng’s answer is even more interesting: “They won’t be able to read these works if they cannot understand Zuoqiu and Shi Ji; they don’t need to read them if they can appreciate Zuoqiu and Shi Ji. This is very simple. These fictional works really cannot be compared with this work of yours.” (90.851) The remarks here are in fact an exact reiteration of what the author has claimed in his preface to Qilu deng (see note 31). Therefore, Cheng Songshu’s enthusiastic commend of Su’s work is in fact the author’s self-congratulatory apology about his involvement with fiction writing: an effort to make accessible to women and children the sages’ profound principles via easier medium. This is the ultimate justification for his writing this novel, although the novel’s actual intended audience, judging from the way it is written, is obviously the author’s peers and their educated sons rather than women and children who could barely read. Consequently, according to the author, his own Qilu deng, which was written to popularize his views on education and family management (as expressed in his “Jiaxun zhunyan”) in the form of a lengthy novel, is certainly comparable to Su Linchen’s efforts regarding The Book of Filiality.

As we have discussed before, a central theme in many works of jiaxun in traditional China has been the “need to be in constant fear [of erring]” (ju 懼) and “to be vigilant” (shen 慎). It is this jiaxun agenda to effectively make people realize “the need to be in constant fear” that compels Li to turn to writing fiction. The problem with a typical jiaxun is its inability to effectively cultivate fear in its readers’ mind due to its generic limitations, while xiaoshuo could “re-
create” this “fear” in an extremely compelling fashion by virtue of its representational power and entertaining appeal. Here an apology for fiction by another writer of the eighteenth century might be illuminating:

What is the purpose of writing fiction? It is to persuade people to do good and warn people against doing evil. Although the classics and histories are the books that are most morally edifying, they are often too difficult to comprehend and cannot reach a wide audience. Full of illustrations to the [retributive] relationship between doing good and achieving happiness or doing evil and suffering, exposure of the immoral and praise of the virtuous, fiction can be very effective in catching people's attention as if they were hearing the morning bell of a temple or witnessing the working out of the principle of karma. This is certainly beneficial to the amelioration of people's mind and social customs.33

In a word, xiaoshuo, if properly written and read, could be more effective than jiaxun in fulfilling the very agenda of the latter.

Indeed, “the need to be in constant fear” is an important aspect of the thematic concern of Qilu deng as a xiaoshuo on family instructions. Consequently, whether Qilu deng can be considered a successful xiaoshuo, according to the narrator himself, is whether it can effectively implant this “fear” in the minds of the reader:

A young student should be very careful with where he sets his feet. Being over cautious is at least better than being over self-indulgent. Look at those sages in the ancient times: they protect their own moral integrity like a piece of refined jade. As long as they live, they keep their vigilance as if they are constantly “at the edge of a cliff or tread on thin ice” [如臨深淵，如履薄冰]. This is why I am offering these earnest words [zhunyan 諄言; an implicit reference to his own “Jiaxun zhunyan”] through these graphic accounts. This [work] is the result of my pains-taking effort and it is hoped that reading of this work will help cultivate the sentiment of fear in the minds of those lucky youngsters. This is by no means an entertaining tale that one can soon forget after clapping and laughing. A poem testifies to this: “Drafting carefully one chapter after another/I didn’t dare to imitate the affected style of Jin Ping Mei; young children should not treat this work as an amusing story/It is instead a thunder-like cautionary tale to be read seriously.” (58.544)

Throughout the novel, the narrator is very careful in distancing his own discourse from those of other xiaoshuo writers. Several times when it comes to a scene of sexual intimacy, the narrator always refrains from going into any detail and makes the point that his noble intention is entirely different from those of other novelists: “If I continue to describe the tender feelings between Tan Shao-wen and Wu Cuijie, I would risk falling into the vulgar tricks of those fiction writers [xiaoshuo jia kejiu 小說家業助].” (50.463) When describing Tan Shaowen’s visit to a prostitute, the narrator justifies himself for not going into detail by criticizing other fiction writers’ eagerness to detail this kind of racy scene: he asks “if the writer really has the intention to provide a cautionary tale [chengyuyi 懲欲意], why would he lead the reader astray by obscene descriptions [dao yinci 導淫辭]?” (24.235). If the ultimate task of a xiaoshuo is to cultivate in the mind of its reader the fear for erring, then the author of Qilu deng also appears to be bothered by one of his own fears, the fear of being associated with “immoral” xiaoshuo writers, whose successes seemed to have stemmed from their very willingness to be “immoral.” This fear accounts in part for the reason why the narrator is always so mindful about the fact that his xiaoshuo discourse is modeled on jiaxun. Our novelist wants to convince us that the detailed and graphic accounts of how Tan Shaowen undergoes his moral decline step by step in the novel are intended to cause “fear” rather than to “entertain.” But the paradox is that to be effective a work of xiaoshuo has to be detailed and graphic about evil and even about the attractions of this every evil and, at the same time, it has to be entertaining. Of course, this is the dilemma that has confronted almost all fiction writers who claim, sincerely or not, that their goal is to “teach.”34 The author Qilu deng seems to have insisted on being not too “entertaining” or, at least, entertainment is not his priority.

On the other hand, the irony is that in order to be fully persuasive, the author of Qilu deng cannot do too well the job of “cultivating fear.” In other words, Li Lūyuan might become a victim of his own success: the novel is sometimes too

34. A common apology by erotic fiction writers is to claim that they have to describe sex in detail if they want to effectively draw people’s attention to the harms of sex because most of them are already so deluded. See for example, the remarks by the author of the preface to the erotic novel Xiuta yeshi 纡緞野史 (The Story of the Embroidered Couch):

I have tried to stop the spread of debauchery in this world but failed because so many people were already addicted. I have to make the best of the situation and try to reform them by [initially] following their inclination and [then teaching them a serious lesson]. I am sure people will have to change this way.

(see Hanhan zi 憔悴子 “Xiuta yeshi xu” 纡緞野史序, Huang Lin and Han Tongwen, p. 196).
convincing in its masterful demonstration of the inevitable fall of its protagonist, and, consequently, the reader might feel unpersuaded by its account of the sudden moral rebirth on the part of its protagonist. The “fear” is now too great and too real to allow any hope of salvation to become probable as the last part of the novel desperately tries to lead the reader to believe otherwise. The interesting fact is that Qiliu deng, as a jiaxun-inspired novel, is often most compelling and persuasive when it reads the least like a jiaxun. The limited circulation and relative obscurity the novel had enjoyed (before it was finally published in 1980s) might be a testimony to its author’s success in making his novel more jiaxun-like than entertaining. Indeed, this might be a case of one falling victim to his or her own success.
小說與家訓：
清代長篇小說《歧路燈》的勸懲邏輯

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摘　要

清代長篇小說《歧路燈》有一個非常獨特的地方，它剛開始以鈔本方式流傳時，許多鈔本往往附有小說作者李緣園所撰的《家訓谆言》。顯然此部小說與《家訓谆言》有著密切的關係，當時的許多讀者是把兩者連在一起讀的。本文首先指出稗官小說和箴規在中國傳統目錄學中本來就是兩個非常接近的文體，所以把小說作爲家訓來讀並非如現代讀者以爲的那麼“離譜”。通過對《歧路燈》和《家訓谆言》的細讀，文章探討了兩者之間密切而又複雜的關係。本文認爲作者是將《歧路燈》作爲虛構的“家訓”來寫的。但是小說成功之處也恰恰是其能超越家訓教條限制的地方。

關鍵詞：家訓，小說，勸懲